

MINUTES OF THE REGULAR SESSION OF THE MALDEN SCHOOL COMMITTEE

Monday, January 6, 2025

Herbert L. Jackson Council Chamber Room #106 - 215 Pleasant Street Malden, MA and  
Virtual Meeting

Mayor Christenson called the meeting to order at 6:13 p.m.

Mayor Christenson read docket items for the meeting.

Mayor Christenson led the committee in the Pledge of Allegiance followed by a moment of silence for those who have served our country and for those who continue to do so.

**Roll Call**

The following attendance was taken:

Mayor Christenson - Present

Mr. Drummey - Absent

Mr. McCarthy - Present

Ms. Spadafora - Present

Ms. Macklin - Present

Ms. Hortie - Present

Mr. Gray - Present

Mr. Bernard - Present

Ms. Rose-Zeiberg - Present

Superintendent Sippel - Present

Student Representative Cathen Fontanilla - Absent

**Approval of Minutes**

Mayor Christenson brought forth the matter of the adoption of minutes for the December 2, 2024 Regular Session of the School Committee. Mr. Bernard made the motion to adopt the minutes.

Mr. McCarthy seconded and so it was VOTED. Motion passed unanimously.

**Public Comment**

Staci Rubin, 33 Blomerth St.

Staci Rubin approached the Committee and began by thanking them for the work that they do as well as the work that was done to make Band available again at the Beebe School. As a member of Beebe Site Council then made a request for the Spanish teacher position to be extended to other World Languages. Ms. Rubin explained that the Spanish teacher position has remained unfilled for three years, and that there is belief that if it is expanded to other languages, because it is not equitable that Beebe does not have a World Language teacher for their students.

Dawn O'Toole, ESP Beebe School, 130 Adams St.

Dawn O'Toole approached the committee and asked that the weather chart for recess be assessed and sent to the Policy and Procedures Subcommittee for review. She believes the current chart is rather vague and that it does not take into account wind chill or heat in the summer. Ms. O'Toole explains that some students who have moved here from out of the country may not have experienced the weather in New England and do not have appropriate clothing for the cold.

### **Report of the Superintendent**

#### **1. MCAS, Question 2 & Graduation Requirements**

Superintendent Sippel begins by going over his Core Values. His Core Values being; Include and Collaborate, Embrace Growth, and Do Right by ALL Kids. Superintendent Sippel starts his presentation with an update on the Implications of Question 2. Superintendent Sippel explains that Massachusetts students have to meet both their district's local requirements and the standards of a Competency Determination to graduate. For Malden, students in the Class of 2025 need to pass a minimum of 21 credits to graduate (with additional specific course requirements). Due to the district's successful efforts to adopt MassCore, the Class of 2026 and beyond will be required to pass 22 credits which will ensure students are ready to begin college.

The requirement for Massachusetts students to meet both their district's local requirements and the standards of a Competency Determination to graduate have not changed. Prior to the vote on Question 2, the High School MCAS (ELA, Math and Science) served as the Competency Determination. Post Question 2, The Competency Determination will now be defined by School Committee Policy.

Superintendent Sippel explains that Federal and State law still requires that schools administer MCAS in grades 3-8 and high school and the state is still legally required to use MCAS for accountability purposes. The Superintendent reiterates that MCAS is still useful, important and an effective measure of student readiness for post-secondary opportunities.

The Superintendent shares his "Next Steps". The first being that he intends to bring a recommendation for the district's Competency Determination policy in February. There are also plans to conduct interventions with students at risk of not meeting graduation requirements. Additionally, the Acceleration Academy, which is designed to prepare 9th and 10th graders for overall success, and for the MCAS.

School Committee member Macklin asks the Superintendent if recommendations for Competency Determination will take effect immediately because she is wondering how

we will measure competency for this year? The Superintendent says that they will likely recommend that it be course driven and it will need to be decided what grade is considered competent and this will be presented to the Committee in February.

