

SCHOOL COMMITTEE

(Official Report)

Special Meeting

December 12, 2017

Called for 6:00 PM in the Dr. Henrietta S. Attles Meeting Room, Cambridge Rindge and Latin School, 459 Broadway, Cambridge, for the purpose of reviewing the Spring 2017 MCAS results.

Members Present: Ms Bowman, Ms. Dexter, Mr. Fantini, Mr. Harding, Ms. Kelly, Ms. Nolan, and Mayor Simmons (ABSENT)

Also Present: Dr. Salim, Superintendent of Schools
Dr. Turk, Deputy Superintendent of Schools
Dr. Adams, Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction
Mr. Maloney, Chief Operating Officer
Ms. Spinner Chief Financial Officer
Dr. Lori Likis, Chief Planning Officer
Ms. Jean Spera, Interim OSS Officer
Ms. Jennifer Amigon, Director of Research and Assessment Evaluation

Mr. Fantini in the Chair.

A quorum of the School Committee being present, the Chair called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m. and then turned the meeting over to the Superintendent, who explained that he has the results of the MCAS, reiterating that it is only one measure; however it is an important summative assessment and he is pleased to share the results. The meeting was turned over to Dr. Adams, Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction to begin the presentation.

2017 MCAS Data Cambridge Public Schools

Tonight's Goals

- Be able to explain how the Next Generation MCAS (MCAS 2.0) is different from prior tests
- View the Information families receive
- Examine patterns in CPS performance by grade level, subject area, and subgroups
- Learn how MCAS results are informing current work in schools and departments

Vision of Assessment in CPS

What is the difference about MCAS 2.00?

- Reflects higher standards and expectations for students with a focus on readiness for next grade and college/career
- 1st time many students took this type of test on computers
- New performance levels (Exceeding Expectations, Meeting Expectations, Partially Meeting Expectations, and Not Meeting Expectations) and new scaled score range (440-540)
- Scores cannot be compared to prior year scores; represents a new baseline

Dr. Adams informed everyone that going forward; MCAS 2.0 will be the type of system that we will be using. It is aligned to a higher standard and it makes sure that students are ready for the next grade and college and/or career.

Accountability Pause

- 2017 is new baseline for MCAS 2.0 – this year’s accountability determinations are based on participation
- All CPS elementary & upper schools met the participation threshold – “No Level” designation
- CRLS is Level 2 under the legacy accountability system
- District and school accountability determinations under new system will take place in Fall 2018 – details TBD

Communication with Families

- ✓ Letter from State Commissioner
- ✓ Letter from Dr. Salim
- ✓ Individual Student Report in all tested subjects
- ✓ November Conferences
- ✓ School Council Presentations
- ✓ Title 1 Newsletter
- ✓ Results by strand (groups of standards)
- ✓ Benchmark performance for Meeting Expectations by strand
- ✓ Individual question results by points earned

Mr. Harding joined the meeting at 6:30 pm.

Dr. Adams turned the next section of the presentation to Jennifer Amigon, Director of Research and Assessment Evaluation

Looking at 2017 MCAS Results Together

- Focus tonight is on key findings from content areas (ELA, Math, Science)
- District/school level results in report sent to School Committee – we will answer/research questions from School Committee Members

Important Notes to Remember

- On subgroups:
 - Racial/ethnic descriptors and gender categories are self-identified by families at the time of school registration
 - Economic status is determined by participation in one or more state-administered programs (SNAP, TAFDC, DCF, Mass Health)
- On Student Growth Percentiles
 - Measure relative growth of student with similar performance histories
 - Need two consecutive years of data to calculate so no 3rd Grade SGP, no Science SGPs, and # of students is less than whole

Mary Ann MacDonald, Assistant Superintendent of Elementary Education, began the next section of the presentation on English Language Arts. Explaining that it is a continuation of sub-groups, this is the first time we are taking this test, it will be interesting to know what will happen. The data shows that African-American/Black students are meeting/exceeding expectations on the 2017 ELA MCAS, two exceptions in 3rd grade literacy are the Latino/Hispanic students and the Asian students are below grade level in Grades 3-5. The performance of the African American and Black students at FMA and Graham and Parks are among the highest in the State even though it is lower when compared to White students.

Mr. Fantini asked to have economically disadvantaged explained. Dr. Adams explained that this is a term that the State uses, more commonly known as free and reduced lunch.

