

Salem School Committee
Meeting Minutes
Monday, February 12, 2018

A Special School Committee Meeting and Public Hearing of the Salem School Committee was held on Monday, February 12, 2018 at 6:38 p.m. in the School Committee Chambers at Collins Middle School, 29 Highland Avenue, Salem, MA.

Members Present: Ms. Mary Manning, Ms. Kristine Wilson, Ms. Ana Nuncio, Mr. Manny Cruz, Ms. Amanda Campbell, and Mayor Kimberley Driscoll

Members Absent: Mr. James Fleming

Others Present: Margarita Ruiz, Superintendent, Kate Carbone, Assistant Superintendent, Margaret Marotta, Assistant Superintendent, Kristin Shaver, Business Manager, Kelley Rice, Chief of Communications, and Jill Conrad, Chief of Systems Strategy

Call to Order

Ms. Manning called the Regular Meeting of the Salem School Committee to order at 6:38 p.m.

Approval of the Agenda

Ms. Wilson moved to approve the agenda as presented. Mr. Cruz seconded the motion. The motion carried.

Presentations and Reports

Superintendent's Presentation – Response to Questions Raised During the February 5, 2018 School Committee Meeting

Superintendent Ruiz provided greater detail and clarified some points made on her previous presentation in response to a number of questions made by School Committee members last week. Ms. Ruiz provided context in regards to the Nathaniel Bowditch School on how they got to where they are today. There have been a number of interventions to try and turn the Bowditch School around. The Nathaniel Bowditch School opened on Willson Street in 2001. It was a model for dual-language instruction at the time. The Bowditch has not offered true dual-language instruction for some years. The Bowditch School has had 8 principals since 2010. Superintendent Ruiz continued that they know the profound and negative effect that leadership turnover has had on the school's ability to develop a stable academic agenda. They know that with every leadership change at the school results in destabilizing of the school culture as new leaders bring new ideas, changes, and expectations for students and staff that are then subsequently tweaked and abandoned by the next principal. This has a profound effect on the culture and academic agenda of the school. The student population at Bowditch has followed a similarly high turnover.

Superintendent Ruiz directed everyone to a slide graph with data on enrollments and number of families who transferred. Ms. Ruiz provided further details on leadership turnover, schedule calendar and time, supportive instructions, and student supports, bilingual secretary, and family engagement facilitator – investments in monetary resources to staffing and materials over the years. Ms. Ruiz continued that the data tells inconsistency and instability. Last year's MCAS scores points to significant gaps in performance between the Nathaniel Bowditch and other Salem schools. The school continues to underperform despite of all of their best efforts in additional supports and resources.

Superintendent Ruiz pointed everyone's attention to several data slides. One of the slides was on the percentile ranking of the Bowditch School as compared to other schools according to the 2017 MCAS data. Another slide showed a historical depiction of the school data for 2012. The percentile ranking is a number that gives an idea of how the school compared to other similar K-8 schools in the state with similar demographics. Ms. Ruiz detailed the data for everyone. The data shows some incremental increases over the years with trend of declining performance on percentile ranking, performance index, and student growth. Superintendent Ruiz continued that she has not placed blame on Nathaniel Bowditch School staff, administration, or the students. Many of the students have significant gaps in their learning, because of the inconsistencies in academic structures due to leadership turnover. They would be hosting or implementing the Sontag Academy during the February vacation next week that would service 84 students from the Nathaniel Bowditch School. The focus of the February vacation would be ELA. There would be a 2nd academy in April that would service close to 96 students. The focus of that academy would be Math and Science. The academy is not a solution to the chronic underperformance of the school, but helps to make sure that students' knowledge is on par with their district peers.

Superintendent Ruiz continued by talking about the transfer process and some concerns that were raised by the School Committee and members of the community regarding the transfer process should the School Committee vote in favor of the recommendation. The district would use the new Student Assignment policy, approved in December, as a framework for the assignment of the students. Ms. Ruiz said that she would personally be watching over the transfer process and monitoring the balance of socio-economic factors, through strategic enrollment targets, as allowed for the new policy.

