



SCHOOL COMMITTEE

BUSINESS MEETING OPEN SESSION MINUTES January 7, 2020

Meeting:	School Committee
Date:	January 7, 2020
Location:	MERMHS Learning Commons
Attendees:	Pamela Beaudoin, Superintendent Avi Urbas, Director of Finance Shannon Erdmann, Chairperson Rachel Fitzgibbon Eric Bourke Sarah Wolf Ken Warnock Caroline Weld Ann Cameron
Absent:	
Guests:	Jason Waldron, Facilities Manager
Recorded by:	Gail Hunter

AGENDA

- A. Call to Order** – Ms. Erdmann called the School Committee Business meeting to order at 6:30 p.m.
- B. Business Meeting Open Session**
 - 1) Public Comment** – There was no public comment this evening.
 - 2) Chairman's Report**
 - Superintendent Evaluation

Ms. Erdmann stated Superintendent Beaudoin's FY19 evaluation has been reviewed by all School Committee members and their comments have been taken into consideration in the Executive Summary. Ms. Erdman noted a majority of School Committee members stated Superintendent Beaudoin had managed the District in an exemplary manner. During the fiscal year Superintendent Beaudoin had managed the budget process, negotiated a contract with META and led the process to build a new Memorial School. Superintendent Beaudoin also spearheaded a number of 3rd Party reviews of District programs. Following these reviews, a full time Athletic Director and School Resource Officer were hired.

Ms. Wolf stated she believed Superintendent Beaudoin had done a wonderful job and the District was lucky to work with her. Ms. Wolf stated serving on the Negotiating Team with Superintendent Beaudoin gave her an opportunity to experience Superintendent Beaudoin's leadership skills.

Ms. Fitzgibbon stated she had a number of concerns.

Ms. Cameron stated she felt the process was uneven and did not reflect the success of the District. She stated she did not like her reviews to have surprises and she wondered if the Committee could be more effective with regard to constructive criticism by being more specific. It's hard to see someone say policies are not adequate and we're not really following them because it is the School Committee who approves the policies in the handbook Ms. Cameron asked if there is a way of being more specific with these kinds of criticisms so changes can be implemented.

Ms. Cameron stated the District had a great year and much had been accomplished. Ms. Cameron stated she appreciated the leadership Superintendent Beaudoin had shown throughout the budget process and respects the strength she and Mr. Urbas bring to discussions with the Towns on behalf of the District.

Ms. Erdmann acknowledged the role Superintendent Beaudoin plays in the Collaborative Group which she started a number of years ago and how she helps the District build political capital with the Towns through that group. Her respectful and positive participation in discussions and leadership has earned the respect of Town leaders.

Ms. Cameron thanked Superintendent Beaudoin and Mr. Urbas for their work on behalf of the District.

Ms. Weld stated she believes Superintendent Beaudoin does a fabulous job on behalf of the District and believes it is time to rally all of us to work on behalf of the students. Ms. Weld acknowledges there is something missing in the MERMHS and would like to see the vibe in the building changed.

Ms. Wolf stated the vibe issue is tricky these days and that is true in other Districts and around the country. She does not believe the problem at the MERMHS is different or worse than other schools.

Ms. Cameron stated Superintendent Beaudoin is aware of the feeling and parents also need to be responsible for change and improvement.

Ms. Weld concluded by stating the new Memorial School would not have been built without the Superintendent's efforts.

Mr. Warnock thanked Superintendent Beaudoin and stated he believed the District was doing well under Superintendent Beaudoin's leadership and knows she is addressing the vibe issue and budget. If anything, he would like her to be more aggressive in negotiating the budget with the Towns.

Superintendent Beaudoin stated she accepts the criticism and acknowledges a lot of attention is being paid to the issue. She believes the District has a blueprint for being more aggressive with the budget and recognizes it is a 5-year project. She is working with Mr. Urbas to make budget goals possible. Superintendent Beaudoin acknowledged the support of the District's administrative team and stated she maintains an open-door policy and Committee members should feel free to call or come in to see her in person.

Ms. Fitzgibbon stated she would like to see revisions to conflicting policies in the handbook implemented to reflect School Committee recommendations. It is the District's obligation to see that happen. It is the Superintendent's responsibility and Ms. Fitzgibbon believes the District is not compliant. Ms. Cameron agreed that handbook policies could be improved. Mr. Erdman agreed the Committee will work to clean up the policy handbook.

Ms. Cameron moved to increase Superintendent Beaudoin's salary by 2.5% (the same COLA adjustment negotiated with META), Mr. Warnock seconded the motion. The motion passed with Ms. Fitzgibbon opposing.

3) Consent Agenda

- Acceptance of Warrants
- Minutes 12/5/2019

Ms. Cameron moved to approve the Warrants; Ms. Wolf seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Ms. Wolf moved to approve the Minutes; Mr. Bourke seconded the motion. The motion passed with Ms. Cameron, Ms. Weld and Mr. Warnock abstaining.

