

NHS School Council

March 11, 2025

MEETING SUMMARY

Attendance Members: Renee Ames, Chris Cain, Jeane Coffey, Stacey Gijbsbers, Priya Kaur, Rourke Lee, Richie Pace, Cady Seaton, Erin Seaton, Mike Testa, Andy Wulf

A) High School Updates

a) Change of next meeting date

- Andy Wulf noted a conflict with the April School Council meeting due to an event that will be taking place at the high school.
- The team decided to move the next meeting date, Wednesday, April 9 from 5:00 - 6:30 PM

b) Recent Extracurricular Success (Mock Trial, Slam Poetry, Athletics)

c) Student Scheduling Update

- Students have submitted their course requests.
- Over the next few weeks, Administration and Department Instructional Leads will make decisions on the quantity of course sections
- Andy Wulf explained, "Our objective is to provide students with their schedules before the end of the school year." He explained that last year, students received schedules on the first day of final exam week. This gave them time to meet with counselors to resolve any schedule conflicts.

d) Cell Phones & Schools

- Since the February meeting, students part of the student council presented at the school committee. This allowed the school committee to ask questions regarding work that has happened in their classrooms to help students understand the addictive nature of cell phones and social media. Students also presented their role in a recent assembly where they shared strategies to limit their use of cell phones.
- Andy Wulf explained that Newburyport High School with support from the District will conduct an intergenerational dialogue around the topic of students and access to cell phones and social media. He explained that

the dialogue will run similar to what had been done 6 years ago to decide how best to move forward with class ranking and the valedictorian and salutatorian. Andy Wulf also noted that dialogue was used back in 2021 when a “Whole School Read” happened using the text, *Just Mercy*.

- The use of dialogue has been a fixture for Newburyport Public Schools for the past 6 years. Teachers have been trained to teach students and adults the skills part of an effective dialogue. Lynne Cote and Eric Schildge are dialogue coaches for the school system and have convened a team of parents, students, and teachers to plan the intergenerational dialogue. At their first meeting, the team brainstormed community members to interview. The content of the interview will help them develop the focus questions that will be part of the dialogue. The goal is to run the dialogue sometime in May.

B) Policy Discussion

a) Competency Determination

- Andy Wulf shared the [final draft](#) of the Competency Determination. He thanked the school council for their feedback and explained the school committee conducted their reading of the policy at their last meeting.
- Andy Wulf reviewed the presentation he gave to all sophomores. He explained that he visited all grade 10 English classes to personalize the overview of competency determination and also help students understand why it is important to work their best when taking the MCAS.
- Here is the presentation Andy Wulf delivered for the grade 10 students this week. He plans to also visit grade 9 Biology classes.

[MCAS/CD - Student Presentation](#)

b) [Attendance Policy - Changes to Consider](#)

- Andy Wulf and Mike Testa shared administration’s recommendation on changes to the attendance policy. The objective is to streamline the policy for all stakeholders; parents, students, and teachers.
- Mike Testa provided an overview of the proposed changes:
 - (1) Council last year helped decide on the number of absences to help with Chronic Absenteeism
 - (2) The current policy involves both the oversight and management from teachers and administration. Families also need to provide

medical documentation to have a sick day absence excused. Parents have voice frustration as there are many times their student is sick and they give permission for them to stay but there is no need for them to see a doctor.

(3) This proposed policy change is looking to streamline how attendance is managed at the school so that it focuses more administratively while making excusals less burdensome for families.

(4) Additionally, the proposal aligns with DESE's accountability measure for chronic absenteeism.

(5) In summary, the proposed policy:

- Uses school day attendance record to determine whether or not a student loses credit in classes due to having too many absences
- Notes that students have can have up to 9 school day absences (excused or unexcused) in a semester before losing credit in their classes.
- Has an accommodation for students with a medical condition or other documented situation that may result in absences across the school year.

■ Below is feedback from the council after reviewing the proposed policy change:

(1) This policy is more straightforward and streamlined.

(2) Can it be more explicit that the medical exemption is made up front.

(3) Question on student who may be dismissed and then returns, does that impact their school day attendance

- Mike Testa explained a student needs to attend 3 of their 5 classes to be considered present for the day.
- Parents recommended to include that measure of time to be considered present in the policy.

(4) Be sure to specify that daily attendance is what is being focused on.

(5) Does it make sense to include the number of students who have been chronically absent?

(6) Is there a more streamlined method for parents to notify the school that their child is absent. Possibly add an email line or phone line.

■ Andy Wulf noted the administrative team will also review the policy proposal with the faculty council to receive feedback. The objective will be to have a final draft for the April meeting.

c) Other Policy Areas for Discussion

- A discussion took place around the honor roll list. Is there a different way to have parents check the list for accuracy.
 - (1) Can a note be placed in x2
 - (2) Discussion took place around the public announcement of the honor roll in the paper.