School Committee member Hortie made a request to see a real life schedule in action so the Committee can see what the day to day looks like for a student. She also goes on to say that she is interested in knowing specifically what we will be looking for when we say competency. Ms. Hortie says it would be helpful for the Committee to have an understanding of what we will need from these classes, as it is easy to say pass or fail, what skills should students be walking away with when they have passed the class. Ms. Hortie also expressed interest in what the state oversight would look like, and how we are going to communicate so that the determination we make also meets what the state is looking for, i.e. “what counts for what”. Superintendent Sippel responds by saying that we can provide sample schedules for the Committee and that they will be working on the Competency Determination with the Committee to appropriately determine these measures.

Vice Chair Spadafora asks the Superintendent if he plans to present the Competency Determination recommendations to the full Committee or to the Policy and Procedures Subcommittee. Ms. Spadafora adds that this should really go to subcommittee to be worked on before it can be approved, though time is of the essence. Mayor Christenson adds that he thinks we need the recommendation first and then it can be sent to the subcommittee. School Committee member Bernard adds that as long as it is clear we can do it in February then at that point we can hold a special meeting if it is not agreed upon. Mayor Christenson says it needs to be referred to us collectively and then if it needs to go to subcommittee it will.

School Committee member Rose-Zeiberg requests that the Policy and Procedures subcommittee be given ample time to look into the recommendations to review them closely and get feedback on them from our constituents.

School Committee member Gray adds that he agrees with the Mayor, normally the Superintendent presents to the full Committee and if it needs more work, it is sent to policy. Mayor Christenson asked that the Superintendent move this along quickly, and asked the Clerk to note that the Committee may meet virtually for a Special Meeting before the February School Committee meeting to move things along.

Mayor Christenson asked the Superintendent if he has any indication that there is potential for an adjustment to the language in reference to Question 2. Superintendent Sippel says that he has not heard anything from DESE or otherwise, but that there is

always potential. Mayor Christenson asks the Superintendent if he intends to host a Town Hall or an assembly with students. Superintendent Sippel said that he has not organized an assembly with students yet but that he will be working with Principal Mastrangelo for things like this.

## **2. Entry Findings Update**

Superintendent Sippel shares that he is in Phase 4 of his Entry Plan and he plans to bring his Report of Entry Findings to the Committee in the Spring. The Superintendent then goes into some “Urgent Topics”; Communications, Extracurriculars, HS MCAS Prep, and Attendance. Superintendent Sippel shares that he and his team have been working on staff and caregiver surveys, the district website, a cadence of Superintendent updates, communication through social media platforms and establishing a new district-wide communications platform for 2025-2026. Extracurricular activities were a huge point of concern and so they have been collaborating with principals to establish and provide more after school clubs and activities for Middle School students. The first wave of clubs starts this week. For high school MCAS Prep they are using Acceleration Academy to ensure students are on track for graduation and the world beyond. As Chronic Absenteeism has also been an urgent topic, a message went out to families in December communicating the importance of attendance. As well as the development of a district-wide Attendance Playbook. The team plans to continue engaging with the community about the importance of attendance.

Following Urgent Topics, Superintendent Sippel shares what they are planning now for 2025-2026; Recruitment, High School schedules and English Learners. He shares that they are in the process of filling vacant positions, and have engaged with professional educational recruitment to fill remaining vacancies. For high school schedules, currently there are 664 students who have at least one “Directed Study”. The next steps are to ensure that every student has a full schedule in 2025-2026. Superintendent Sippel shares that he and his team are working on the ongoing integration of multilingual learners who have been taught in self contained classrooms. They have already made sure that all of these students have been integrated during lunch and are in the process of fully integrating them with their English speaking peers in exploratories. Next steps will be collaborative planning with educators and leaders to optimize next year’s programming for English Learners, Grades K-12.

Superintendent Sippel also shares additional urgent themes; Special Education, Curriculum and instruction for advanced learners, recess and physical activity, and teacher support and training. Some longer-term concerns are; expanding funding and resources, mental and physical well-being, rigorous curriculum for all students, and World Language education.

Lastly, Superintendent Sippel shares that the Class of 2025 Graduation will be Sunday, June 1, 2025 at 2:00 p.m., and the last day of school for Seniors will be Wednesday, May 28, 2025.

