

## SCHOOL COMMITTEE

(Official Report)

### Special Meeting (Superintendent's Retreat)

January 20, 2018

Called for 8:00 a.m., Saturday, January 20, 2018, in the CRLS Pearl K. Wise Library, 459 Broadway, Cambridge, the purpose of a Retreat with the Superintendent of Schools and any other invited School District Senior Administrators focusing on Operating Protocols and the School Committee Norms.

Presenter: Dorothy Presser, Field Director, MASC

Members Present: Superintendent Salim, Ms. Bowman, (~~ABSENT~~), Ms. Dexter, Mr. Fantini, Ms. Kelly, Ms. Nolan, Mayor McGovern, Mr. Kimbrough ABSENT

Also Present: Dr. Turk, Mr. Maloney, Ms. Liss

A quorum of the School Committee being present Mayor McGovern called the meeting to order at 8:08 AM and read the call of the meeting.

Superintendent Salim stated that in his contract he is to meet annually with the School Committee to identify topics that they want to explore. He and Mayor McGovern decided on a retreat and the Mayor wanted to have it at the beginning of the new term.

Ms. Presser went around the table to do introductions.

Ms. Presser did a PowerPoint presentation that is on file in the School Committee office. They discussed the School Committee's first two sections of the School Committee Operating Protocols.

Slide one: What are Operating Protocols? It is usually a series of Ground Rules made by the group that are unique to the group working together. There should be conversation of how the work will be done to work together and self evaluation. Are they working for the group, do they need to be tweaked?

Slide two: What Operating Protocols are not intended to do. Operating Protocols are not to hinder the work but to facilitate the work, conversation back and forth so the group works well together.

Everyone that attends the meetings regularly should review this. Ms. Presser then asked participants to pair up. There was discussion about how to pair up. Every group should have three members (one not a School Committee member) rather than two.

Ms. Presser set the timer for ten minutes for them to work in groups. They recessed at 8:15 AM.

Ms. Bowman joined the group at 8:22 AM

The meeting resumed at 8:27 AM and Ms. Presser said they won't break into groups for the next section since they did not get far on the questions.

Some of the groups discussed up to question #2, some got to question # 5.

Ms. Presser asked in terms of the first norm #1 How we Communicate regarding being respectful, professional and focusing on the issues rather than individuals, how do you feel?

Ms. Dexter stated that they should focus on the present School Committee rather than the prior one.

Ms. Presser said given that there have only been a few meetings with the new Committee, they should focus on the relationship with the prior School Committee and how can they do better.

Ms. Kelly felt good about being collaborative.

Ms. Nolan stated that she thought they stayed focused, last term the School Committee was not always focused on issues rather on individuals but this term they are already shifting.

Ms. Bowman doesn't agree. Last term was challenging and this term has brought about a different set of challenges.

Ms. Presser asked do you want to talk about it, what was it? Is it about people that aren't here?

Ms. Bowman said she thinks that is an unfair question because some people aren't here to be part of the conversation and she doesn't think that is helpful.

Mayor McGovern added it depends on what the issue was, how collaborative it would be. If people have strong feelings it is going to be a more challenging conversation.

Ms. Dexter said last year the Chair stayed the same but we had two new School Committee Members, a new Superintendent and Assistant Superintendent. There was a shift that stirred things up over the two years. These things are evolving.

Ms. Presser asked so it depends on how hot the issue is. Do people come into the discussions with an open mindset or this is my feeling and might not listen as well if it is a hot issue? If not a hot issue you may be able to compromise on an issue?

Mr. Fantini stated that if Members come in with something to support what they think is best for the students and the administration doesn't agree, it could create a conflict that needs to be worked through.

Ms. Nolan thinks they all approach the work assuming they are doing what is best for the students. They may disagree on how they get there but try to get consensus. A good example is the AV Policy where they did get consensus.

Ms. Kelly doesn't think they reached consensus. Her concern was that the Principal of the high school was not in the room during the meeting and her perspective was coming from that. Each of them comes with their own perspective that they brought to the conversation. She felt it was a wear down conversation that took too long.

Ms. Bowman thought it should have been discussed in the Sub-Committee Meeting with administration and should not have reached the level it did on the floor. That is how they operate and it is problematic and they need to figure out a way not behave that way.

Mayor McGovern asked, how do you mean that is how we operate?

Ms. Bowman feels it is reactionary all the time. They can take the time and build the conversations with the administrators before they get to the floor with major policy issues; and as a practice they could do better from that vantage point.

Ms. Presser added that in practice, maybe Sub-Committees aren't used as much as they should be.

Ms. Kelly stated that the motion came from two Members, not the Sub-Committee and needed another meeting before bringing it forward.

Ms. Dexter added that all you need is four votes and you can get something done. That is the way Democracy works. She thinks it is unrealistic that they can get everything done thru Sub-Committees.

Ms. Presser reminded them that one of their norms says they will strive for consensus.

