

SCHOOL COMMITTEE

(Official Report)

Roundtable Meeting

May 22, 2018

Called for 6:00 p.m. in the CRLS Henrietta S. Attles Meeting Room, Cambridge Rindge and Latin School, 459 Broadway, Cambridge, for the purpose of discussing the Athletics Program.

Members Present: Ms. Bowman, Ms. Dexter, Mr. Fantini, Ms. Kelly, Mr. Kimbrough, Ms. Nolan, Mayor McGovern

Also Present: Dr. Kenneth N. Salim, Superintendent of Schools
Dr. Carolyn Turk, Deputy Superintendent
Mr. James Maloney, Chief Operating Officer
Ms. Maryann MacDonald, Asst. Superintendent of Elementary Education
CRLS Principal Damon Smith
Ms. Elizabeth Liss, Education Liaison for Mayor's Office
Ms. Jean Spera, Interim OSS Director
Coach Lance Dottin

Mayor McGovern in the Chair

A quorum of the School Committee being present, the Chair called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m. The Mayor explained he has to leave early due to a scheduling conflict and will turn the rest of the meeting over to Vice Chair Kelly. He stated he appreciates the lowering of the probation GPA to 65%, and he wants to make sure the athletic program will be clear about how to include families in communications on all aspects; it needs to be more specific with a clear plan for what parent communication means with documentation. He would also like to see more intramural activities.

Mayor McGovern exited the meeting at 6:15 p.m.

Vice Chair Kelly in the Chair

The Chair read the call of the meeting and announced that this Roundtable meeting will be recorded by audio and visual devices. There is no public comment and no voting; she then turned the mike over to Dr. Salim who gave an introduction and introduced the Athletic Director Mr. Tom Aria, Principal Damon Smith and Mr. James Maloney as presenters. Dr. Salim also explained that this presentation comes as a result of many questions that have come up over the past few months regarding equity and other issues.

School Committee Roundtable CRLS Athletics May 22, 2018

Agenda

1. Interscholastic Athletics
2. Role and Responsibilities of Director of Athletics
3. Overview of CRLS Athletics Department (comparative districts)
4. Cambridge Facilities
5. School Committee motions
6. Challenges and Initiatives
7. Discussion

Objectives

Mr. Aria took the Members through a PowerPoint presentation that began by focusing on the background of interscholastic athletics. The presenters were prepared to answer questions and concerns of the Members, and explain what the athletic department currently does and intends to provide in the future.

Questions and discussion

Ms. Nolan asked about data on the different ranges of students by ethnicity, socio economic status and gender. Ms. Nolan also stated that she is able to see more clearly, from the presentation, how athletics works. There are 110 paid coaches, there are 125 volunteers and she wants to know how many are CPS staff?

Mr. Aria answered that about 60% were CPS teachers. Ms. Nolan wants to make sure we are hiring the best people for the job. She is interested in knowing the pros and cons of hiring or not hiring teachers. Mr. Aria explained that it will be addressed on the area of coaching, later in the presentation.

Ms. Nolan asked about intramural opportunities for all students.

Mr. Aria responded it all comes down to logistics and man/woman power as to who gets into different opportunities. He has been trying to get the intramural opportunities at the upper schools also, but it is not fully operational yet; due to facility availability and limitations. If we were running at full capacity, we would be displacing other groups.

Emily asked how many groups meet less than four times a week.

Mr. Aria named fencing, orienteering, and many club sports, it was brought up that rowing meets twice a day.

Mr. Fantini asked if the department has considered training student athletic leaders.

Mr. Aria stated he led a group of athletic directors through the Dual County League (DCL); they brought over 20 students to participate in workshops held during August and this past spring. He would like to bring in some outside groups to run trainings, it will be costly, but he is open to it.

Principal Smith stated they moved to the DCL so that our athletes can get an idea of athletics beyond sports at our school.

Mr. Fantini wants to know if the 60% coaches are a high rate of faculty; or is this a goal that we are striving to improve? Mr. Aria stated it is typical rate.

Ms. Bowman asked about food and snacks for kids that are staying after school for long periods of time and may not have the means to bring food with them.

Mr. Aria stated that some coaches have the help of the parents. Some teams are able to provide snacks but not all teams. Athletic trainers provide Friends of Cambridge Athletics (FOCA) with snacks in their office and Team Meals is something that was organized by parents.

Ms. Bowman spoke about the supports that may be necessary for high level administration to give coaches the support needed to do their jobs effectively and asked how do we provide for our coaches?

Mr. Aria stated that they pushed for workshops to get people involved in understanding other communities. He is trying to provide a space for the coaches to be able to come to him with their concerns.

