

GATEWAY REGIONAL DISTRICT SCHOOL COMMITTEE

The Gateway Regional School District will provide an exemplary education that challenges all students in an instructional setting appropriate to their needs.

All visitors attending the school committee meeting should sign in at the security booth.

SPECIAL MEETING MINUTES

Wednesday, February 5, 2025

Gateway Auditorium

7:00 P.M.

7:00 PM I. OPENING OF MEETING & QUESTION TO SEE IF ANYONE IS RECORDING

Call to order: Mr. Forgue, Chairperson

BLANDFORD

Nicole Daviau
Keri Morawiec

CHESTER

Jeana Briggs
Brian Forgue
Jason Forgue

HUNTINGTON

Pegg Dragon
Lisa Goding

MIDDLEFIELD

Alex Seid
Tasha Strong

MONTGOMERY

Peter DeGregorio

RUSSELL

Lyndsey Papillon

SECRETARY

Stacy Stewart

CENTRAL ADMINISTRATION

Kristen Smidy, Superintendent
Stephanie Fisk, Assistant Superintendent

STUDENT REPRESENTATIVE

Theodore DeAngelis-Page
Ana Holmes, Alternate

ADMINISTRATIVE COUNCIL

Martha Gendron, Littleville Asst. Principal
Chris Parker, Technology Director
William Sullivan, GRS Principal
Chris Tamburrino, Asst. Pupil Services Dir.
Val Zeh, GRS Assistant Principal

OTHERS: Janna Mangini, Thomas Robitaille, Mark Folta, Heather Cabral, Ann Marie MacDonald, Andrea Elliott, Anthony Elliott, Amber Cole, Ashleigh Therian, Amy Mason, Candice Amendola, Jenna Kakimoto, Shay Main, Stephanie Simonowicz, Alicia Hansen, Sarah DaSilva, Jessica Michalski, Megan Little, Grace Preissler, Jessica Sakaske, Heather Comee, JeffComee, Gwen Comee, Michael Comee, Alicia Swendsen, Tammy Merenda, James Hayes, Kristina Schultz, Kayla Turner, Mike LaBranche, Deb Kuhn, Joanne Frappier, Annie Pritchard, Linda Hyjek, Cindy Harrison, Jessica Hart, Robert Salvas, Kimberlee Parker, Wendy Long, Kayla Brady, Peter Stone, Sarah Stone, Jen Jakubasz, Jerry Long, Misty Robitaille, Melissa King, Isaiah King, Justin King, Kaila Spencer, Mikayla Menin, Jim Duggan, Nicole Fecteau, Bob Daley, Ann Daley,

7:02 PM II. PUBLIC INPUT

Guests attending the meeting may address the committee on topics not on the agenda. (There is a three minute time limit per guest)

- Mr. Jason Forgue said we are holding this special meeting because there have been numerous requests from parents, guardians, school committee members to allow people to provide comments. He explained that communication with district members under public input has a 15 minute cap, but will recommend we extend it.

Mr. Jason Forgue made a motion seconded by Mrs. Morawiec to extend the public comment from 15 minutes to 45 minutes in order to give everyone who wants to speak the opportunity.

