

School Committee Meeting Minutes
Virtual Meeting
April 24, 2023
6:15 PM

Members attending: Suzanne Allen, Abigail Besse, Sharlene Cronin, and Shannon Molloy. Ms. Knowles joined the meeting at 6:30 PM.

Absent Members: SusanMary Redinger.

Others in attendance: Linda Dwight and Ingrid Nilsson.

Ms. Besse called the meeting to order at 6:15 PM.

Vision Statement:

Henry Wacek read the vision statement.

Student Update:

Henry Wacek provided the student update and shared that everyone is adjusting to being back at school after April Vacation. Report cards were posted and the middle school and high school plays were announced. He also mentioned a wasp issue at TBS. Dr. Dwight said she would speak with Mr. Harrigan, the District Facilities Director, and ask him to look into this.

Public Commentary:

Deborah Walker, HPS Educator, Harvard resident, and member of the negotiations team, read a prepared statement on behalf of HEA members and urged Committee members to settle a fair contract as soon as possible. She indicated that while they are currently waiting for a mediator to be assigned, they do not need to wait for mediation to continue with negotiations.

Lauren Crittendon, HPS Educator and member of the negotiations team, read a prepared statement and shared some of the information that was included on a flier distributed at the Special Town Meeting in February. She reiterated that the HEA is requesting a lesser increase than what several other state districts have settled on in their contracts.

Kellie Carlucci, HPS Educator, President of the HEA, and member of the negotiations team, read a prepared statement and urged the School Committee to settle a fair contract as soon as possible. She recognized that while there are districts that are paid less than Harvard, there are other

districts that are paid the same or more and she believes that the HEA is asking for a fair and reasonable raise.

Kathleen Doherty, HPS Educator and the Chair of the negotiations team, reiterated that the HEA is willing to consider a number of options but want their contract to be in line with other state districts. She also mentioned the 8.2% increase town employees are receiving in one fiscal year and while the HEA understands there is a different salary structure, they believe they are asking for a fair increase that will work within the proposed FY24 budget.

Ms. Besse indicated that the School Committee wants to settle as quickly and fairly as possible.

Laura Yochum, parent of two HPS students, expressed concern about the removal of honors classes for 9th graders and how this information was communicated to parents. She also presented a list of questions regarding the thought process behind the decision that led to this change.

Dr. Dwight will be in touch with Ms. Yochum regarding her specific questions.

Ms. Besse clarified that these types of curriculum changes are made at the school leadership level and do not require the approval of the School Committee.

Anna Kekis, parent to three HPS students, questioned the decision to unlevel classes and the ability of teaching staff to teach to the level of all students. She is worried that it will create more inequality rather than less and suggested looking to other districts to see what they have done to promote equality.

Ms. Besse encouraged community members to stay for the next two updates as they may address some of their concerns.

John and Sandra Haley, parents of a HPS School Choice student, are residents of Leominster and said one of the reasons they wanted to do School Choice in Harvard is because they went through this experience in Leominster and have concerns about how to effectively differentiate for all students.

Annie Aivonov, 11th grade student at TBS, said there were a lot of 8th grade students who did not realize their classes would be unlevelled in 9th grade. She asked for the best way for students to express their opinions. Ms. Besse suggested that they reach out directly to Dr. Dwight and Ms. Murphy.

Irene Goncharova, 11th grade student at TBS, expressed concern about the separation of the middle school and high school and how this may impact the teachers' curriculum.

Yaxi Li, 11th grade student at TBS, shared that his family learned of unleveling of 9th grade from other students rather than from the school directly. He also said that all of the top districts in the state have leveled curriculums.

Ms. Besse shared that a public forum will be held in May that will hopefully help clarify some of the concerns brought up this evening.

Middle School Math Curriculum Presentation:

Ms. Robin Benoit, Director of Instructional Design, provided a middle school math curriculum update with the three middle school math teachers: Kellie Carlucci, Jessica Blanchette, and Sherry Nolan. The presentation covered why *Into Math* was originally selected, the standards for mathematical practices, and instructional highlights. Ms. Carlucci provided an example from the 6th grade, Ms. Nolan provided an example from the 7th grade, and Ms. Blanchette provided an example from the 8th grade. Committee members had an opportunity to ask questions.

Superintendent Update:

Dr. Dwight shared her submitted report as follows:

- Bromfield Changes/Improvements: One of the unique needs of the middle school and high school age groups is the opportunity to create different schedules. The teachers and Principal Stephen Greene will reveal a pilot change in schedule for the middle school at a public forum scheduled for early May. The high school will also begin to study a potential change in their schedule that will improve student experiences. The high school continues to unlevel classes in 9th grade and the new middle school math program will provide Algebra I for all 8th graders with 9th grade students then moving on to unlevelled Geometry. There is no plan to eliminate leveling in grades 10-12 and students will have the opportunity to enroll in college preparation, honors, and AP classes.
- Clear Audit: The Harvard School District received a clear audit with no findings. This is thanks to Ingrid Nilsson, the Director of School Finance.
- Concert Series: The Music Department at TBS held three nights of concerts to highlight the students' progress with choral and instrumental learning. The students treated full audiences to wonderful music.
- Worcester County Superintendents' Meeting: Superintendents from the county met together in person to discuss the problems of practice. The agenda included updates on

active legislation and Attorney Mike Long spoke about union and school committee relationships.

