**BRISTOL WARREN REGIONAL**

**SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEETING**

**Wednesday, February 6, 2019**

A meeting of the Bristol Warren Regional School Committee was held on Wednesday, February 6, 2019, in the auditorium of Kickemuit Middle School, 525 Childt Street, Bristol, RI. Chairperson, Erin Schofield, called the meeting to order at approximately 6:37 PM.

Present: Erin Schofield, Chairperson; Adam M. Ramos, Vice-Chairperson; John P. Saviano, Secretary; Brian Bradshaw, Treasurer; John C. Bento, Victor Cabral, Sheila O. Ellsworth, Marjorie J. McBride, and Carly N. Reich; and Mario J. Andrade, Superintendent;

**OPENING BUSINESS**

Chairperson Schofield invited all to join in the recitation of the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag.

**OPEN SESSION**

*Discussion/Action with BWEA and NEARI regarding Kickemuit Middle School Safety and Security concerns*

Mrs. Schofield stated that the purpose of tonight’s meeting is to hear from teachers about their security and safety concerns.

Mrs. Schofield clarified that there will be no public comment.

Mrs. Schofield stated that the teachers union will give a presentation to the School Committee after which the teachers will come forward to present their concerns regarding safety and security at KMS. Mrs. Schofield added that once the School Committee has heard from the Union and the teachers, the Committee will enter into executive session to address and discuss those concerns.

Mrs. Schofield stated that at the completion of the executive session, the open session will reconvene at which time she will report out on the progress that has been made.

*Presenters:*

**Michelle Way DaSilva, BWEA Co-President, 7th grade Kickemuit Middle School (KMS) math teacher**

Ms. DaSilva thanked the School Committee for meeting with the KMS staff for the purpose of addressing concerns, needs and ideas for solutions from those teachers who face the specific challenges that have been highlighted over the past week. Ms. DaSilva stated that this has been a growing problem over the past three years, and one that a solution has been sought after for the past year and a half, if not more.

Ms. DaSilva stressed that the teachers only have the best interest of all KMS students at the heart of this.

Ms. DaSilva thanked the School Committee in advance for listening and hearing as the teachers come forward to share their point of view concerning the problems they face on a day to day basis, and their ideas for solutions to address these problems in order to ensure a well-organized and disciplined learning environment for every student that walks into KMS.

**Melissa LaBonte, KMS Music Teacher**

Ms. LaBonte stated that she has two children in the school system, one who currently attends KMS. She expressed her concerns about the issues and incidents at the school which she feels must be fixed.

Ms. LaBonte stated that this is not just a school issue but a community issue that can’t go unresolved or be tabled. Ms. LaBonte feels that the children have waited long enough for a resolution to be implemented. Ms. LaBonte stated that the children need strong voices, the School Committee’s voices.

Ms. LaBonte stated that the current measures to address the issues at KMS are not working.

Ms. LaBonte asked the parents and members of the School Committee to listen to the teachers and to the children who need their help.

**Donna Stouber, teacher at KMS for 25 years**

Ms. Stouber stated that the goal of the District should be to always do what is right for the children, but she believes the District does not.

Ms. Stouber spoke specifically about those students with special needs who require special education support in the classroom, but added that it is not provided.

Ms. Stouber spoke about the problem of students being exited from IEP’s when they still need to have an IEP. She expressed her frustration that some of these student’s families were told the child would be better off with a 504. Ms. Stouber believes that parents are not realizing that their children are being denied services at their child’s expense. Ms. Stouber indicated she is not surprised that there are discipline problems as a result of children being exited from IEPs when they shouldn’t be.

Ms. Stouber closed by stating that she would like to see the District get back to doing what is right for the District.

**Nicole Daniello, KMS Special Education Teacher**

Ms. Daniello stated that she has been teaching students with disabilities for 20 years.

Ms. Daniello shared that about two and a half years ago, she began conversations with building administration and the Special Education Coordinator, Lisa Martin, concerning 6th grade students on her caseload with challenging behaviors.

Ms. Daniello shared behavior plans that she has implemented .