Dr. Adams stated they intend to visit FMA and Graham and Parks to see if they are doing something different, or whether it is because they are extended day.

High School ELA data

Overall performance is consistent over the past 4 years. Analysis by Strand (groups of standards together) shows average performance equal to the state in Language and Reading, but below the state in Writing.

Using MCAS Results to Inform Curriculum, Instruction, Support: JK-12 English Language Arts

- Collaboration – Dept. & Schools review data to identify action steps
- Instruction – Identify Tier 1 instructional changes
- Writing
 - New writing units
 - Success criteria
 - Computer-based
- Instruction – create student intervention plans
- Standards-aligned Curriculum
 - New Frameworks and Revised Standards
 - Review existing curriculum for alignment
 - Prioritizing standards in new units

Ms. Amigon went to schools to understand how the coordinators were using tier 2 and tier 3 information. They have been working with students that are below expectations. Our teachers are working very hard, but they don't know the criteria. All tests will be computer based in the next two years; the question is whether our students will be ready.

The presentation was paused to answer clarifying questions.

Mr. Harding asked who developed the standards, and the Superintendent answered that these are State standards.

Ms. Bowman asked what the success criteria is. Checking for students understanding what steps need to be accomplished to complete a task. The expectation is that the student recognizes what success looks like and how to make it happen and complete it. Dr. Turk offered that this was the work they spoke on in expertise teaching.

The presentation resumed.

Dr. Turk spoke on math at the upper and high school. This new testing tool makes us think differently about performance. We used to think about achievement, just looking at the results from year to year. Now we are looking at achievement and growth. Growth will help us to move students forward. It means change over time rather than the level of achievement in any given year. Some questions asked are given what you see, how much did a student improve from 6th to 7th grade, how much across the state. A student may achieve well and not improve from year to year, or may be doing badly, yet steadily improving. It is important to look at growth. It is something to strive for beyond proficiency. There is low, expected, and high growth.

Dr. Adams explained what we are doing with the information and how are we acting on it. We have the spring MCAS and screener in the Fall. There should be no surprises when they get to March of the following year.

Using MCAS Results to Inform Curriculum, Instruction, Support: JK-12 Math

- ✓ Intervention – Using Multiple data sources on student performance
- ✓ Instruction- pedagogy that supports ambitious instruction
- ✓ Assessment – Lower performance items inform interim assessments
- ✓ Curriculum – Revising curriculum maps + adding curricular resources

Science: Cambridge & State Averages

Science, Technology, Engineering

- Strand results inform instructional and curricular support

Using MCAS Results to Inform Curriculum, Instruction, Support: JK-12 Science, Technology, Engineering

- **Assessment**
 - MCAS item analysis informs selection of interim assessment questions
- **Analyzing Student Work**
 - Focus on providing scientific evidence (CER)
- **Instruction**
 - Focus on the science practices to support students in the new standards

What Are We Doing About It?

- **Know** Supporting schools and departments in
 - accessing
 - understanding
 - analyzing and acting on their data

Dr. Adams spoke on this stating that doing work on the district level by going to the different schools and talking to the coordinators face to face and sharing the information helps to know how to look at data and know how to use it.

- **Plan** Developing SIPs with Action Plans informed by data working with peers who had specific successes
- TLT meetings with every school

Dr. Turk began by mentioning that the School Improvement Plans are living documents and that this work was done during the summer in August to have a guide so that there would be a Plan in place aligning with the district plan; this work is never done in isolation. While the School Improvement plan is being worked on; regular school work is going on at the same time. It can be like sailing, always constant motion, staying alert and being very aware of what is going on around you simultaneously.

- **Act**
 - ✓ Address writing the results through instruction
 - ✓ Design Lab to problem solve
 - ✓ Looking at Student Work with Teaching teams
 - ✓ Professional learning – action research, collaboration, observing each other

Ms. MacDonald stated that generally, after a presentation, the School Committee Members ask what we are going to do about what we learn from data. They understand that the students need to be better prepared. The district has very intentional plans on improving writing and it is not at the expense of reading. They have a goal of reading by 3rd grade; when some schools don't fare very well, Ms. Amigon

went to those schools, and found that it was writing that was poor and holding back the reading. Students need to be able to explain their thinking and then write down their thoughts; this is called numbers talk. There is a design lab challenge to meet students with disabilities. WIN means what individuals need. A highlight of the District Plan is needed. Ms. Spera is included in this process. There was a lot of work done by coaches others in the classroom setting. There will be a review and an update in January. Teams are looking at student work and teachers feel more comfortable bringing student work to the teams at meetings. We have a data dashboard; which is a tool with information all in one place. There is more focus on chronic absenteeism. There is professional learning going on in schools now that require teachers to do collaborative research and planning. There is limited time in the day for this, so the teachers are struggling with it, but it is happening and there are some support networks in place.