4) Sub-Committee Reports

- Elementary Facilities/MSBC (Caroline Weld/Ann Cameron) – Report

Ms. Cameron stated on 12/20/19 there had been a discussion around a change order for the staircase to the athletic field. The Sub-Committee approved the change order. Ms. O'Donnell a member of the sub-committee and structural engineer believes the proposed change is a better

and less expensive option. Mr. Urbas indicated the options were around pilings and slope stabilization. Committee members agreed to the change. The Memorial School projects remains on time and on budget according to Ms. Cameron.

Superintendent Beaudoin stated furniture and playground numbers are getting closer to the budget projections.

- Finance Committee (Anne Cameron/Shannon Erdman) – NR

Ms. Erdmann stated the Finance Committee is meeting on 1/10/20 at 8:00 a.m. Ms. Cameron will send a reminder to the Collaborative Group.

- Policy Committee (Eric Bourke/Rachel Fitzgibbon) – NR
- Negotiation Team (Sarah Wolf/Ken Warnock) – NR

Superintendent Beaudoin stated the META Co-Presidents will be initiating the Teacher Assistant contract process by the end of January. Ms. Cameron asked if this was a whole new contract? Superintendent Beaudoin stated it is. Superintendent Beaudoin is optimistic the contract negotiation will be a positive process. There are templates from other Districts to use in negotiations.

5) Superintendent's Report

Superintendent Beaudoin stated the two-week vacation was well received by all.

The District has received a report on the status of Eagle's Nest Playground at Essex Elementary School. The process started when Mr. Waldron the new Facilities Manager assessed the playground with an eye to making improvements. The playground was built in the 1980's the report stated the playground needed to be decommissioned there is no way to repair or renovate the playground. The playground is a Robert Leathers playground there are only 3 or 4 still in existence due to safety concerns.

The School Committee and Principal now know the District has the report and the decision has been made to shut the playground down. The School Building Sub-Committee on playgrounds will start immediately to recommend a new playground design for Eagle's Nest and the District plans to have the new playground ready for fall 2020.

Ms. Fitzgibbon asked for a copy of the report and asked if the School Committee needed to make the recommendation to close the playground. Superintendent Beaudoin stated she did not need the School Committee's approval to shut down the playground it was a safety issue. Ms. Fitzgibbon stated the playground was reviewed annually. How did it become so compromised? It is a beloved structure played on by everyone.

Mr. Urbas stated with the hiring of Mr. Waldron the process of assessing the playground changed. Mr. Waldron commissioned the review and assessment of the playground by a licensed playground inspector who is familiar with codes, rules and regulations. The inspector stated she was surprised the playground was still being used it is beyond its useful life. Mr. Urbas stated the Robert Leathers playground design was common 30 years ago, but the inspector was clear it is time to turn the page.

According to Mr. Waldron, problems include splinters, head entrapments, tripping, lack of ADA compliance, missing boards, missing monkey bars, lack of safety surfacing, rotting wood and rusty coordinates. Ms. Cameron asked if the swings were okay. The swings are not safe rust and separation of swings from rotting wood are a problem.

Ms. Wolf stated it would be an emotional loss for the children and the Town. She would like the children to be able to say goodbye to Eagle's Nest.

Superintendent Beaudoin will add Eagle's Nest to the agenda for January 14, 2020 to discuss with interested parents why renovation is not feasible. Superintendent Beaudoin has briefed EES Principal and will move onto public disclosure by informing Mr. Zubricki and the Town of Essex. The School Building Committee Sub-Committee will develop a plan and budget. Mr. Warnock asked if the new playground could become a community project. Consideration will be given during planning for a new playground.

The playground will be raised to eliminate liability issues for the District. Ms. Fitzgibbon would like to read the report and understand injuries that have occurred on the playground she is not aware of any. She believes there are many things going away and this is as much a PR issue as a safety issue.

6) Continued Business

- **Service Animals Policy Review**

Superintendent Beaudoin would like to share thinking and growing interest around service dogs in school. Service dogs help relieve stress during exams. There are concerns around allergies and cleanliness, but she is curious to understand how the School Committee feels about the issue. Is the Policy in place enough or would the Committee consider a staff member with a designated District therapy dog?

Ms. Fitzgibbon asked why? Superintendent Beaudoin pointed out service dogs that come into schools help kids manage stress. In many schools' service dogs work with adjustment counselors. Superintendent Beaudoin is asking the question. Ms. Erdmann asked how other schools are handling services dogs? Is there an employee with the dog or does a 3rd party bring in the dog? Ms. Erdmann would like to poll for policies using the current District policy with additional structure around service dogs if necessary.

Superintendent Beaudoin states there is a wide spectrum around the use of dogs with most trending to positive. Ms. Fitzgibbon inquired about who asked for this. Superintendent Baudouin

stated the adjustment counselor would like the option. Service dogs have been tried in one school and are integrated into the counseling program.

