

SCHOOL COMMITTEE

(Official Report)

Special Meeting (Retreat)

January 7, 2015

Called for 5:00 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. at the Gutman Conference Center at Harvard, Area 3, Ground Level of Gutman Library, 6 Appian Way, (Corner of Appian Way and Brattle Street), Cambridge, for the purpose of a retreat with the School Committee and School District Senior Administrators focusing on priorities and collaborative strategies and any other business that may properly come before the Committee.

Members Present: Ms. Cronin, Mr. Fantini, Mr. Harding (**ABSENT**), Ms. Kelly, Ms. Nolan, Mr. Osborne, Mayor Maher

Also Present: Superintendent Jeff Young ,
Deputy Superintendent Carolyn Turk
Assistant Superintendent for Student Services Victoria Greer
Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction Jessica Huizenga
Assistant Superintendent for Elementary Education Maryann MacDonald
Executive Director of Human Resources Barbara Allen
Chief Operating Officer James Maloney
Chief Financial Officer Claire Spinner
Chief Planning Officer Lori Likis
Bob Ettinger, CPS Ed. L.D. Resident

Mayor Maher in the Chair.

Handouts: Agenda, Taunton Public Schools – Beliefs and Norms, (June 10, 2009), On-going Work, from Cabinet Perspective (on file in the School Committee Office).

A quorum of the School Committee being present, the Chair called the meeting to order at 5:10 PM.

The Mayor announced that the purpose of this retreat with the School Committee and School District Senior Administrators is to focus on priorities and collaborative strategies needed to make the Cambridge Public Schools the best school system it can be. He noted that the Superintendent has 18 months remaining in his tenure and the School Committee Members have 1 year remaining in their term.

Mayor Maher introduced and thanked the retreat facilitators, Rick Weissbourd and Jim Honan, who volunteered their time tonight. He turned the meeting over to Mr. Weissbourd and Mr. Honan.

Introduction/Goals (5:00-5:30 p.m.)

Mr. Honan and Mr. Weissbourd gave a brief history of their background in Cambridge and explained the format of the retreat.

The School Committee Members and Senior Administrators introduced themselves and briefly described what inspires them in their work with the Cambridge Public Schools.

Full group discussion – Norms (5:30-6:00 p.m.)

Members were asked to read the Taunton Public Schools – beliefs and norms which was taken in part from the Massachusetts Association of School Committees (MASC).

Mr. Weissbourd mentioned that the following common themes are brought up often:

- Issue of no surprises
- Promoting positive image for the school system
- Channeling requests through the Superintendent for information, reports and data
- Questions from the public being referred to the Superintendent

The attendees were asked to comment on the following question:

What are some best practices or “norms” of highly effective leadership/governance in high functioning School Committee/District Leadership relationships?

The following “norms” were offered by the Members and Administrators:

- Job description and role of School Committee as policy makers
- How we communicate- tone-challenges -aspiration
- Relationship between School Committee and schools
- Elected group
- Public meeting, change interaction
- How to have contentious, problem solving conversations in a public forum? – tension – communication - challenge
- Disagreement and differences of opinion are ok; tone makes it difficult
- Norms about norms – how do we remind each other respectfully
- Who is gatekeeper to control norms
- We had norms in the past
- How do we govern – tendency to rush policies, take time to deliberate, consider opportunity, costs
- School Committee wants to dig deeper, SIPs as example – use Sub-Committees w/triads, continue to improve our processes
- Understand from where each other come – feedback to principals is critical
- The relationship we have has 2 parallel tracks: administrators and educators
- How we improve, 2 bodies together
- Committed to improvement
- We are not completely separate entities; we are part of one organization
- Need respect for every person’s perspective and responsibility
- What would a new superintendent need to be reassured of: tone, communication
- How to evaluate this periodically

Small group discussions on norms (including report out) (6:00-6:30 p.m.)

Break out into smaller groups to brainstorm on norms:

What would you do to move these norms forward?

Each group indicated the ideas and themes discussed in the break out groups:

- What is the most efficient and effective process to address the issues
- Development of check-in process for where we are: School Committee, Administrative team
- More opportunity for both formal and informal conversations with the Superintendent
- How to use time more efficiently – putting together the agenda
- Communication
- Meeting structure
- Need to have additional opportunities for a more fuller discussion

- Policies – role of School Committee, interest of due deliberation on policies by both Committee and Superintendent prior to being adopted
- To be more specific on how we govern
- Respect, tone, communication, process, parallel tracks

What would be the elements in our norms? What would be the process for the next step?