Ms. Daniello stated that she had a formal meeting with Director of Pupil Personnel Services, the former KMS Principal and the current KMS principal to discuss possible solutions to help these students move through their day successfully without incident. Ms. Daniello shared that she was directed to “keep doing what she was doing”. Ms. Daniello stated that she felt completely overwhelmed, sickened and defeated.

Ms. Daniello said she never felt unsafe with her students, but she said she was in constant protective mode - protecting the children from being embarrassed and protecting the other students from witnessing such intense behaviors which was extremely stressful.

Ms. Daniello said that for the next year and a half there were a lot of meetings with parents and administrators to come up with new behavior plans and new accommodations that barely worked.

Ms. Daniello stated that she feels the solution is an Alternative Classroom, inclusion based, with the ability to provide small group or one to one instruction in another classroom with a special educator, which she believes would help lessen anxiety for the student and give them a safe place to reset and do their work with a certified teacher.

Ms. Daniello shared how she has spoken with special educators in Barrington who teach in alternative classroom programs. She described the make-up of those classrooms in Barrington.

Ms. Daniello expressed her concern regarding the loss of one special education position three years ago, and the number of TAs supporting students in an inclusion setting which has diminished severely over the course of three years.

Ms. Daniello shared her frustration with how many PCA’s and TA’s are currently working with students with disabilities talking specifically about the student to adult ratio. Ms. Daniello stressed how important TA’s are and the very important role they place with special education students.

**Emily McCaffrey, KMS 7th Grade Language Arts Teacher**

Ms. McCaffrey stated that she has been teaching at KMS for eight years.

Ms. McCaffrey stated that the issue of student safety and socio-emotional health has spanned several years during her time at KMS. She feels that KMS is serving more as a triage than a place to grow. Ms. McCaffrey stated that KMS needs proactive measures for all students.

Ms. McCaffrey shared the following needs:

* Students who are accessible to learn academics. This might mean alternative learning environments, on site mental and emotional support, and more support professionals ready to help those in need. (Adult to pupil ratios matter.)
* Consistent, transparent consequences for disruptive and disrespectful behavior
* The ability and time to celebrate our students who continue to work hard and respect their teachers and peers. They’ve been overshadowed too long.

Ms. McCaffrey stated that teachers are in the business of children for the purpose of bettering the lives of students.

Ms. McCaffrey stated that if the District chooses not to strive for improvements in the areas outlined, not only will individual adolescents continue to be hurt, but there will be a failure to better the communities of Bristol and Warren, our state and ultimately our nation.

Ms. McCaffrey then read the KMS Mission statement which states:

Our mission, in partnership with our learning community, is to nurture lifelong learners in a safe environment where students are empowered with the knowledge and skills to be successful in our increasingly complex world.

Ms. McCaffrey closed by stating this is the very reason the teachers are gathered here today, to ensure that our mission be fulfilled.

**Mary Arsenault, 7th Grade Science Teacher**

Ms. Arsenault shared about several discipline incidents that occurred and continued due to the absence of appropriate disciplinary action. She also shared about an assault where a fellow teacher was injured.

Ms. Arsenault stated that one teacher shared that she has tried everything from positive reinforcement, ignoring behaviors, restorative practices and nothing has worked. She felt that this particular student “stole from her and stole many educational opportunities from students in the classroom”.

Ms. Arsenault stated that she is asking for more clear regulations and consequences for all students who are behaviorally or emotionally unavailable to learn. She believes that everyone should be held to the same standards no matter what their circumstances or issues.

Ms. Arsenault closed by asking the Administration to put all kids first and supply appropriate personnel to make the school a great place to learn and a great place to teach.

**Pat Fillipino, KMS Science Coordinator**

Ms. Fillipino began her presentation by sharing data from the National Alliance on Mental Health from 6/14 which outlined statistics of youth with different mental health disorders.

Ms. Fillipino took the national average and applied it to the 753 students in attendance at KMS and shared those results.