Ms. Weld stated she joined the School Committee as animals were being taken out of the buildings. There are other areas of concern for the Committee. Ms. Cameron stated there was an old lab who hung around Essex Elementary until the dog was banned, and she agreed with Ms. Weld about other important issues. Superintendent Beaudoin pointed out the District would be commissioning and agency or handler. Ms. Fitzgibbon stated she agreed with Ms. Weld and Ms. Cameron there are other things the School Committee could be doing to assure the Social Emotional Health of students.

Ms. Wolf stated she could understand the need to bring in service dogs occasionally and the times would need to be defined. Mr. Warnock stated the current policy covers what the Committee is discussing in the first line; *No animal shall be brought to school without prior permission of the building Principal.*

Superintendent Beaudoin stated in some ways if considered necessary the District would be starting a new program. The first step is to understand the Committees feelings, thoughts and concerns around 3rd parties coming in with service dogs.

Ms. Wolf stated she was not in favor of adding a formal program but understood a volunteer coming in with a service dog complying with the first line of the existing policy. Mr. Warnock agreed it is up to the discretion of the principal. Ms. Fitzgibbon stated the principal will look for a more formal policy.

Superintendent Beaudoin stated the District could start small, choose a handler at the Principal's discretion. The issue is not closed. Ms. Erdmann concluded the policy will remain as it is.

- SC Calendar Winter Spring 2020

January 14, 2020 School Committee Meeting, January 15, 2020 Budget Meeting MBTS, January 28, 2020 Business Meeting to start at 6:00 p.m. Budget Hearing at 7:00 p.m. at Essex Elementary.

Program of study presentation was originally scheduled for January 28th but due to a big basketball game will be re-scheduled for January 14, 2020.

Ms. Cameron requested Superintendent Beaudoin asked Mr. Zubricki if Essex would like the District to present the budget at a meeting for Essex BOS and Finance Committee. Superintendent Beaudoin agreed to ask Mr. Zubricki.

Parking Lot – the following are currently in the School Committee parking lot:

- Student Representative consideration of changing format for student representative
- Update Cell Phone – add question for the January 28, 2020 meeting.
- More inclusive community

- No Place for hate – Newburyport Town commitment
- BOS – Town government petition, Ms. Erdmann suggested starting with the members of the Collaboration group.
- meHUB Mr. Zubricki is looking for clarity around meHUB. Superintendent Beaudoin indicated the District was slowly building momentum to develop the role of meHub and will discuss with the Collaborative Group in light of the incident in Rockport.

Superintendent Beaudoin spoke to the need for shared core values and the need to build consistency between the two communities. Ms. Cameron stated the schools are the community. Superintendent stated the District is building a conversation with RULER and developing a shared set of values. Ms. Weld stated these values do not happen overnight.

Ms. Fitzgibbon asked if the Committee was discussing the culture in the community or the culture in the schools.

Ms. Erdmann stated you cannot talk about the culture in the school without talking about the culture in the community. This discussion is a 3-way discussion, parents, school and community. The School Committee is responsible for the school.

Ms. Fitzgibbon stated the tone of respect and inclusion comes from the school, schools have a charter and a set of values. She is concerned there is a cultural issue at the High School, and it is acute. Ms. Fitzgibbon is concerned kids are not happy and values are not being modeled. She believes we need to address the issue of a somewhat toxic culture.

Ms. Cameron disagreed with the statement that leadership does not have the defined values and suspects that parents do not understand what is happening. The school is one part and support from parents who also set values as an expectation is needed. Ms. Weld stated teachers need to model and unfortunately some teachers are not modeling.

Superintendent Beaudoin stated 3rd parties are using the District as a model of a quality culture based on survey data of parents and students. The question was asked how does the District address Social Emotional health in a broader format? Mr. Warnock suggested hearing from the SRO on a regular basis and believes this is a good place to initiate community engagement.

Ms. Weld stated we need to give the new team a chance. What the communities need takes time to develop.

- FY21 Budget Hearing Debrief

Ms. Cameron stated the District is in a hard place and Essex may need a revenue miracle. Superintendent Beaudoin stated the District is not cutting any programs and is not panicked. Mr. Urbas stated the growth is reasonable and supports a part time use of reserve funds to support the District. Ultimately the District's needs will become a community question and be recognized as a District and local project. Ms. Erdmann stated it is the responsibility of the School Committee to deliver the message to the Towns.

Superintendent Beaudoin stated during the Hearing the discussion focused on the roll off of debt in 2024, and the use of these funds to supplement the District budget. Override consideration was also discussed with the understanding the District was managing the budget positively.

7) School Committee Comment – There was no additional School Committee comment this evening.

8) Adjourn

Ms. Wolf moved to adjourn the meeting; Mr. Warnock seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

School Committee Meetings:

January 14, 2020 – Business Meeting

January 15, 2020 – MBTS Finance Committee and BOS Meeting, 7:00 p.m. MBTS Town Hall

January 28, 2020 – Public Hearing Essex Elementary with Business meeting starting at 6:00 p.m.