Ms. Dexter added we are elected officials and as Mr. Fantini says all you need is four votes.

Ms. Bowman replied that this is not congress we are talking about children. This is what happens when people don't take a step back. It is to have the necessary conversations that lead you to a better product. She doesn't want to model poor behavior over the next two years. Four votes should not be the framework of what they do.

Ms. Kelly restated that they had an Ad-hoc Sub-Committee meeting on that difficult matter. Both Ms. Nolan and she had discussions with the Principal and students to get feedback. The motion came in from two individual members as though they had not been a part of the discussion. Why have the Sub-Committee if it was going to come in as a motion from two members?

Ms. Nolan added it is difficult and problematic, her understanding, as a Member of the Sub-Committee, was that Administration couldn't meet until December at the end of the term which was difficult and the School Committee could not call a Sub-Committee meeting because it was between terms. Timing was problematic with the School Committee being involved in the Policy development. She said that Mr. Kimbrough felt very strongly about the AV Policy having worked with kids.

Mayor McGovern said regarding consensus, yes, it takes four votes to make something happen. We get a better policy when everyone gets to voice their opinion. Every vote is not going to be 7-0 but through the process all points of view have to be listened to, that's what working on a committee is. The Sub-Committee needs to bring a recommendation to the floor.

Ms. Nolan added our policy is that a Sub-Committee of 3-4 people cannot make policy, just bring recommendations to the whole School Committee.

Ms. Presser stated that part of what she was hearing is that all the correct voices are heard at Sub-Committee meetings, including the public.

Mayor McGovern added if we are making policy on the floor it is difficult and feel pressure to do something. That should not be the practice and not the best way to operate.

Superintendent Salim stated the School Committee was discussing this difficult motion that had urgency because of time. It was not discussed at length with administration. He cannot speak to the nuances like the high school administration can. He felt that at the end the Committee made the best decision they could without all the information they needed. How does the committee not end up in that corner if that's not the best way to make policy?

Mayor McGovern stated regarding filing motions. A couple of emails doesn't make it an emergency but you want to solve a problem for a group. Everything they do is political and they are in competition every year. How do they stay focused and have the time to form decisions? It was difficult due to how the policy was framed, that it is hurting the most vulnerable kids in the district. If he said send it back, it would look like he did not care about kids of color and he couldn't do that. Moving forward, when making policy think about, is this something the district should deal with?

Ms. Bowman added talk about standing up for race they are not authentic about it. It would have looked like they don't support kids of color. Every time a motion comes in they add on and it is going to help the

achievement gap. Their behavior doesn't line up with what comes out of their mouths. She doesn't want to bring up persons of color issues every time.

Ms. Presser said from listening to this discussion, is there a conversation not necessarily around protocols but procedures? Do they have a regular Sub-Committee meeting schedule? They can always set it up and if there is nothing to meet about, it can be cancelled. It may be more of an organizational thing.

Mayor McGovern said if we are on 4-5 committees that meet once a month along with regular meetings, that's a lot. The School Committee is part time. There should be standing committees that are absolutely needed and if something comes up they can get 3-4 members together. They don't want to meet just to say they had a meeting.

Ms. Kelly said some of the Committees should be broader. They need to be aware of how many committees they can put someone on. They have a tendency to add more committees.

Ms. Bowman stated that during last term she did not meet every two weeks but they did come together to get things done. They need to be in communication with administration. Are they a Committee that reacts or think more proactively to leverage the system in a way to be more effective?

Ms. Nolan agrees they should set up a regular meeting schedule that can always be cancelled. The Committee is there for a reason. If they are going to do a lot of the work in Sub-Committee's like the AV Policy because they had pledged to do something before the end of the semester. Mr. Kimbrough had very strong feelings but he did not attend any of the meetings.

Ms. Kelly said but Mr. Kimbrough could have had a voice if he had come to the Sub-Committee meeting.

Ms. Dexter added they need to remember not to react to a parent. Do they have good intent? If they don't fundamentally trust each other, they should take that out of their Norms.

Mayor McGovern added they can't get defensive and take things personally. It doesn't mean they don't have good intentions, just be mindful of raising things to the level of a crisis. If they go to a school meeting and parents say they should have money for school busses and they want the public to see them as the one that got it solved, it could get them out of focus. Did they talk to the Superintendent before making a motion?

Mr. Fantini is changing the subject regarding the Weekly newsletter; a lot of it is the Superintendent responding to requests for information from Members. It should be used to say how they are moving toward district goals and closing the achievement gap. When he brings in a motion to request information it is to be transparent. If a request requires staff time it needs to be a motion.

Superintendent Salim stated if something is going to take considerable time it should come as a motion. Information requests should be mindful of staff time. Dr. Turk and Mr. Maloney spend considerable time gathering information and that time is not spent supporting the schools/district.

Ms. Dexter added that she never asks for information because she is curious, it is because she feels she cannot do her job without certain data. There is also the Freedom of Information Act where any member of the public can request information. If they can't get the information out maybe they are understaffed and need more people.