Principal Smith thanked her for the question. He stated that once they moved into the DCL, they are in more suburban environments and the fans are the ones that are the biggest problems. Their first concern is to make sure our students are safe. There are site managers in the stands, during games that incidents are reported to. There have been conversations about what it means to be a spectator in the stands vs. how different it is when principals from opposing schools communicate about what happened at a game. Generally, we are the most urban team travelling to non neutral neighborhoods.

Ms. Bowman recommends that the Superintendent and the Athletic Director think about having a professional person address the trauma that happens to our students and to debrief our student athletes after games.

Mr. Kimbrough asked how the coaches are evaluated at the end of the season.

Mr. Aria answered that there is an evaluation review at the end of the year; it is based on observations and conversations as they relate to how the coach has interacted with the students and if they have followed up on grades with their students and are holding students accountable in different areas.

Mr. Kimbrough spoke about our freshman, and fall athletics. They are not accountable for their grades, however, the spring athletes are accountable for their grades. He wants to know how Mr. Aria feels about the inequity of this.

Mr. Aria stated that it has been given consideration and thought, but he has no hard numbers on how many are effected in the fall and how many are effected in the spring.

Mr. Kimbrough also spoke on information in the Register Forum from the female student athletes, stating they don't get much press.

Mr. Aria explained that he went to student leadership meetings; he mentioned a student athletic council, he also stated it is a hard thing to tell kids to go to a game. He recommends girls supporting girls.

Vice Chair Kelly stated the day we really will see a change is when the male athletes start showing up at the female games.

Principal Smith admitted that there is not strong viewership of girl sports and there is room for us to grow as a school. He plans on developing a Falcon Loyalty card to increase school spirit for girls. We have a large number of events going on at once so awareness of who is being neglected is sometimes hard to recognize.

Mr. Kimbrough asked what teams can the LGBTQ+ population play on, are there any clear guidelines on welcoming LGBTQ+ students?

Mr. Aria says anyone who wants to participate in any sport can as long as they make it through the tryout session.

Mr. Kimbrough wants to make sure we are open and transparent about making sure vulnerable students know they are welcome to participate.

The presentation resumed beginning with Order C17-363 November 21, 2017, the Thanksgiving Day Game being moved to Thanksgiving Eve. There was an Ad-Hoc committee formed between Athletic Directors of Cambridge and Somerville, to see if this would be a good way to get larger crowds at the games. It was supposed to be a pilot program for a couple of years to see how it worked. Before the game the feedback received from the students was good, if there is a bigger crowd, they were all for it. They got more revenue. After the game, the feedback from students was mixed.

The next topic was C17-378 December 5, 2017, the Coach hiring process. Mr. Aria stated they like to have someone in place 3 months prior to the start of the season, and it is not easy to attract qualified coaches that are teachers, they have a lot of responsibilities and are obligated through the course of a day. They have had 24 coaching vacancies and only one single person has applied for the job. Parents are included in the interview process from beginning to end.

On the topic of C17-399 December 19, 2017, it is the goal of the Director of Athletics to keep open lines of communication for all. There are open coaches meetings, student athletes meetings, student athlete leaders meetings and student athlete feedback surveys.

On the topic of C18-060/062 March 6, 2018, Academic Policy and communication, this is the first year we have had funding for the Student Athlete Academic Mentor Program. They have communicated not only with students, teachers, coaches, but also guidance counselors and deans.

The next topic was the MIAA Athletic Eligibility Standards. Winter and spring seasons: students have to pass two out of four classes from their last report card. Fall Season: it is 4th quarter plus earning 40 credits over the course of the previous academic year.

Mr. Aria stated that in terms of block scheduling, students have to pass their classes.

CRLS Athletic Eligibility Standards are higher than that of MIAA and has been in place since 2015

CRLS Athletic Eligibility Revisions they will be getting rid of passing English and Physical Ed, there will be progress reports for the entire season.

Ms. Nolan asked about “must attend school and class consistently” to make 95% in class attendance.

Mr. Aria explained that there is a difference in the presentation and the printout. Moving on, there will be more probation period.

Proposed Academic Improvement Plan

Ms. Kelly asked how often the students have to submit their progress reports. The answer was weekly.

Ms. Bowman asked if the dynamic diversity program manager is able to leverage some hiring opportunities; perhaps while recruiting teachers he can also recruit coaches. She also expressed her concerns regarding C17-399 and the fact that the Order states to bring coaches and athletic staff to a Roundtable to discuss their concerns; this has not happened. On academic eligibility, she feels that we should not be lowering expectations. Ms. Bowman questioned why PE and English have been included and she cannot see the sense in supporting Level Up and reducing academic requirements to a GPA of 6.5.