Superintendent Ruiz shared some of the current data, by schools, on the economically disadvantaged, talked about the assignment process, and commented that all Salem elementary schools have afterschool activities. Ms. Ruiz reported they would be adding classrooms and staff, talked of available seating in classrooms, and further discussed the number of students who would be attending the Collins Middle School. Superintendent Ruiz detailed much of the infrastructure in place to support the plan, the curriculum to support the social-emotional learning for students, and implementation of the Caring Schools Community curriculum at K-5 grade, as part of morning meeting times that also supports the social-emotional learning. Ms. Ruiz completed her presentation by reporting the overall student enrollment projections within the next 10 years, available space for early childhood program if the School Committee approves the recommended plan, and the need for state intervention if the plan is not approved.

Public Hearing on the Recommendation to Dissolve the Nathaniel Bowditch K-8 School and Relocate the Horace Mann Laboratory School to the 79 Willson Street Building in Fall 2018

Questions and Comments From the Audience on Public Hearing Segment of the Recommendation

Fawaz Abusharkh of 4 Harrison Road felt that the presentation did not answer why the Nathaniel Bowditch School needs to be dissolved, why the Horace Mann Laboratory School is not the one being dissolved, and why the Bowditch School teachers need to go through the same experience as before. Mr. Abusharkh shared his concerns for the Latino community and parents who suffered for 8 years due to bad decisions and are now subjected to yet more changes. Mr. Abusharkh wondered why the issues of the Nathaniel Bowditch School existed for so many years. There were plans for change dating back to 2013 that were not acted upon. Mr. Abusharkh suggested those concerned should address the issue with the State and gather at least 20 people to march a strike in front of the City Hall and the Superintendent's Office to be heard. It is time for action if they want things to change.

Dr. Brendan Walsh, 5 West Terrace, stated that he thought Superintendent Ruiz made a good presentation. The issue presented to the Salem community and eventually to the Salem School Committee is a large one with numerous consequences, both intended and unintended. The intended instructional performance consequences appear to be of a positive nature. The unintended or likely unforeseen consequences, whether positive or negative, is unknown. Such conscious consideration requires time and this proposal leaves little of that. For that reason, it would seem to be worth taking a bit of extra time to implement this proposal, should the Committee elect to do so. Dr. Walsh continued that it would be appropriate to allow a year of discussion, planning time, and public explanation. There was no mention of the effects of this proposal and the attendance policy in the original presentation either in the news or at the last presentation. Dr. Walsh stated that he is pleased and appreciate the discussion this evening. Dr. Walsh detailed two possibilities that can be looked into rather than rushing and suggested they give themselves time to consider those options. Dr. Walsh gave a couple of warnings about situations like these: haste makes waste and act in haste, repent at leisure. Dr. Walsh provided School Committee members with copies of his remarks.

Nadia Nieves, 2 Sophia Road, has been at the Bowditch School for 8 years, spoke on behalf of herself and many students who felt heartbroken upon being informed of the recommendation to close the Nathaniel Bowditch School. They felt they had no choice or options. Ms. Nieves stated she has been part of many programs at the Bowditch School and has continued working there because she enjoys many of the opportunities at the school. She is part of the basketball team that has been there for 2 years. They have been in the league for a year. Ms. Nieves continued they had a meeting the day after the announcement where they were able to ask questions and felt that most of the answers were sugarcoated. The word 'segregation' has been used frequently and should not be used as it has. Ms. Nieves said she understands there is a welcoming preparation but personally does not want to leave the Bowditch school. Ms. Nieves stated she has been at the Bowditch School since 2010, has seen many loyal teachers leave, and asked what happens to the teachers who have served in their positions for a very long time and would now have to seek employment elsewhere? She would now be required to go to go to a new school. Ms. Nieves continued that she understands the grades at the Bowditch School are very low and asked for another chance to improve, something that the data has shown can happen. Ms. Nieves shared that she has one more year left before going to the High School and does not want to go to another location for just a year to then continue on to the High School and begs the School Committee not to close the Nathaniel Bowditch School.