- World Language National Honors Society and Tri M Induction: The World Language Department honored students for their dedication and achievement in the subjects of French and Spanish. A few students who excel in both languages joined both societies. The Department Chair for the Unified Arts, Craig Robbins, combined the Tri M Induction into the high school concert which was a great way to honor the students for their commitment and dedication to the study of music in front of a larger audience.
- “Bromfield Kid” Scholarship: This scholarship will be awarded annually in honor of Mr. Hoffman, who spent 35 years as an educator with the Harvard Public Schools. A “Bromfield Kid” embodies all that is best at the core of each person and when fully expressed, the actions include a love of learning, integrity, kindness, and a focus on well-being. Each year, two Bromfield seniors will be selected to receive a \$500 scholarship as the year’s “Bromfield Kids.”

Hourly Pay Scale Approval:

Dr. Dwight shared a prepared memo that outlines the proposed hourly pay table and job classification changes which include a 3% COLA for FY24 and eliminating the grades on the current wage table that are below minimum wage. Additionally, they propose to regrade two job classifications (aides and administrative assistants) to bring them more in line with the District’s peer communities. Members expressed support for this change and will plan to vote at the next meeting.

Policy Review:

Ms. Allen presented the proposed changes to policies: IJOA, JLCA, ID, IE, and IGA. Committee members voted on the policies individually.

A motion was made and seconded to approve policy IJOA (Field Trips) as presented. The motion was passed unanimously by a roll call vote.

Move: Ms Molloy

Second: Ms. Cronin

Status: Passed

Members reviewed the proposed changes to policy JLCA (Physical Examination of Students), but it was decided to have the Policy Subcommittee re-review the language to ensure clarity.

Ms. Allen performed a first read of policy ID (School Day). Committee members provided feedback and the Policy Subcommittee will make sure the policy aligns with the current practice of early drop-offs.

A motion was made and seconded to approve policy IE (Organization of Instruction) as amended. The motion was passed unanimously by a roll call vote.

Move: Ms. Cronin

Second: Ms. Allen

Status: Passed

Members reviewed the proposed changes to policy IGA (Curriculum Development), but it was decided to have the Policy Subcommittee re-review the policy before bringing it back to Committee members for a final vote.

Annual Town Meeting Preparation:

Members discussed the upcoming Annual Town Meeting on April 29, 2023 and any items that still need to be accomplished beforehand. Ms. Nilsson will print a small batch of budget books, but the District will also provide a QR code that links to the online version.

Grants/Club/Field Trip Approval:

Dr. Dwight shared the grant recently approved by the Harvard Schools Trust for Committee members to review.

A motion was made and seconded to approve the grant from the Harvard Schools Trust as presented. The motion was passed unanimously by a roll call vote.

Move: Ms. Molloy

Second: Ms. Cronin

Status: Passed

Future Meeting Dates:

The next School Committee meeting is scheduled for May 8, 2023.

Agenda Items:

Ms. Besse said the next meeting will include an update from Best Practices, the School Committee evaluation, superintendent evaluation, District financial update, and the District and School Committee improvement plans. Members will let Ms. Besse know if there are any other items that should be included.

Minutes:

Ms. Besse approved the March 20th meeting minutes with no objection.

Committee members reviewed the minutes from the April 10th meeting but will review again at the next meeting after the discussed revisions have been made.

SC Liaison and Subcommittee Reports:

Ms. Allen shared that the Transportation Advisory has been working on getting a Montachusett Regional Transit Authority stop added to Harvard and have been given initial approval. They will continue to discuss the best location for this stop.

Ms. Cronin said that the Tech Advisory is meeting again on May 3rd and the Budget Subcommittee will meet again on May 11th. Best Practices will meet again when Ms. Redinger is back.

Ms. Molloy shared that she put a warrant in the folder for members to review. She also provided a negotiations update and said a mediator has been in touch with an available date to meet and that everyone who needs to be there has made themselves available. They are just waiting on confirmation and are looking forward to reaching an agreement with the HEA. SEPAC has a parent support group at the General Store on April 27th at 12 PM and a business meeting that same night where they will start planning for the spring social. She mentioned having SEPAC come to an upcoming School Committee meeting to present before the end of the year.

Ms. Knowles said the main item that came up at the recent DEAC meeting was buses and the length of time students spend on the bus who are on the last stops. She asked if it may be worth re-evaluating some of the bus routes to reduce the number of Harvard students on the Devens bus and cut back on the length of the ride overall. Dr. Dwight said the District can look into this.

Ms. Besse reminded all Committee members to stop by Central Office and sign diplomas before graduation.

Public Commentary:

None.

School Committee Commentary:

Ms. Besse congratulated Ms. Nilsson on the results of this year's audit.

Adjournment:

At 8:43 PM, Ms. Besse adjourned the meeting with no objections.