Ms. Fillipino listed the current supports in place for students and then shared scenarios of how this would play out in the current classroom statistically based on the national average.

Ms. Fillipino provided the following solutions:

* Additional mental health support for all students afflicted with a mental health issues and who have been trained and certified in this area for this developmental age
* Alternative classrooms with qualified and trained teachers who specialize in teaching students with mental illness
* Have time during the day for sessions to support students mental health needs
* Have both of the above provide, teach and model strategies for students to cope with their difficulties.
* Re-enter mainstream classroom once they are able to handle the rigor of learning and are available to learn

Ms. Fillipino commented that as the Federal Government continues to cut funding to states, the reduction of funds has hit the local level.

Ms. Fillipino closed by stating that the teachers are asking for the programs and personnel necessary to provide an environment for all students to learn.

**Kristina Pereira, KMS teacher for 16 years**

Ms. Pereira remembered back to when she experienced KMS at its finest. She highlighted those supports and programs that have been lost which made KMS a wonderful place to learn and teach.

Ms. Pereira reiterated that the programs and resources have been slashed, but the needs have only grown with an increase in physical student altercations.

Ms. Pereira stated that restorative practices is a viable solution for 95% of the students, but that an implementation plan is needed that will make it work. She feels that conference facilitators are essential to making the system work.

Ms. Pereira asked that the programs that worked be brought back.

**Erin Welchman, School Nurse**

Ms. Welchman began her presentation by stating that the concerns at KMS are not new and not specific to Bristol Warren.

She explained that anxiety, depression and behavior problems, ADHD, and eating disorders are all on the rise with more than 50% untreated. Ms. Welchman stated that there is an increased incidence at the Middle School level due to where the students are developmentally.

Ms. Welchman stated that she sees the KMS Administration and Staff doing their very best every day to assist the numerous children in distress or in crisis with the resources we have, but she believes it is not enough.

Ms. Welchman shared concerns for students due to lack of staff.

Ms. Welchman feels that KMS students would benefit greatly from additional guidance staff, behavioral specialists and social workers to address the daily concerns of all adolescent students at KMS.

Ms. Welchman stated she believes that KMS students would benefit from having an alternative learning classroom.

Ms. Welchman shared about the benefits of having these types of supports in place.

Ms. Welchman closed by cautioning not to let the increasing mental health needs and safety of our students be a victim of budget cuts. She believes mental health supports should be at the top of the District’s priority list.

**Andre Arsenault, KMS Music Teacher and Choral Director**

Mr. Arsenault stated that there is a very small percentage of students at KMS whose social and emotional needs cannot be met with the resources currently available. He added that he believes that there is a very large percentage of students at KMS whose education is “being robbed” because the time and attention of Administration, Teachers and Guidance Counselors are being monopolized by this very small percentage of students. Mr. Arsenault feels that the Tier 3 students are not getting the services they need and neither are the rest of the students.

Mr. Arsenault spoke about the increase in students who have many social and emotional issues that cannot be addressed by classroom teachers because they have a classroom of students ready to learn and also need and deserve attention. Tier 3 students are not getting the time and attention they need, and the rest of the class is not receiving the education they deserve.

Mr. Arsenault stated that restorative justice will not work for kids that have no regard or respect for teachers, administration and their fellow students.

Mr. Arsenault spoke to the issue that children with behavioral issues are leaders and influencers who are dragging other students down, and because it is not being addressed, those students are ruining education for so many.

Mr. Arsenault highlighted all the benefits of addressing these problems.

**Joann Schneider, KMS 7th Grade Teacher**

Ms. Schneider spoke about her many experiences with students entering class upset and stressed. She added that the students want to talk about the heavy situations that they deal with at home. These types of situations interfere with my teaching and student learning. Ms. Schneider stated that she would love to be able to help these students, but as an educator, she is there to teach.

Ms. Schneider stated that she feels an Alternative Learning Program is necessary.

Ms. Schneider expressed her concern that there is one guidance counselor to service a student population of 600. She would like to see more mental health professionals and to see more mental health supports in place.