- **Support**

- Tiered School Support Fund utilized to address needs that arise during the school year

Dr. Salim spoke on continuous improvement. They have organized as a Cabinet to look at how they look at individual schools. They are also looking at the summer participation programs and have noticed that they are not always well attended. They are trying to pair up academic programs with other programs. They are looking at the school vacations to bring students into an academic setting during vacation. This should create support even on Saturdays.

End of power-point presentation.

Mr. Fantini in the chair.

There was a discussion including questions and concerns on the presentation.

Ms Nolan stated she has some questions on the widely disparate results. She is curious about the upper school math, at the district level, 6th grade math has very low growth. Grade 6 math SGP at PAUS is the lowest of all. She wonders why math goes up in 7th grade, then drops back down in 8th grade?

Dr. Salim answered that looking at growth and performance is important. They are making comparisons of Strand Analysis Data vs. Standard Data. It is required that we look at each individual student. We need to be specific not abstract.

Dr. Adams mentioned we need to understand the partially meeting category. There has been a rather large turn over of teachers in the math department. There has been a significant amount of staff on assignment for all math teachers in the Fall and there will be more in the Spring. A math coordinator joined us last fall and in her experience; she has looked internationally to see what the standards are and what we expect from our students. We can not look at only one source. There has been a lot of work to make the math curriculum more robust.

Ms. Amigon stated there is a big difference between the grades. There is no easy answer to what is the solution to slow growth. She also made it clear that 6th graders are new to teachers, they don't have time to get to know the kids and understand their learning style, then in the 7th grade they are more familiar with the child and then able to teach the child better.

Dr. Turk stated that we should always be reflective about the ways our curriculum is or is not aligned to the standards. The MCAS test is based on the standards.

Ms. Nolan acknowledged the growth in 7th grade, but, then we see the drop in the 8th grade and you know the kids by then. She stated it would be helpful to know how the school communities are getting the specifics around what interventions are being done. Ms. Nolan also brought up that bright spots is the new term that took the place of best practice, but what good is it to our disadvantaged students?

Dr. Salim stated that Jenn Amigon has done a good amount of work on spending time where the need is. Ms. MacDonald has informed everyone about multi-tiered systems of support and working on SES learning. It is very important to look at this so that students can be ready for academic work.

Dr. Adams stated that looking at the district we are required to look at sub-groups; when looking at schools, we can look at the individual child. There is no one sided solution to any of this, however, they are still trying to figure out how to make it all work.

Ms. Bowman is curious about the strategies used to tackle these gaps. What is the difference between the strategies we are using now, that is connected to the District Plan under the leadership of Dr. Salim and the strategies we have used in the past? Since what we have been doing has not worked; please show clarity on what is different. She wants to have a deeper conversation on compressing content.

Dr. Adams thanked her for bringing up compression and assured everyone their intention is to avoid compressing too much in before the end of March and that they are not trading it for instruction time.

Ms. Dexter asked the following questions:

She wants to know the percentage of elementary schools that tested on pen and paper vs. computer testing. Dr. Adams responded that it varied a little bit. All elementary schools tested on computer in 4th grade, the students elected which way they wanted to test in 3rd and 5th grade which was about half and half.

Ms. Dexter explained that she wants more information on the chubby fingers of third graders testing on the computer versus older students testing on the computer.

Ms. Dexter also asked for their thoughts on females vs. males to explain the big gender gap in ELA. Ms. Amigon stated that she met with the ELA coaches and looked at race and gender data; they will have a lot more to report on later. Dr. Salim added that looking at other types of tasks is regular ongoing work. Ms. Dexter asked since the CEA union asked us not to use the 3rd grade ELA, will it affect morale, what will we do? Dr. Salim is hesitant to use the testimony of a group of teachers to base decisions.

