

SCHOOL COMMITTEE

(Official Report)

Roundtable Meeting

October 28, 2014

Called for 6:00 – 8:00 PM in the Dr. Henrietta S. Attles Meeting Room, Cambridge Rindge and Latin School, 459 Broadway, Cambridge, for the purpose of a Roundtable Meeting to continue dialogue on the Level 3 Schools update with Darrell Williams, Principal of the King Open School and Mirko Chardin, Head of the Putnam Ave. Upper School.

Members Present: Mr. Fantini, Ms. Cronin, Mr. Harding, Ms. Kelly, Ms. Nolan, Mr. Osborne, Mayor Maher

Also Present: Dr. Jeff Young, Superintendent of Schools
Dr. Carolyn Turk, Deputy Superintendent
Maryann MacDonald, Assistant Superintendent for Elementary Education
James Maloney, Chief Operating Officer
Barbara Allen, Executive Director Human Resources
Claire Spinner, Chief Financial Officer
Lori Likis, Chief Planning Officer
Darrell Williams, Principal, King Open School
Bob Edinger, Intern
Ms. Gist, CEA President

Mayor Maher in the Chair.

A quorum of the School Committee being present, the Chair called the meeting to order at 6:30 PM.

The Superintendent informed the Committee that the DESE intervention team which works with Level 3 schools recommended that discussion on the Putnam Ave. Upper School (PAUS) be postponed until January or February to allow time for work on an improvement plan. Ms. Nolan requested that Mr. Chardin communicate to the PAUS community of the work being done there over the next couple of months as opposed to waiting until a winter meeting. Dr. Turk announced that the DESE intervention team would be meeting with the instructional leadership team and the full faculty of the Putnam Ave. Upper School on November 5th and 6th.

Dr. Young introduced Mr. Williams who would be engaging in discussion with the Members on the strides the King Open School has made with the African/American subgroup and the work ahead with the low income subgroup.

Mr. Williams responded to the Members questions, comments and concerns as follows:

How do you plan to sustain the success you have accomplished most recently?

- Understanding in the building that this can't be done alone
- Ownership that the problem actually exists; African American students were not doing as well and we needed to do something about it
- Paid attention to the MCAS data
- Started with MCAS simulations; mock MCAS opportunities for the whole school K-5
- Had individual data meetings with teachers
- Raised expectations of why review and use of this data was important

- Strategically hired a data specialist last year; created all inclusive data dashboard
- Teachers referred to this dashboard at meetings; this helped in terms of shift of culture to a data driven school
- Those data driven meetings determined that we needed to focus on open response questions
- Worked with students on understanding and structuring the response
- Had to pay close attention to those students in their classes

How is the implementation of the recess program, Playworks, helpful as a holistic approach to achievement?

- Playworks uses resources to teach student skills they need to participate in healthy productive play and resolve conflicts so they don't spill over in the classroom
- This increases learning time in the classroom since less conflicts need to be resolved
- Staff learns how to use play to make connection with students and to form meaningful relationships that will have an impact in the classroom

Explain how RTI works in your school.

- RTI is always a work in progress; start with a model and constantly revise it
- RTI Team consists of members of the Instructional Leadership Team which is made up of K-5 teachers, spec. ed. teachers, and specialists
- Forces time in schedule for collaboration; screening meetings that follow assessment
- Learn which students are struggling from screeners and which students would benefit from additional support
- Smaller group of screeners monitor the progress of that student during 8-9 week program
- Interventionist keeps record of what that student is doing
- Tier 2 intervention is 98% in the classroom with good differentiated instruction
- Identify additional Tier 2 support staff (certified teachers) as interventionists to provide additional supports in the classroom; use of retired teachers

How were you able to achieve success with one subgroup and not the other?

- It's hard to determine
- Work is grounded in what students bring to table and our ability to access their individual needs
- Low income students, as defined by the DESE, don't fare well on multiple choice questions which require them to use more complex comprehension skills; we have a way to address this

How do you keep staff engaged in this challenging process?

- Leadership - belief that person in charge will listen to people around him/her and get something accomplished
- Leader demonstrates the ability to follow through on task
- Using data

Follow up on resources you were given and are there resources that you see in the future which will help you build on this progress.

- Resources are grounded in need
- Needed additional staff to support the RTI work

What other measures of achievement and overall successes of students have you and your staff used that go beyond MCAS?

- Benchmark assessment is not a strong enough indicator to see how students would do on MCAS
- Used Fast assessment; comprehension piece
- Writing assessments grounded in the units of study
- Observational assessment
- Interactive science notebooks and reading notebooks
- MCAS simulation assessments
- Computational fluency assessment in math

How do you focus on this without alienating the community? What do you envision for the future measures of success?

- Not compromising curriculum to teach to the test
- Embed skills and practice which students need to do well in all curriculum areas
- Give skills students need to be lifelong successful learners
- Having dialogue is helpful
- Able to learn from colleagues to have difficult conversations in an area where you feel safe

Do you have partners in this effort?

- King Open extended day complements work
- Extended day staff arrives 11:00 am and are present during the school day and transition to the extended day program; they know students needs and facilitate help with homework

Did you have to do Saturday or extended sessions?

- Tapped into Title 1 program for Saturday school and summer school during his first and second year. Third year and this year doing before and after school support.

What are mechanisms teachers use to deal with students who are disruptive?

- Designated supervised space for students to calm themselves; sometimes a walk or physical activity
- Students are removed temporarily to gain entrance quickly; help them to understand what they did and why they did it
- Expectation is that all students need to be in the classroom; work on restorative practices
- If a chronic situation exists, issues are funneled through the student support team whose main focus is the health and well being of the students in the school on a case by case basis

Mayor Maher noted that the presentation made at the October 21st Regular Meeting and the dialogue tonight has reassured the Committee that Principal Williams and the King Open staff are on top of the situation. He congratulated Mr. Williams on the progress made. He wants to make sure that they have the time and resources needed to continue this improvement. How can we use these best practices in other schools?

Ms. MacDonald informed the Committee that she recently attended a session at the DESE on the turnaround schools in Massachusetts. The lesson learned was that school wide customization is necessary:

1. Leadership
2. Intentional practices
3. Student specific supports
4. Climate and culture

Dr. Young responded to the question of how we can intervene with other schools which have similar challenges. Internally they would work hard to build a safe environment for people to feel comfortable speaking without being judged or punished. Through RBT they are developing a shared thinking of what effective instruction looks like. They are trying to build an infra-structure to give Cambridge a curriculum, instruction and assessment system. The public needs to help us build a collaborative culture of sharing, trust and non-defensiveness.

On a motion by Mr. Fantini, seconded by Mr. Harding, the meeting was adjourned (8:02 PM).

Judith T. Martin
Executive Secretary
to the School Committee

Distributed Back-up Documents (copy on file in the School Committee office):

- King Open School PowerPoint Presentation, 10/21/14