She closed by stating that she would like to see the mental health aspect dealt with as much as the behavioral aspect

**Jeff Grifka, KMS Social Studies Teacher**

Mr. Grifka began by saying that schools not only in Bristol Warren but as a nation are on the cusp of a crisis regarding how to meet the social and emotional needs of students.

Mr. Grifka talked about his concerns regarding the ways children act out in the classroom. He added that administration is spending so much time focusing on children who are acting out, that the other students are suffering.

Mr. Grifka believes that the District needs to champion our students accomplishments. Mr. Grifka stated that he believes there needs to be an alternative program in place that will provide resources for students to be successful.

Mr. Grifka feels that parents, teachers and administrators need to make this happen.

Mr. Grifka closed by saying that he wants families to come to a school that is a rich, vibrant learning environment.

**Jennifer Saarinen, KMS Teacher Specialist and KMS’s Teacher of the year and the District’s Teacher of the year**

Ms. Saarinen began by stating that she has been a passionate, invested and innovative educator at KMS for 14 years.

Ms. Saarinen stated that in her current role, she sees nearly ⅔ of the KMS student body during a school year and has seen more incidences of blatant disrespect and non-compliance than she has in any previous year.

Ms. Saarinen expanded upon the following three suggestions for solutions to the current concerns at KMS.

* Reduced class size
* Add a support professional to each team who has a background in adolescent psychology and childhood trauma
* Alternative Education Program

Ms. Saarinen commented that she realizes these suggestions would require additional funding or reallocation of funds, but she implored the School Committee to take those considerations seriously rather than having to react in the moment of a preventable crisis that impacts the safety and well-being of the students, staff and administrators of KMS.

Ms. DaSilva stated that the School Committee has just heard from 12 staff members who wanted to share their concerns. Ms. DaSilva commented that there are close to 70 staff members at KMS. Those that spoke this evening summed up *all* teachers concerns to make it as straightforward as possible, and to outline the solutions to make KMS the best school for all students. Ms. DaSilva closed by stating that she looks forward to working with the School Committee toward next steps and for working out a solution.

Mrs. Schofield thanked everyone who came forward to speak noting that the statements were heartfelt, child-based and focused. Mrs. Schofield added that she looks forward to coming to the table to work on solutions

**EXECUTIVE SESSION:**

Pursuant to Open Meetings Laws 42-46-5 (a)(3) 42-46-5 (a)(9) for the following:

1. Discussion/Action with BWEA and NEARI regarding KMS Safety and Security Concerns
2. Discussion pursuant to KMS Student Behavior Grievance

MOTION: Mr. Saviano made a motion to enter into executive session at 7:35 p.m.; seconded by Mr. Bradshaw.

The motion passed unanimously.

MOTION: Mr. Bento made a motion to adjourn the executive session at 10:16 p.m.; seconded by Mr. Saviano.

The motion passed unanimously.

*OPEN SESSION reconvened at 10:23 p.m.*

Mrs. Schofield asked for a motion to seal tonight’s executive session minutes.

MOTION: Mr. Saviano made a motion to seal the executive session minutes; seconded by Mrs. McBride.

The motion passed unanimously.

Mrs. Schofield reported out the following action items from tonight’s executive session:

* The School Committee voted to suspend the School Committee Policy requiring School Committee meetings to end at 10:00 p.m.
* The School Committee voted to direct the Superintendent to look into obtaining a police officer to remain at KMS until further notice.
* The School Committee voted to create a subcommittee of the School Committee to address safety & security concerns at KMS. Their first meeting will be held Monday, February 11, and conducted in executive session. The findings from that meeting will be reported out at the February 25th School Committee Business Meeting. (The Subcommittee will include School Committee members along with members of the union and administration. )
* The School Committee voted to direct the Superintendent to secure additional therapeutic services for KMS as soon as possible.

**ADJOURNMENT - 10:25 PM**

MOTION: At 10:25 p.m., Mr. Bradshaw made a motion to adjourn the meeting; seconded by Mr. Saviano.

The motion passed unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,

John P. Saviano, Secretary

/kd