Vice Chair Kelly would like to see what the impact is on students with the prior GPAs on SAT scores and how well they performed in college.

Dr. Salim responded that the eligibility remains at 70, the question is what triggers probation. They are trying to get more students into the probationary prevention support group.

Ms. Bowman does not see enough information around why decisions were made. She suggested that the trajectory of playing should be offered even if the student has to catch up.

Principal Smith responded on the historical reason for “must pass PE and English”, prior to the class of 2013 English was the only graduation requirement that had to be taken every year. Then PE became a graduation requirement also. These classes pre-dated waivers related to Pys. Ed. requirements; now they are emphasizing all academic classes. There is no intent to suggest that any class is more important than any other class. In relation to the 70 GPA, he hears it loud and clear and would like to continue that conversation also. He is proud of the higher standard and wants to maintain the high standard and also have a stronger probation piece. He wants them to have the post secondary opportunity in college. PE and English is antiquated to what we do now.

Ms. Nolan appreciates the explanations of the changes that we may be asked to consider. We need to be very clear about how this is communicated to parents, especially for students that are under 18 years old. If we don't make it very clear, it may not happen. Where it says “include families in communication”, the parent and the student both need to sign off on the academic probation. Is there any data on:

Whether or not it worked?

How are we assessing and judging?

How many students go to college for sports?
How many got scholarships in D1 D2 D3?
Do they know about the NCAA clearinghouse?

Vice Chair Kelly stated this almost sounds like an IEP of the family, student, coach, guidance counselor and athletic director, if they were to do this on a weekly basis it would go a long way to improving this issue.

The last report states that twelve students out of 325 failed, given it is a small group of students, it is possible to help these athletic kids.

Mr. Fantini agrees with Ms. Bowman that we need to have the coaches as part of this conversation as well. Their input is vital, it is their passion and we need to honor them by listening to them. There is a lot of information that would have come from the coaches if they were able to participate in this Roundtable. He thinks the eligibility is on the right page – move it forward. The academic counselor was a good hire. He wants to know how soon this will happen. He also wants to have the Thanksgiving Day game on Thanksgiving Day. One child not being able to participate in a sport is an issue. We need to make sure the homework centers are of good quality. Some systems have a hardship appeal for an athlete to go before the school board. We should be open to this even if it is limited.

Emily asked about the extra curricula intramurals that students are not participating in. How many other schools offer an intramural program? She also wanted to know if they polled the non sports participating students as to why they do not participate.

Mr. Aria stated Brookline has a very robust intramural offering. Mr. Aria answered that they polled the freshman class last year and only twelve students responded. Emily suggested they try another method to get responses. She also asked about eligibility requirements.

Mr. Maloney stated that the biggest impediments to intramurals are usage and facilities. It will impact little leagues, Babe Ruth and our upper school programs.

Emily asked if there are eligibility requirements for art, student government, and theatre productions, adding it would seem fair to have across the board eligibility requirements.

Principal Smith answered stating some years ago, they began discussing it, as it relates to VPA activities because the amount of time required for a theatre production equals a sports season. They did not follow up or decide on it. If the School Committee body wants, they will look into it once more, there is a certain amount of equity across co-curricula activities, there are pros and cons to doing both, but they can begin the conversation, but these may be some hard conversations. The eligibility requirements for both athletic and VPA activities being discussed concurrently might not be a good idea.

Mr. Kimbrough spoke on funding positions to track athletic eligibility. Who does this work?

Mr. Aria answered that \$20,000.00 goes to the person who sets up tutoring through school volunteers; this is a pilot year. He is a former coach, knows the eligibility standards well, knows the students very well and sets up the communications between the coaches, teachers and the students, and knows how to get the kids back on track. He also sets up a plan with the ineligible students that show an interest in sports so they can participate in the future and he helps other students currently in the programs keep and improve their standing.

Mr. Kimbrough asked about what role the coaches play on thinking about hyper masculinity work.

Principal Smith responded there is intervention when particular incidents occur and with particular teams when needed.

Mr. Fantini thanked everyone for the presentation and acknowledged that Mr. Aria's responsibility is huge.

Ms. Bowman wants to put supports in place to undermine systematic oppression. Sports are a privilege that has responsibility attached to it and we need to make sure our students are able to rise to the advantage of participating in sports.

Ms. Nolan wants to reach out to students and get their voices for feedback on the program. All kids need to be eligible, not just kids that are playing sports.

Vice Chair Kelly thanked them for the presentation.

Mr. Fantini moved for adjournment seconded by Ms. Nolan. Adjourned at 8:00 p.m.

Dosha Beard
Executive Secretary to the School Committee

Distributed Handouts/Documents (on file in the School Committee Office).

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