Ray Fortuna, Collins Middle School student, 298 Washington Street, shared that the Collins School would receive the Bowditch students with open arms. There are many opportunities at the Collins school. They offer athletics and a great deal of support in English, Language, Math, and counseling in every floor for anyone who needs it, for example. Teachers and staff at the Collins School show they care. Mr. Fortuna continued that they are all one community who cares about each other and recommends that Bowditch students attend the Collins Middle School where they would surely receive much help from the teachers. Mr. Fortuna said that the Collins School helped him improve his grades and could do the same for the Bowditch students.

Debora Amaral, 172 Marlboro Road, shared that her daughter and children all attend the Collins Middle School. Ms. Amaral stated that the Collins is an incredible school and she feels horrible for the 6th, 7th, and 8th graders who have to move to a new school and remain there for two years. At the same time, the good news is that their friends would be there, because they would be going together and hopefully along with some of the teachers too. Ms. Amaral continued that this is not a new problem. They have sat there for years, it has been discussed. They have not turned their backs; the issues of the Nathaniel Bowditch School have been acknowledged. Ms. Amaral detailed some of the demographics dating back to 2012 unbalanced demographics and the attempt to address it on the first renewal of the Choice policy, which

was adjusted a few times. Ms. Amaral briefly explained seat availabilities, student placements, choices that led to slow change, and further explained the move of the ELL program to the Bowditch School by previous Superintendent Stephen Russell. Things got out of balance then and it was not a School Committee vote. It was a programmatic change that the Superintendent had a choice to make, which he did and caused the Bowditch School unbalance. Ms. Amaral continued that the School Committee, the union, and administration did work together to try to make changes in the Bowditch School and agreed that leadership changes (lack of continuous leadership) did affect the situation. Ms. Amaral stated that she believes something big has to happen and shared further insight, details, and feedback. Ms. Amaral stated that she supports the Superintendent's recommendation and emphasized that something big has to happen.

Mabel Madera, 1 Heritage Drive, said that the situation of the Nathaniel Bowditch School is not due to low student grades, because program issues should have been addressed if that were the case. Ms. Madera shared her personal experience with difficulty explaining to her little sister why the Bowditch School may close and shared that she personally feels it is the wrong decision and the Bowditch students are the ones who would end up suffering.

Gabriely Payano, 12 First Street, shared that Nathaniel Bowditch School teachers were excellent and loyal and thinks that closing the school would be a bad decision. Ms. Anon stated that she knows the Collins Middle School offers opportunities to Bowditch students but asks the School Committee to give the Bowditch students another chance. Many Bowditch students want to learn and she, too, wants to continue there and graduate from the 8th grade with her friends. Ms. Anon and her sister both attend the Nathaniel Bowditch School and do not want to separate but continue their daily bond. She does not think they should close the Bowditch School and asks the School Committee not to.

Yoleny Ynoa, parent of a student at Nathaniel Bowditch School, said that he was asked to select 3 school preferences when he registered his child for school and he chose the Bowditch school as his first preference. They assigned his child to the Bowditch School. Mr. Ynoa shared that he does not understand why there exists an issue of segregation, because the Nathaniel Bowditch School was a segregated school in 2001 and considered the best school then. Mr. Ynoa stated that he does not understand why issues with the Bowditch School programs, teachers, and inconsistencies with leadership changes were not addressed three or four years ago. Mr. Ynoa shared a personal experience about his daughter at the Bowditch school with a teacher who was hired as a Spanish Bilingual teacher with no experience in the Spanish language that caused his daughter to fail an exam because the teacher did not fully comprehend the language. Mr. Ynoa brought it to the attention of the principal and was ignored. The issues of the Nathaniel Bowditch School are not student grades but administration. Mr. Ynoa asks the School Committee to allow the Bowditch school more time to work on grade improvements and suggested hiring a new principal and new teachers if/as needed and changing the program as has been done at other schools such as the Bentley School where they changed the programs that resulted in the school's improvement. Mr. Ynoa asked the School Committee not to close the Bowditch School; they need the Nathaniel Bowditch School to continue.