Motion Carried (VOTE) Yeas 10 Nays Abstain Absent

- Mr. Jason Forgue asked that people provide their name and the town you are coming from prior to speaking.
- Misty Robitaille worked at Chester for the past 7 years, as a paraprofessional, in the library, and as a sub. Before Mrs. Maffuccio was at Chester, the school quality was minimal. She put Chester on the map with the quality of learning, tapping trees, learning about the local train station, and composting. She has shown up for our students day after day and is supportive to the staff. She made any situation better. She encouraged me to go back to school and get my teaching degree. We don't do what is easy, we do what is best for Chester. Please hear all the good Mrs. Maffuccio has done for the school.
- Sarah Stone, Palmer. Her daughter's father lives in Chester. They enrolled Sophia in Chester based solely on the fact there was a 4 day in person schedule during Covid. It is a 2 hour round trip to bring her to school, it is not easy but it is what is best for Sophia because of Mrs. Maffuccio and the sense of community she built. They call her Ms. Maffooch and they can go into her office anytime. She is the first person she sees, and Mrs. Maffuccio walks them out. She is the heart of the school. Bring pressure on the teachers union and bring her back because that is what she deserves.
- Peter Stone, Middlefield. I brought Sophia to Chester solely because of covid. There was an absence of leadership and bullying and they were at the point she was going to go back to Palmer until Mrs. Maffuccio was there. She had dealt with things and exceeded his expectations. She calmed people down and got people to work together. She is a leader of change. Sophia is in 5th grade and is terrified for the rest of the students if you don't bring her back. She always managed everything with grace, dignity and calmness. There are behavior issues due to stress. There were issues with the boiler. No one informed him she was sitting in a school on a metal chair in a 48 degree school. He met with the two covering the school and neither knew the regulations. If Mrs. Maffuccio were there she would have known the regulations.
- **Jeana Briggs**, Chester. She is a parent and school committee member. Her oldest started in Chester in 2011 and except for the trifecta of teachers Brady, Cabral and Baker, it was not good at all. Mrs. Maffuccio came in and changed everything. She is difficult to deal with. She had to put faith in another PTO member because she and Mrs. Maffuccio are both headstrong. She gets that a lot of people in administration don't like her and she hopes that is not what's going on. You put in misleading comments Mrs.

Balboni and Mrs. Goding. People shouldn't be able to post to public forums. My child came home from school crying every single night because no one on this school committee gives a crap about Chester. She has fought for 5 years and we are going to take her away from this school and everything she is doing.

- Sophia Stone, student. She was the heart of Chester elementary when she had a hard time, she had been there to make it better. She encourages friendship and never takes sides in conflict. Everyone in her class supports Mrs. Maffuccio and everyone wanted one. Her school has become misbehaved and it never happened while she was there.
- Alicia Swendsen, Chester. Her son started before covid. His first year Mrs. Maffuccio was not there. There was an assistant principal and no principal and Mrs. Maffuccio came in and took care of the kindergarten teacher. There is clear communication and she knows her kids are safer. She will see everyone's side and sort it out. If they can't be notified of the boilers, what if there is a lockdown. What are the two people who were filling in going to do? The teachers and faculty will do the right thing, but they need someone to look up to for leadership. How do we get a vote of no confidence for the superintendent.
- Mr. Jason Forgue said it can be addressed on another meeting agenda. The committee will make a decision if it is brought forward or not.
- Andy Elliott, Becket. She worked under Mrs. Maffuccio and got support from her. She made Chester a teaching of excellence school. While working at Gateway the administration has been amazing. She has nothing but good experiences with Mrs. Smidy. She would come back in a teaching capacity if she could. She loves the GRS principal and Ms. Zeh and Mrs. Maffuccio. Her child doesn't want to go to school. What can we do to get Maffuccio back. She has brought experiences like boiling maple syrup, hatching chickens, growing vegetables, and science shows. Bring Mrs. Maffuccio back.
- A student misses Mrs. Maffuccio and wants her back right away.
- Justin King, Blandford. He has a 5th grader at Chester Elementary and is surprised how many people have been moved by Mrs. Maffuccio. When they first arrived there were racial comments that were not dealt with and when they were it was inappropriate. Once Mrs. Maffuccio came along, she changed the culture. His son had come out of his shell and built up his confidence. It is not just the academics, it is the social and emotional aspect as well. Teaching kids to be good humans. We are saying whatever is going on, wrap up quickly so we can get Chester back on track.
- Tammy Merenda, Becket. Mrs. Maffuccio is someone who has made an immeasurable impact on her school. I raised 10 beautiful children in different schools in Berkshire county. She was searching for something better for her first grader Angelo and found the best school for their needs at Chester, a truly caring school. Her commitment to education goes beyond politics, taking the time to know each child and support teachers making a thriving community and a positive nurturing environment. She doesn't just do her job, she gives her heart. Chester needs Mrs. Maffuccio as much as she needs to be here. The children notice she needs to be here too. I personally would like to know what she has done. Let us know what is going on and let's bring her back. Three weeks ago she had her son's IEP meeting and she is not impressed with who is running Chester.
- Janna Mangini transparency is very poor and we've heard crickets from a month and a half ago. A principal that we love so much is not at school and we know nothing. Her son just had another surgery and was texting her. Mrs. Maffuccio has been amazing. She didn't even know who to talk to. They personally liked Mrs. Smidy until now. If any members personally don't like Mrs. Maffuccio, let it go.

