

SCHOOL COMMITTEE

(Official Report)

Roundtable Meeting

September 30, 2014

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 continuing dialogue regarding the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education District Review Report.

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
Dr. Victoria Greer, Assistant Superintendent for Student Services
Dr. Jessica Huizenga, Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction
James Maloney, Chief Operating Officer
Barbara Allen, Executive Director Human Resources
Claire Spinner, Chief Financial Officer
Lori Likis, Chief Planning Officer

Mayor Maher in the Chair.

A quorum of the School Committee being present, the Chair called the meeting to order at 6:10 PM

The Mayor explained that this meeting is a follow-up to the DESE District Review and thought it best to focus on the recommendations, which are more actionable than the findings (pages 46-58 of the report). The format of the meeting would be to allow the Superintendent to speak for 30 minutes focusing on Recommendations #2-10 and to give a brief sense of the work in progress related to these. He would open up dialogue for the remainder of the meeting between the School Committee and the Cabinet members.

Discussion Summary

Superintendent Young thought it best to focus on recommendations and not the findings and to give the School Committee the opportunity to engage with the cabinet members. He wanted a chance to solicit the Members thoughts and ideas and the role they might want to play. He reiterated that they welcomed the DESE review report and thought it a good opportunity to look at what is successful and how we can do better.

The Superintendent stated that he would focus on the DESE's educational recommendations as follows:

2. The district should collaboratively develop a multi-year District Improvement Plan (DIP) that is annually extended.

Dr. Young agrees with State's findings and recommendations. He noted that his team is starting to develop a district plan that will work in concert with our school improvement plans. They plan to bring school improvement plans to the School Committee in December. The district improvement plan is a new approach to goal setting and planning which they hope to extend to a 3-5 year projectory. Ms. Likis will be the lead on district improvement planning and he looks forward to incorporating the School Committee's recommendations with those of the DESE around long term planning.

3. The superintendent should review the new organizational structure and consider revisions that eliminate ambiguity about responsibilities, authority and accountability.

Dr. Young admitted that this was challenging but noted that it was important to remember that the DESE visiting team was here when we were only 6 months into the new organizational structure. He explained the idea behind the structure of the Teaching and Learning Team (TLT) consisting of Dr. Turk, Dr. Huizenga, Ms. MacDonald and Dr. Greer. The TLT Team meets regularly to ensure that the building-based and system-wide priorities are met and to address the governance questions of: what decisions get made where? what should individual schools be empowered to decide? and what decisions should be made at the district level? This is a matter of negotiating what best serves our students.

4. Curriculum. Given the autonomous nature of the schools, the district should create a systematic plan to ensure the faithful delivery and horizontal alignment of the curriculum to the 2011 MA Curriculum Frameworks. This should include structured opportunities for district-wide teacher collaboration as well as building-based professional development. The success of the new multi-year curriculum review cycle will require augmented and ongoing teacher collaboration across schools.

Superintendent Young feels that good progress has been made in this area. Dr. Huizenga has helped to get the curriculum cycle up and running with a strong and coherent cyclical multi-year process that brought other curriculum areas into the cycle at various stages. The Professional Development booklet published this year was a collaborative effort between the Cambridge Education Association and the CPS Administration. This began a year ago and modeled the balance between the system-wide approach and the building-based approach. There are certain aspects of professional development that all teachers should have and certain practices, knowledge and skills around core curriculum. Teachers should have discretion in making choices on things that interest them as well. The professional development program embraces this double value system.

5. Instruction. The district should provide the necessary support and accountability to ensure that teachers consistently provide high quality and appropriately differentiated instruction, maintain high and rigorous learning expectations, and develop higher order thinking skills for all students. As part of this process, the district should ensure sufficient instructional time and supports so that all students have equal access and opportunities to attain proficiency and high levels of achievement.

There was a study done by Dr. Marilyn Friend on inclusive practice in Cambridge and the way present instruction can become more inclusive. Also, 110 people are involved in the Research for Better Teaching (RBT) work focusing on instructional leadership. Principals, coaches, curriculum staff, and cabinet members are involved in a 7 day, 3 section course, to identify common language about high quality and high expertise teaching. He felt it important that individuals doing instructional leadership and those doing evaluations have a clear understanding of what high expertise instruction is.

6. Assessment. The district should establish and communicate consistent expectations regarding the analysis and use of assessments of curricular and instructional improvement by ensuring communication and providing the support needed to continually build staff capacity to use data.

The three things that will yield the high quality academic program in Cambridge are: developing the curriculum using the Understanding by Design Model, collaborative professional development, and high quality teaching and instruction through the support of Research for Better Teaching. Related to this are assessments and they are working to find a way to get assessment data that they need more efficiently so more time can be put to the instruction that we are ultimately assessing.

7. Human Resources and Professional Development. The district should carefully examine the policies, practices, and procedures it currently utilizes to implement the new educator evaluation program. Lines of responsibility, communication, and accountability should be redefined and internal communication systems simplified and expedited.