- For the joint body to come to agreement on norms – would be positive
- How do we create the group that will work on the norms – governance sub-committee? or a task force?
- Liked the framework: how we govern, communicate, improve and what is the process to check ourselves
- Setting a positive tone for discussion at the meetings
- Include something about tone and respect
- Working on process for using the norms
- Norm checking: how would we do that and honor the power dynamic of the group
- Read the norm at the meeting
- Holding ourselves accountable
- School Committee and Superintendent to decide on a concrete plan for regular communication

Mr. Harding joined the meeting.

Break (6:30-6:45 p.m.)

Full group discussion – Strategic Goals (6:45-7:15 p.m.)

What are some strategic priorities for the next 18 months?

The Superintendent distributed a hand-out entitled, “On-going Work, from Cabinet Perspective” which was prepared at a recent Cabinet meeting. (Hand-out on file in School Committee office)

- 1) CPS strategic initiatives to improve student achievement (introduced in FY15 budget and continuing in FY16 budget).
- 2) Collective bargaining with all 8 units
- 3) District improvement planning, connected to new school improvement planning process (including the question of how deeply to get into district planning considering there will be a new superintendent)
- 4) Capital planning
- 5) Student enrollment/demographics/controlled choice planning
- 6) At least two principal searches
- 7) Response to outside program evaluations (DESE report, coaching evaluation, co-teaching evaluation, coordinated program review)
- 8) Early childhood programming, in tandem with the City Manager
- 9) Writing and implementing the Family Engagement plan
- 10) Addressing equity issues, including but not limited to cultural proficiency training as well as recruitment and retention policies and practices related to staff diversity

Discussion followed on the following:

- Having goals on achievement, family engagement, equity
- Should have one set of goals for the district which should be our district plan
- Also, have a plan for our strategic objectives
- Need Members’ guidance on what they prefer: include community vision? or just focus on next 18 months concentrating on on-going work
- Benefit of doing a multi-year plan; could dovetail with Superintendent’s search

- Strategic priority governing norms; create task force
- Involve community to identify philosophy of our educational system
- Spend time on moving system in the right direction
- Look at ways to improve our practice
- Equity – political aspects to that, competing constituencies, have a limit to resources and how they are distributed
- Have a community conversation about our expectations
- Articulate a strategic priority on equity
- Make best match for existing needs in each of the schools
- What are the indicators of equity in the district standards

Small group discussion (7:15-7:45 p.m.)

Break out into smaller groups to brainstorm on strategic goals.

Full group discussion and wrap up (7:45-8:30 p.m.)

What are some strategic priorities for the next 18 months? What might 3 or 4 of those be?

- Increase opportunity for access
- Summer programs
- School climate
- Social emotional support
- Time – revisit extended school day
- Creation of equity framework
- Continuing program evaluations
- Look at quality of instruction in classrooms
- Improve communication between School Committee and administration down through the system
- Stay focused during the transition
- Superintendent's evaluation
- Quality of collaboration, setting the tone
- Norms of behavior
- Model for bringing in community conversation
- Address the culture; what are the new norms
- Reconcile to one agenda
- Committing to a document on how we treat and address one another
- Have strategic objectives that will take us to the outcomes that we want to achieve
- Communication with the City side is very important when looking at the "whole" child
- Frame matters in a coherent way

The Mayor would like to continue this discussion and have Ms. Gist, President of the CEA, at the table with them in the future.

What's the mechanism to be used to focus on 3 or 4 things on the strategic priorities?

- Roll out a plan on the social and emotional learning of the students
- Think about our resources in a way that will sustain academic achievement
- How do we continually work on our communication
- Share and collaborate with the City with their resources
- Lead, defer or collaborate on issues
- Improve instruction before you can see changes in social emotional learning
- How do we achieve excellent instruction in every classroom
- Various interpretations of what high quality instruction is in our system
- Need to agree on assessment system

- Be positioned as an employer of choice; recruitment; work environment; want the best people to work here

Mayor Maher favored the idea of creating a short term task force which could include representation from the School Committee and administration. Ms. Likis could support them in writing the plan. Mayor Maher suggested coming back together with a draft in the next 4- 6 weeks.

Ms. Likis noted that everything is in the district plan and on the list which the Superintendent handed out tonight. She is not clear how to proceed. Is the focus only on the next 18 months? If so, Ms. Likis could help the task force prepare a draft. If the School Committee wants the community to be heard, then it would be a different process. It was noted that there will be a significant community process as part of the superintendent's search which will be happening soon and maybe these two areas could be intertwined.

Dr. Young suggested that he and the Mayor appoint two members each to the task force on norms and strategic goals.

The Mayor thanked Mr. Weissbourd and Mr. Honan for their outstanding leadership in facilitating tonight's retreat.

Adjourned (8:30 PM).

Judith T. Martin
Executive Secretary to the School Committee