School Committee member Macklin asks the Superintendent what determines high school scheduling with respect to a directed study and asks that he speak to the demographic of that. The Superintendent explains that they will be looking at this with the technical assistance provider who is working with them to see on a variety of dimensions whether there are students who are more likely to be in a directed study or not. Or if there are students who are meeting MassCore, or if they are graduating. He adds that who gets a directed study and who does not is very complex, but in some cases if a student requests a class and it is already full and there is not another class that the student is interested in to take its place, they are assigned to a directed study. But, they will have a better understanding soon.

School Committee member Bernard asks the Superintendent if any efforts are being made to retain people who are going into retirement to do substitute teaching or to be an advisor for after school activities. Superintendent Sippel responds by saying they are absolutely interested in that option and will continue to look into it.

School Committee member Hortie asks if we are addressing transportation for extracurricular activities if a particular club is only at one school and if there is a way we can assist in getting the older students where they need to be. Superintendent Sippel shares that with the roll out being so new they have not addressed this yet.

School Committee member Gray points out that he finds the term “engagement through social media” rather vague and is hoping for, maybe at a later date, a clearer explanation of what that actually means. Superintendent Sippel explains that the platform he mentioned will replace all of the different platforms being used now. And there will be a thoughtful roll out, and more information to come.

School Committee member Rose-Zeiberg speaks to Ms. Hortie's comments about extracurriculars, saying that as an idea for expanding clubs to other schools we may be able to connect them electronically. Ms. Rose Zeiberg asks if students have to pay, are teachers being stipend, and if it is limited to teaching staff or will it be opened up to community members who may want to come in to advise clubs. Superintendent Sippel says that the clubs are not everyday, usually one day a week so teachers are being stipend. As far as volunteers coming in to participate, it is intriguing to think about moving forward.

Vice Chair Spadafora tasks Superintendent Sippel with doing an audit on Communications platforms. As some who are no longer in the district may still have access to the platforms. The Superintendent shares that the program they plan to launch next year is that it does automatic updates every night so anyone who has withdrawn from the district will be withdrawn from the platform. Ms. Spadafora shares she believes the issue of directed studies should be at the top of the list with concern to student attendance. Superintendent Sippel shares that the number of days absent for students with directed studies is higher than students who do not, and their district team is working to fix this.

Ms. Hortie shares that her understanding of directed studies is that there is a level of directed studies that is different for freshmen than everyone else, that this was implemented to give extra support. If that is not correct, is there a way to support freshmen if we are doing away with directed studies. The Superintendent explains that as you get into the higher grades, the number of students with a directed study actually increases because some students have reached their graduation requirements and so they can afford to have one. Ms. Hortie then asks if we are going to be expanding our elective options or are we offering enough sections that so many students are in a directed study. The Superintendent adds that they are looking into this now.

## **Motions and Resolutions**

### **Personal Privilege**

### **Executive Session**

Mr. Bernard made a motion to enter into Executive Session at 7:48 p.m. Mr. McCarthy seconded. A roll call vote was taken.

### **Roll Call Vote**

Mayor Christenson - Yes

Mr. Drummey - Absent

Mr. McCarthy - Yes

Ms. Spadafora - Yes

Ms. Macklin - Yes

Ms. Hortie - Yes

Mr. Gray - Yes

Mr. Bernard - Yes

Ms. Rose-Zeiberg - Yes

Motion passed unanimously.

The committee reconvened to Regular Session at 8:22 p.m.

*Mayor Christenson recused himself in Executive session because of a potential conflict of interest. Vice Chair Spadafora served as the Chair for the remainder of the meeting.*

**Adjournment**

Mr. Bernard made a motion to adjourn at 8:23 p.m. Mr. Gray seconded and so it was VOTED. Motion passed unanimously.

I certify that a notice of this meeting was filed with the Clerk of the City of Malden in the manner provided under Chapter 39, Section 23A of the General Laws.

*Ariana Langston*

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**Ariana Langston, Clerk**