During the first year of the educator evaluation process, knowledge and skill set had to be learned. The percentage of people who were evaluated during the first year was low. The evaluation rate is now 90% and they have made this a priority.

8. The district is encouraged to develop a new data-driven professional development model that creates an appropriate balance and alignment between the professional development objectives and interests of each school with the overarching educational goals and priorities of the district.

There are over 100 new teachers this year in CPS. The new teacher induction program is operating in a strong way that will enhance our ability to teach core knowledge in the first year or two. Our new teachers will know what the expectations are to reach professional status. The Skillful Teacher course will be given this Spring as part of the RBT program.

9. Student Support. The district should ensure that a JK-12 multi-tiered system of academic and non-academic support is implemented consistently at all schools.

Some schools piloted Response to Intervention (RTI) a couple of years ago. This allowed us to learn as a district the elements of successful implementation. Currently, (RTI) is implemented at different levels in all the schools.

10. Finance and Asset Management. The city and the district should follow through on plans to renovate schools and improve the environment for its administrative offices. It should schedule the renovations as soon as practical, even if unsuccessful in getting MSBA assistance.

The King School is scheduled to open in September, 2015. Planning has begun for the second project: King Open/Cambridge Street School. It is hoped that once the design is underway on the King Open/Cambridge Street School, that conversation can begin on a plan to find a place to house the administrative offices.

Dr. Young asked for the Members questions, thoughts or suggestions. He would like to know what areas they would like to focus on and how they would like to be involved to work on those areas.

Ms. Kelly noted that there is ambiguity on the #3 organizational structure of TLT and asked how we could determine whether the model is working and what modifications need to be made to the model. When we look at an organization structure there are solid lines and dotted lines and the dotted lines exist but can get confusing. Dr. Young responded that the solid lines are based in terms of supervision and evaluation. The dotted lines relate to consultation and daily work. One way to determine if it's working is to ask the principals and curriculum leaders. We need to get more formal and intentional in assessing. Dr. Turk commented that the work is interrelated. The structure of their administrative meetings is different from a year ago based on feedback from administrators and principals. They now have full day meetings on Fridays known as "administrator Fridays" with flexible groupings. Ms. Kelly questioned how a principal makes the decision of which person to contact about a specific item and who at the district level would contact and work with that principal. Dr. Turk responded that Ms. MacDonald would handle issues involving grades K-5 and she would handle grades 6-12. Anything specific to curriculum would be handled by Dr. Huizenga and anything related to OSS would be handled by Dr. Greer. Ms. MacDonald explained that the Teaching and Learning Team is seamless in their knowledge of their collective work together and they continue to grow and learn as a team.

Ms. Cronin commented that there is inconsistency in implementation from school to school. It is not clear where the lines of authority are when challenges come up. One of the key findings in the DESE report is non-negotiables vs. school autonomy. In order to lessen school-based insecurity, what must be done across the district in every school should be non-negotiable, such as benchmarks, standards, and practice. If that's not clear then the autonomy piece gets magnified. Dr. Young noted that the history and culture of CPS was that of individual schools doing their own programs. Movement has been towards more coherence and consistency. Many agreements currently exist in the schools in terms of what students are expected to learn and teachers are expected to teach. This is constant throughout the district. Dr. Turk gave an example, that after some debate and getting feedback from the principals, the TLT came to agreement on three items that will be part of the plan for each school's (JK-12) school improvement plan. Each school will have a math goal; will keep in the forefront of their thinking the work

that needs to be done to support students with disabilities; and based on their individual school data, will be able to make a priority choice to identify an area of focus.

Ms. Cronin asked if we have established the time each school spends on ELA, science, math, world language, etc. Dr. Turk responded that there is a frame for the recommended number of minutes on each subject area across the district but challenges do exist among some schools with space issues.

Mr. Harding asked for clarification on the evaluation process for teachers and administrators. Dr. Young explained that there is a new system for doing evaluations through the standards supplied in the State Educator Evaluation System. The reason for standards is that there is something objective for both the evaluator and the evaluatee to understand. If someone is considered proficient at a standard, there needs to be evidence in terms of observation and artifacts. Mr. Harding questioned if there is data showing a consistent pattern of non-satisfactory progress, when is an intervention planned. He feels evaluations should also be supportive and encourage the individual to improve. Dr. Young responded that principals can be put on improvement plans. He agreed that evaluations should be both formative and summative.

Ms. Nolan noted that these organizational issues have been long-standing and that the structure really hasn't changed much in the last year. She asked if there is a better way to organize and can we consider pushing management down to schools. It may be better to have just one "go to" person.

