

School Committee Meeting Minutes
Virtual Meeting
May 22, 2023
6:15 PM

Members attending: Suzanne Allen, Abigail Besse, Sharlene Cronin, Shannon Molloy, and SusanMary Redinger.

Others in attendance: Linda Dwight, Caitlin Lelievre, and Ingrid Nilsson.

Ms. Besse called the meeting to order at 6:18 PM.

Vision Statement:

Henry Wacek read the vision statement.

Student Update:

Tegan Allen shared that the Green Team watched “The Biggest Little Farm” which was made available to students by the Harvard Garden Club. She also said that some of the music students will be heading to New York City this upcoming Saturday.

Henry Wacek shared an update on the protest after the last meeting as students were upset about the unleveling of 9th grade English and the lack of communication leading to that decision. He mentioned that a lot of the communication focuses on the parents and not the students themselves. Tegan reiterated a point made at a previous meeting and said that it would be helpful to have morning announcements as they did pre-pandemic.

Superintendent Update:

- Survey Results: A survey on the proposed changes at TBS went out to families, students, teachers, and staff on May 16th and as of May 21st, the District had 203 responses. Although the data is still being analyzed, Dr. Dwight shared some of the initial responses and actions from the District.
- What is Dynamic Learning?: Dr. Dwight outlined how student learning looks different today than in the past. Student curiosity and inspiration are sparked through engaging questions, experiments, and projects and each student has contributions that add to the classroom experience which allows students to learn from each other. While the educators in Harvard already incorporate many strategies of dynamic learning, one of the focus areas for professional development in the next year is Universal Design for

Learning (UDL). This is a teaching approach that works to accommodate the needs and abilities of all learners.

- Hildreth Elementary Family Forum: Dr. Katsh-Singer and Ms. Sturgis will host families over Zoom on Wednesday, May 24th at 6:30 PM.
- Summer Grant Secured: Ms. Nilsson and Ms. Toth secured another year of summer funding for academic support. The District will have \$75,000 to provide summer tutoring and enrichment.
- Prom and Celebration: Students enjoyed the Junior/Senior prom held at Fruitlands this year. This was followed by an all-night community-planned and delivered Celebration with an *Around the World* theme.
- Senior Parade Planned: The parade of cars will return on Thursday, May 25th at 5:30 PM. The community has enjoyed this new tradition since 2020 as a way to celebrate the graduates.

Public Commentary:

Jim Voutelle, Harvard resident, thanked Tegan and Henry for their student updates. He also thanked Dr. Dwight and the School Committee for their work to address the concerns of the community. He asked a few questions related to how students will receive enough instruction time in the classroom and the relationship between the School Committee, the Superintendent's office, and the school council.

Erin Suchecki, Harvard resident and parent to two HPS students, spoke in support of the teachers. She indicated that HPS is one of the best districts in the state and that many residents move to Harvard because of the school district. She wants the teachers to feel that they are supported and she worries that a lack of support will be detrimental to the school system.

Lisa Hopkins, HPS Educator and member of the HEA, urged Committee members to settle a fair contract as soon as possible. She mentioned the rate of inflation and the higher rates of the settled contracts in other districts. She also pointed out that Harvard students have consistently higher test scores than other districts and she is hoping for a settlement at the mediation meeting on Wednesday May 24th.

Debby Walker, Harvard resident and HPS Educator, read a prepared statement and urged Committee members to settle a fair contract as soon as possible. She said that two thirds of the ARPA funds are unspent and at risk of being taken back. The HEA believes that this could be used to pay teachers as they were deemed essential during the pandemic.

Annie Cooper, Harvard resident, said that the School Committee is looking to implement some exciting changes in the next school year and that these changes will require a lot of work from

the teaching staff. She said it seems as though compensation for the additional work would be an appropriate consideration.

Fang Li, Harvard resident, thanked the School Committee and Dr. Dwight for reviewing the survey results. She expressed concern that letting any student into the honors classes isn't really changing anything in terms of unleveling. She also asked about the communication at TBS as it appears to be inefficient. She is worried about how students will feel they belong if their voices are not heard.

Charlene Tuttle, HPS retiree, spoke on behalf of the HEA. She and her husband moved to Harvard for the school system and her three kids are products of the school system. She believes it is demoralizing for teachers to speak publicly asking for more money. She recommended that the Committee members think of the future as more HEA members plan for retirement because new educators will look for districts where the Committee and teachers work in harmony.