Ms. Presser added under the Freedom of Information Act if someone requests a report and it is not in a certain format, there is no requirement to create it, unless they pay for it.

Ms. Nolan stated that the whole Committee needs to agree that the information should be gathered. Should they have a different system to get the information?

Mr. Maloney added that the Superintendent should be copied on all requests for information.

Ms. Presser said if asked how is the district reaching its goals. Her response would be that is why you have School Committee meetings.

Superintendent Salim said the way they have thought about roundtable meetings is to have discussion around the Plan. During the summer they did the outcomes and retreats and have talked about changing the Superintendent's Agenda back to the CPS District Plan with occasional updates on the District Initiatives.

Ms. Presser asked how does the flow of information go?

Ms. Dexter thinks the Weekly is excellent.

Mr. Fantini regarding the Weekly he would like to see more about what he doesn't know about the district; like Biogen and how we are progressing on our goals. The newsletter doesn't have to be 80% responding to Members questions.

Ms. Bowman wants to know the key information that is going on in the District so they are aware. The School Committee book is very organized and she know how to respond with it. She is not sure what she is supposed to do with the Weekly, how is it relevant.

The Superintendent wants to be careful not to create a new scope of work related to the information for School Committee. There are ways to organize the work with the District Plan. The Weekly is not to be actionable but to hear from Administration before the general public so they are not surprised.

Ms. Kelly said they have a role to interact with the public and share positive information. Ms. Bowman is working on communication.

Ms. Nolan added Biogen is important and we need to know that someone was hired for the advanced learning position and the confidential section has information that they need to know that the public does not.

Mr. Fantini doesn't want to be caught short when one school does one thing different from the Policy.

Ms. Dexter would like space on the Agenda for the Superintendent to give the public updates on positive things happening. In terms of knowing well in advance, what does that mean?

The Superintendent said the consent Agenda is reviewed on Monday morning for any pressing issues, ideally Motions should be sent before 9AM on Monday before the Thursday to give him enough lead time to work thru something.

Superintendent added regarding School Committee school visits the Principal, Dr. Turk or Ms. MacDonald needs to be informed. Ms. MacDonald can arrange for Members to visit a couple of schools in one morning so the schools know when the visits will take place. Staff members react when School Committee Members drop in to schools without prior notice and it is distracting. Even informal conversations with staff, people can get mixed messages.

Dr. Turk stated it can be troubling if there is a tough issue going on at a school and they are trying to work through it and School Committee Members tell them don't worry about it and jump right in.

Ms. Presser said to summarize, how can we operate differently? Are we following protocols? Does Social Media need more clarification on the open meeting law?

Ms. Bowman wants to put Communications Committee on the Agenda. What are their policies around social media? They need to be mindful; they may be violating some child's rights.

Ms. Presser asked should they work on how communication can flow differently, look at operational policies.

Ms. Nolan added they all need to recognize the timing of things. Will they have enough time to deliberate?

Superintendent stated think about the timing of a policy review and when to change things during the school year for student/staff (the impact, unanticipated consequences and when they start to be effective).

Ms. Kelly walked away concerned that they had waived the second reading they needed the two week period to reflect and come back with something constructive to add. There are reasons for procedures.

Dr. Turk added one of the disconnects is they may need to be thinking about how they scaffold out change. It was not a matter of a policy that had been in place. They had moved away from the policy they created space for a revised policy that was brought up with the understanding that there was more work to be done and information forthcoming. Timing is something to be mindful of. That is why they need to be in communication so they don't land in a place that is not good.

Ms. Presser told them to have a discussion at the beginning of the process to clarify and agree what the outcome is that they are looking for.

Superintendent stated based on this discussion, what are their ideas for future retreats?

Ideas:

Technology in the classroom

Review of innovative high tech models like Rhode Island

General check in what are we finding stressful

Process for Policy Review

Sub-Committee responsibility

How to collaborate in a political environment

Best practices in an educational area (example Math)

Data dashboard

Data Accessibility

Non key indicators

Social Media & general meeting

Ongoing self evaluation of norms and protocols

Early college discussion

College graduation data after 6 years

Continue looking at reaffirming or changing our norms

Policy motions with emphasis on educator input

Strategic Plan

Measured response by School Committee about information they hear about issues from parents, staff or students

Rotation thru curriculum Areas

Discussion about career and technical pathways including internships and apprenticeships

Revisit Guidance

Self evaluation of School Committee roles as a whole and goal setting

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Upper School Math  
How to strengthen our working relationships  
Professional Development  
Cultural Proficiency  
Race and Gender among School Committee - how well are we doing?  
Sub-Committee's How many, what topics  
Collaborative Engagement Effort  
Roundtable vs. Workshops

Motion to adjourn by Ms. Kelly second by Mr. Fantini  
Meeting adjourned at 10:08 AM

Terry Gist  
Confidential Secretary

Powerpoint Presentation on file in the School Committee Office