- Candice Amendola, Chester. Her son had started in Chester and was not impressed and was made to cry by the assistant principal. He came home in tears. He had to go into the ICU for diabetes, the administration was horrible. They were unsupported and he was so depressed, she ended up home schooling him. She heard from some of her mom friends that Mrs. Maffuccio was incredible. She made it a point to get in contact with her and it was amazing. She arranged the classrooms so he could be closer to the nurse. She attends all his 504 meetings. When her five year old was three and trying to get into half day preschool, Mrs. Maffuccio was able to connect with him. I work in southern berkshire. With all the principals I have worked with, Mrs. Maffuccio is amazing. The kindergarten teacher is really struggling.
- Stephanie Simonowicz, Middlefield. There is a mental impact with sharing our feelings in front of the public and audience. Administration has earned this spotlight in the darkest form. If you have the power to positively take away our leader. you should have a strong backing because our community will not settle for anything less than transparency. Our children deserve better. You may think the interim help is sufficient, but her children tell her otherwise. At no point since Mrs. Maffuccio has been gone has she met a new person. No one has met anyone. Her oldest daughter thinks Mrs. Maffuccio is on a long vacation. Her kids go home and she has to tell them a white faced lie. You do that to your children and let me know how it goes. You are failing and tonight's meeting is an example of that. What good does it do if everyone is losing. I hope you know how shameful this is to let it drag out. It is shameful for someone who has been so good for our school. Anyone who doesn't like Mrs. Maffuccio, take your pride and put it in your back pocket.
- Isaiah King said when they first moved to Chester/Blandford, with the first principal, he didn't really know what to think about it. But the next year, Mrs. Maffuccio came in and it was like a rainbow, all sunny and bright. It has gone downhill so we really need her back. 128 people have signed the petition to get her back.
- Kayla Brady, Blandford. She has a daughter in 5th grade. She is both a parent and a school administrator and was a teacher at Gateway. She understands there is a process that needs to be followed. But in the role of a parent, she was one of the first ones to reach out. There are a ton of 5th grade parents. Because of the change in principals, they love their time with Mrs. Maffuccio. They had so much turnover before Mrs. Maffuccio. Our kids are the ones suffering. To have their principal who is very loved, taken away, they miss her. Parents are feeling the pinch. Working in Chester was like working on an island. Mrs. Maffucci changed that. I hope you can bring her back because our kids are suffering.
- Jess Michalski, Blandford. Her daughter gravitated to Mrs. Maffuccio so if you can bring her back, please do so she clearly has had a great impact. She would encourage better communication with issues such as the boiler. Why wasn't she aware until a day later. What can we learn from this?
- Jenna Kakimoto, teacher. We all agree, Mrs. Maffuccio is awesome. It is a legal situation where people are not allowed to say anything. She knows it's frustrating and that is how it is and we need to wait for the process. As far as the vote of no confidence, there is no evidence. In the same way that Mrs. Maffuccio has turned around Chester, Mrs. Smidy has done the same for the district.
- Jeana Briggs agrees there is legality over what people can say. Something should have said to their kids. Why hasn't the administration said something to their kids? It has been

utterly terrible for our kids. Just one statement that unified the kids saying it was going to be okay didn't come to our kids. It is a huge detriment to our parents too.