Dr. Young noted that there are many ways to organize a school system. It could be highly centralized or highly decentralized or somewhere in between. They are trying to find a balance between holding true to building-based culture that has been the history of Cambridge and having to subscribe to certain standards and expectations that should be available to all students and all teachers. He gave an example on how opinions would differ regarding centralization or decentralization, e.g. how would you feel if a school decided not to have music or art but more in core academics. Ms. Nolan commented that the standards need to be set and we want to be clear on the guidelines. Moving towards a minimum range of minutes per subject area as long as the school reaches the standards would give the school flexibility. Ms. Nolan asked for clarification on the district strategic plan which was done 5 years ago. Dr. Turk noted that plan was developed prior to Dr. Young's hire and that the State has made significant changes in terms of their expectations since that time. Ms. Likis gave an overview of the State's requirement that we have a multi-year district improvement plan with an annual action plan. Cambridge has adopted that model for our school improvement plans this year and hope to adopt it for 3-year district improvement plan on goals and objectives.

Mr. Fantini expressed concern that the organizational structure may be an impediment to progress. He suggested asking someone from the Harvard Business School or Education Center to review our organizational chart in comparison to other high functioning school systems. Mr. Maloney spoke on his experience with the new organizational structure. Dr. Turk stressed that even though at times there may be strong debate among the team members, they come out united in their expectations for students and teachers. Mr. Fantini stated that we need a structure that shows we are not individual schools but a system. He spoke about the way Somerville hires principals for the system not the individual school. He asked how additional resources if needed could be provided to a Level 3 school given our set budget. Dr. Young explained that it is his responsibility to hire principals and it is based in some degree on what he hears from teachers and community. Ms. Spinner clarified that there is a certain level of staffing for every school; some additional levels of staffing follow children, e.g. Title I funds and Special Education resources. General funds, Title I and School Improvement Plan funds are put together for the Level 3 Schools.

Mr. Osborne asked how we can be more deliberate to strategic responses to children. He doesn't feel that the cultural dynamics and changing population of our City were reflected in this report. He had questions on the instructional leadership training: Who would be involved? How far down the chain can it go? He commented on the educator evaluation system. Most effective evaluation shows what you need to work on as well as what you do well. Ms. Allen spoke regarding the educator evaluation system and said that she could share actual examples of the evaluation ranges and comments with the names redacted. Dr. Young commented that the new evaluation system may be threatening to people due to the eventual use of student growth and test scores as variables. There are 110 people involved in leadership

training; work involves RBT going out to schools and working with staff. Dr. Huizenga added it's more about the process than the rating. It is a powerful process in the dialogue and feedback that they are getting. RBT's work will get everyone on the same page. Dr. Greer stated that her background is building strong teams. The process they have gone through is part of building a team and she is comfortable collaborating with principals if needed. She feels she has a strong voice and is empowered to do the job at high level. She explained how having executive presence empowers people to follow her.

Mr. Harding stated that conversation is needed on the on-going culture clash in Cambridge and what citizens want out of public education. How will the priorities be determined in this report? We can't use it in a productive way if we don't have a space to prioritize. Dr. Young explained that of the 9 recommendations they have discussed, #2, the formation of district improvement plan will be the stage where all those questions will be addressed. They all have to agree that it's better to do a few things really well than everything half well.

Mr. Osborne wants to hear more on the early stages where students are struggling and from the people who are dealing with these students. Dr. Young expressed that more learning and sharing happens in a roundtable format than at a regular meeting setting. A possibility would be to take RTI and have a roundtable with real conversations with principals, teachers, etc. to discuss what is going well and what they are struggling with.

Mayor Maher felt that tonight's roundtable encouraged great conversation that shows we are on the same page to work together for a better school system. One of the biggest challenges is how to get a principal to be an educational leader and not just a building manager. How do you actually affect change and have it done in a timeframe for people now. When we have poor kids in this system who continue to fail, we all fail. We have a good school system; how do we work together to make it a great school system.

Mr. Fantini expressed concern that our Level 3 schools have a significant amount of special needs, low-income and children of color. When structures in systems don't work at high levels of efficiency, those students lose out. We need to be better at managing these systems so those children don't get impacted in a negative way. Ms. Likis stated this is where we all come together with that belief and that commitment. In terms of planning, we need to determine what our shared vision would be and our desired outcome in serving these and all students. When she meets with the Members to start the process of the district improvement plan, she would like them to address the question: "What does a cultural proficient equitable Cambridge Public School System look like to you?" Dr. Young stated that we need to build the capacity to deal with change. He mentioned the possibility of a roundtable meeting around cultural proficiency. Ms. Kelly appreciated the roundtable format and noted that using a cultural proficient framework and spreading that framework would support our most vulnerable students and those with the highest needs.

On a motion by Mr. Fantini, seconded by Ms. Kelly, the meeting was adjourned (8:12 PM).

Judith T. Martin
Executive Secretary
to the School Committee

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

Cambridge Public Schools District Review Recommendations (pages 46-58)
DESE The District Planning Process (Create, Align, Implement)