Peggy Fucillo, 4 Cedar Hill Road, Former Teacher at the Nathaniel Bowditch School, commented that it is all about the students, not the name of a school, and explained that there was a sign in her room that said, *"If I do not learn the way you teach, teach the way I learn."* Ms. Fucillo shared her educational background and a historical perspective of the Nathaniel Bowditch School. While data shows student grades are low, it is the school system itself that has failed and not segregation at the Bowditch School. Ms. Fucillo continued that moving the Nathaniel Bowditch School would not resolve the issues of a school where so many memories and traditions have been made and named some of those memories and traditions. Ms. Fucillo believes there is a much better solution and proposed the return of the Dual-Language Program, incrementally as a program to attract students to choose the Nathaniel Bowditch

School (NBS). Ms. Fucillo also proposed a talented program, a program in the Arts, a Stem program, and the incorporation of the Horace Mann Laboratory School. Ms. Fucillo asked they be creative. They can come together as a thoughtful and caring community. There are many methods that can help. Make Bowditch shine again.

Amanda, a student from the Nathaniel Bowditch School from K-8 grade, shared that she was present when the long-term principal left and others were coming and leaving and felt that the problem were not the students or teachers, but they were given a temporary solution to a long-term problem; they were not given anything that was set in stone. Students and teachers have been trying their best with the constant changing environment. The problem is the leadership at the school and where the focus needs to be. Amanda continued that she does not think the solution to the Nathaniel Bowditch School is the addition of further changes to the students by taking them out of their environment but rather to find the solution within the school.

Diana Vargas, 79 Willson Street, thanked Superintendent Ruiz for her presentation this evening, which explains that the reason for closing the Nathaniel Bowditch School is due to low scores and not segregation. The tone of the presentations within the last month has changed. Ms. Vargas agrees that they have to do something about the low scores at the Bowditch School and does not believe that closing the school is the right answer but rather coming together with others towards a solution. Closing the Bowditch school would cause unforeseen problems. Ms. Vargas continued that the proposal to close the Nathaniel Bowditch School has been rushed; the decision has not been made yet and parents are expected to choose a school, teachers are asked to submit those preferences for immediate processing, and teachers have been asked to sign up for available positions already listed on TalentEd. Teachers have met with Human Capital to discuss their licenses, school choices, and grade levels for next year – things they were told that need to be done immediately. Ms. Vargas continued that these things have occurred while a decision to the proposal has not yet been made. This still feels to many that it is not a proposal but a decision that has already been made. Ms. Vargas explained that she understands a process needs to be set in motion in the case that the proposal is voted in favor, but they need to keep in mind that they need to have a view of what the district is going to look like. Ms. Vargas agreed with Dr. Brendan Walsh that they have not taken the necessary time to look at the future outcome. They need to make sure they do not repeat the same mistakes. Would there be racial and demographic balances throughout the school district or would there be differences in some of the schools? If so, they would not be solving the problem.

Ms. Vargas continued that she does not think they have addressed a Plan B. Students never had time to waste; they always needed to learn something every year to prepare for the following year. Ms. Vargas wondered what would happen if the School Committee does not approve the proposal. They could, as a community, come together with a plan. The Nathaniel Bowditch School is very large and the movement of the Horace Mann Laboratory School (278 students) and Early Ed (about 300 students) would not fill its entire space. Ms. Vargas wondered if there are other plans in place to fill the available space. Ms. Vargas suggested a possible solution is that both Nathaniel Bowditch and the Horace Mann Laboratory Schools could be combined to utilize the space to its best capacity. Ms. Vargas stated that she thinks the way they treat Hispanic families in the district is what is going to make a difference between a fair process or a discriminatory one – something that the Superintendent must look into and the Salem School Committee must analyze very carefully – to ensure that no family in this district is discriminated against.