- Mr. Forgue said we are approaching the 45 minute limit.

Mr. Jason Forgue made a motion seconded by Mrs. Morawiec to extend the public comment from 15 minutes to 45 minutes in order to give everyone who wants to speak the opportunity.

Motion Carried (VOTE) Yeas 10 Nays Abstain Absent

- It was asked if there was a timeframe.
- Mr. Stone asked who they need to go to, to go above the school committee.
- Mr. Jason Forgue said the state. They are doing what they need to do.
- A parent asked if we are fighting for her or against Mrs. Maffuccio? It is not what is easiest, it is what is best for our students.
- Mrs. Smidy said she has a deep respect for Mrs. Maffuccio and she mentored her.
- A Parent said it is hush hush. Is it DCF or EEC, all news outlets were notified. I hope you have answers next week or you are going to look foolish.
- Mr. Jason Forgue said he has four children and his kids went through Chester, there was a ton of turnover.
- Mr. Stone said If your kids were up there right now, would you just sit back and watch. He was hoping you would support us.
- A student said she loves Chester Elementary and always feels safe because of Mrs. Maffuccio. She was there and she has been going through ongoing bullying and that one person is taken away from here. She wants her back so bad.
- This is why I am going to fight you. Our kids are suffering. She is just one.
- Mrs. Briggs said if Mrs. Maffuccio's peers are not fighting for her, how do we? We are elected officials here to do our job. Who is advocating for us?
- A student asked if they can find out anything so that problems can be solved and school become better again.
- Mrs. Briggs is extraordinarily frustrated with what Brewtus has endured but she will in no way support a vote of no confidence for Mrs. Smidy.
- A parent said she held Mrs. Smidy in the highest extreme, and was hoping she was pro Mrs. Maffuccio.
- Alicia Swendsen said she would not have come up with the vote of no confidence if it wasn't for the boiler.

7:17 PM III. NEW BUSINESS/ACTION ITEM

A. Discussion of Substitute Principal Position at Chester Elementary School

- Mr. Forgue introduced the current substitute principal, Mr. Folta.
- Mark Folta introduced himself. I sent you all an introductory email. He is doing this as a personal favor to Mrs. Smidy. He has met Mrs. Maffuccio a few times and she is hardworking and competitive. All those words you said about Mrs. Maffuccio, he thinks about Mrs. Smidy. Do you think it doesn't kill her not to talk about it? She is being directed by attorneys to keep your mouth shut. She won't even tell me what is going on

which is unusual. I see you at school and I go into classrooms and have been there 4 days trying to be as visible as possible. I know I am not Mrs. Maffuccio and the kids want someone to talk to. Talk to Ms. Cabral, she is great. You can talk to me when you get to know me. At this time in his life, he does what he loves and it's the kids. Not the parents, they are passionate about their kids.

- Linda Hyjek, a teacher from Littleville said Mark filled in for them when Littleville went through something similar. The kids bonded with him. When he came back to visit the kids ran out of the classrooms to hug him. He was healing our school community.
- Mr. Folta will do the best he can.
- Mr. Jason Forgue is truly sorry there isn't more information. They will come up with something to tell the students..
- Kayla Brady would ask that a vote of no confidence not be put on the next agenda. I would want my privacy respected if I were Mrs. Maffuccio. But she would like to have Mrs. Maffuccio back if that is possible.

8:00 PM IV. ADJOURNMENT by 9 p.m. unless extended by majority vote.

Mr. Jason Forgue made a motion seconded by Mrs. Morawiec to adjourn at 8:20 p.m.

Motion Carried (VOTE) Yeas 10 Nays Abstain Absent

Respectfully submitted,
Stacy L. Stewart,
School Committee Secretary