Dot Samsi, Harvard resident and parent, said that she is feeling heard and appreciates the time that has been put into the changes as a result of the concerns shared by community members. She still has some concerns about the world languages piece. She recognizes that things are still in flux but is worried about the amount of time it will take to implement this revision to the schedule. Other high performing districts consider world languages to be a core subject.

HES ELA Update:

Dr. Katsh-Singer started the presentation by sharing how the phonics curriculum pilot fits into the HES Strategic Improvement Plan. She then introduced Ms. Chapman, First Grade Teacher, and Ms. Robinson, ELA Curriculum Specialist, to share the details of the program with School Committee members. Members then had an opportunity to ask questions.

District Improvement Plan Progress Update:

Dr. Dwight shared the District Improvement Plan and outlined the areas where progress has been made during the 2022-2023 school year. School Committee members had an opportunity to ask questions.

Best Practices - School Committee Evaluation Finalization:

Ms. Cronin proposed that the next step for the School Committee Evaluation is to go live and use it as the official self-evaluation for this year. Members will have until June 15th to complete the evaluation and Ms. Cronin asked that they make note of anything they think should be changed.

ATM Date Change Proposal Discussion:

Ms. Besse suggested postponing this agenda item in the interest of time, but asked members to review the information in their packet before she reaches out to provide Committee feedback on the proposed changes.

Harvard Housing Discussion:

Ms. Besse suggested postponing this agenda item and asked members to send her feedback by May 31st.

Grant/Club/Field Trip Approval:

Dr. Dwight shared the grants recently approved by the Harvard PTO for Committee members to review.

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

Move: Ms. Allen

Second: Ms. Redinger

Status: Passed

Future Meeting Dates:

The next School Committee meeting is scheduled for June 12, 2023 with a tentative meeting scheduled for June 26, 2023 if necessary.

Agenda Items:

Ms. Besse said the next meeting will include the superintendent evaluation, SEPAC presentation, and the New Orleans trip request for next year. Members will let Ms. Besse know if there are any other items that should be included.

Minutes:

Ms. Besse approved the May 8th meeting minutes without objection.

SC Liaison and Subcommittee Reports:

Ms. Allen shared that policy will wrap up J policy and they are starting to move through I and they plan to share more at the next meeting. The Wellness Committee will have another meeting

and she mentioned the great speakers they were able to pull together for this year. Transportation continues to work on getting a shuttle stop added in town that will go to the train station.

Ms. Cronin said that the draft minutes from the last Budget Subcommittee meeting are in their packet which includes status updates on some capital projects. The Tech Advisory meets again on Wednesday and Best Practices met earlier today.

Ms. Molloy shared that SEPAC had a business meeting as well as a parent support group. She commented that they have been seeing new faces each time a support group is offered which has been exciting. The date of the spring social is June 14th with a rain date of June 21st. It will be held from 3:30 to 5 on the library lawn.

Ms. Redinger said that DEAC met and the primary discussion focused on overcrowding on bus 7. Unfortunately, it has not reached the point that Mass Development would pay for a second bus so they are waiting to hear from the District on how the bus issues can be resolved. She also shared that HEAC met and talked about the progress of electrification of the school and grants that may be available. The DPW is expecting the District to fix the runoff issue on Mass Ave and Mr. Harrigan will be coordinating this effort. Once that is done, the building project can be closed out. Best Practices is also working on creating some structure for the naming convention of files, folders, and drives.

Ms. Besse said the HES School Council met last week, but she was unable to attend due to a scheduling conflict. She shared that the HES community forum is taking place this week where the results of the survey will be shared.

Public Commentary:

Fang Li, Harvard resident, thanked Dr. Dwight and the School Committee for their work. She wanted to make an additional comment on the communication in the District. Specifically, she mentioned the low response rate from students completing the survey and said she believes they feel discouraged as a result of their concerns not being taken seriously.

School Committee Commentary:

Ms. Redinger shared that she was able to go to part of Lynn Lyons presentation tonight before attending the School Committee meeting. She suggested that it would be better to schedule these types of presentations on nights with no School Committee meeting to ensure more people can attend and benefit from the great speakers being offered to the community.

Ms. Molloy said she withheld her comments on the ELA presentation as it was added to their packet late and she did not have enough time to review everything. While she champions any kind of additional phonics to early curriculum, she is worried that this model teaches young readers the habits of struggling readers and students will carry that with them throughout their academic careers.

Adjournment:

With no objection, Ms. Besse adjourned the meeting at 9:01 PM.