Mr. Nestor Grullon, shared his concern on the issue of bullying that Nathaniel Bowditch School students might face at the other receiving schools. Mr. Grullon strongly believes that the Bowditch students would be subjected to bullying which would be another problem that would need to be addressed. Moving students from one location to another only increases problems, particularly bullying. Closing the Bowditch school is not the solution. Parents and the community can instead come together to work towards a solution.

Thomas Cahill, 2 Warren Square, Salem Public School Parent, shared his concerns of the Superintendent's proposal that it has not been transparent; he found out about the proposal two weeks ago. He would have thought to have been informed of such a significant decision, as big as closing an elementary school is being made, 5 years after they had just outsourced another elementary school (the Bentley to become another Charter Academy), for more than two weeks. Mr. Cahill continued that he agrees with others that something needs to be done. He still has not heard of many curriculum initiatives associated with the proposal, such as how many teachers would potentially be added to the welcoming schools. Mr. Cahill shared that he thinks this is, at this time, a decision and not a proposal and is disappointed by that. There was not much of a public discussion. Mr. Cahill asks the School Committee think about programmatic things rather than simple relocations such as the number of hired teachers and available resources at welcoming schools. More thought should be placed on more than physical space available as a driver of that decision. Mr. Cahill reiterated that he wished for more transparency and would like to know further detailed information on thoughts of the relocation process and the services that would be provided to the students at welcoming schools.

Scott Stenberg, 25 Pickman Road, shared that it is important to be aware of possible unconscious biases that have affected how the system has developed, have played on the decision. Honoring student and family background is important if this change does occur.

Lucille Willett, said that she has not heard talk about the vision in terms of what needs to be said except to increase students' academics and shared the benefits of the accelerated schools program at Stanford University. That program required much attention from teachers, parents, community, and students. They went through the very rigorous process of taking inventory, seeing what their common vision could be. Ms. Willett detailed the components of the program and said they also had a multi-age program that followed along in K-2 with an extra grade added every year. That accelerated school process was very rigorous. There was a lot of professional development. There was much research, and they found that they would see the greatest gains in their student achievements when they hit 7th and 8th grade. The Nathaniel Bowditch School was built because teacher and parents met with architects to design the building. Ms. Willett said they did constant research to address needs accordingly. Ms. Willett continued there have been 11 principals at the Nathaniel Bowditch School since 2001 and wondered of the continuity and who has been watching or paying attention? Ms. Willett said that students would see success with big change, but it does not mean that the Bowditch School needs to be dissolved. Ms. Willett asked institutional memory not be forgotten.

Finance Report

a. Approval of Warrants

February 8, 2018 in the amount of \$545,607.29
February 15, 2018 in the amount of \$476,550.01

Ms. Manning motioned to approve the warrants as stated. Ms. Wilson seconded the motion. The motion was approved.

Committee of the Whole (COW) to Follow the Regular School Committee Meeting

Adjournment

There being no further business to come before the School Committee this evening, Ms. Manning entertained the motion to adjourn. Ms. Campbell seconded the motion. The meeting was adjourned.

Respectfully submitted by:

Angelica Alayon, Secretary
Salem School Committee

Meeting Materials and Reports

School Committee Agenda February 12, 2018

Committee of the Whole (COW) Agenda February 12, 2018

Data Packet for 2/12/18 School Committee Meeting and Public Hearing

Nathaniel Bowditch School (NBS) Transformation Committee Recommendation

Presentation to School Committee