Ms. Kelly has a question around the change in the writing standards. Dr. Adams will put her answers to the changes regarding writing units in writing and provide the text to the Committee of the Whole. Ms. Kelly also wanted to express the value of looking at Social Emotional Learning (SEL) first and then look at the academics from the SEL lens.

Mr. Harding asked the following questions:

What do School Improvement funds actually do?

He wants to understand how the teachers will know what works for their individual classroom.

The Morse is taking on universal design, why aren't all schools taking it on? The Members will be put on the spot to answer that question.

We always have data; how do we use it with equity prevailing.

Regarding tiered support intervention, especially at PAUS; when does it kick in?

We keep seeing the data over and over again, nothing happens, what are we going to do that is new?

Dr. Salim offered that we can explore beginning to use Saturdays or the February vacation for extra learning. Dr. Turk stated there is a formal process now that makes sure teachers can reach out to ask for whatever support they need to solve the problem.

Mr. Harding also offered the following recommendations:

We should be less involved in 3rd grade ELA.

The parents are not always in agreement with the teachers. Sometimes we worry too much about what the teachers are going through.

We may need a students' union instead of a teachers union

We need to spend more time with the kids learning of their needs

Ms. Amagon said she appreciates his comments and mentioned a robust assessment system called School City and she has been spending time building it up in order to study instructional next steps. She agreed that the amount of data shared tonight can be overwhelming.

Ms. MacDonald explained that the elementary schools have meetings three times a year to look at data. She explained the steps that are taken after looking at this data and a decision is made on what specific interventions are needed and then progress monitoring happens in the next four weeks. Then they look at Professional Development supports through after school choice courses.

Mayor Simmons joined the meeting at 7:55 pm.

Mr. Fantini stated that this was a great presentation. In the Superintendent's district plan he intends to see growth. What would happen if a student is behind and the February vacation is not enough time to get the student up to grade level, what would you do? Dr. Salim stated that they look to see that the students are making progress along the way, there is no way to give a blanket answer to that question. There are many factors that need to be looked at.

Ms. Bowman mentioned the after school providers as a means to helping to assist to close the gaps. Mr. Fantini mentioned the Compass program and Breakthrough programs and that they don't have access to the data dashboard. Dr. Turk responded that they are working with ICTS for permission to share.

Mayor Simmons followed up on shared responsibility. It has been spoken about on the City and School sides; please do it very early in the year. Human Services has incredible programs, but we do not use them. She agreed that we need to look into the other partners to help close the gap.

Mr. Fantini asked the following:

When will the 10th grade test become a reality? Dr. Salim answered that some of the questions will be field tested this spring. There will be a transition period.

Regarding progress monitoring, how will we reach out to parents and teachers and will the process be transparent? In regards to students, Dr. Adams responded that the communication will be through report cards.

Ms. Nolan asked:

About the bubble and monitoring, do we have it for all kids?

What do you do with kids that are on the line, do they continue to matter?

Dr. Adams stated of course they continue to matter, they are being careful of when and when not to use the data and what the instructional strategies are that affect all students not only those struggling.

Ms. Bowman asked for a point of information from Mayor Simmons: Is there a way for the City Council to pass a resolution to adopt our District Planning Framework?

Mayor Simmons stated there is no pathway that she knows of. City Council and the School Committee have different jurisdictions; the City does not have a pathway on education. There should be some thought given to it in order to help carry out the mission of the school district. She gave an example of a day care provider on the city side may not have the same accreditation and would not be expected to have the same as a Day Care provider on the school side.

Ms. Kelly stated that the Joint Roundtables with the Department of Human Services could serve as a model of where that is already occurring.

Ms. Dexter asked if all scores go up by 10% next year, how will we know they are getting better at learning instead of getting better at test taking. Dr. Salim answered that they look for early evidence of change from other indicators such as formative and benchmark assessments that show early evidence of change.

Ms. Kelly would like to have more information on science practices which is another area we have been weak in over the years.

Mr. Fantini concluded by thanking the administration for a great presentation.

Motioned by Mr. Harding, seconded by Ms Bowman, the meeting adjourned at 8:15 p.m.

Dosha E. Beard
Executive Secretary to the School Committee

Distributed Back-up Documents/Handouts:

- 2017 MCAS Data Cambridge Public Schools presentation to the School Committee
- Spring 2017 MCAS Report prepared December 2017