

Andover School Committee
Minutes of Regular Meeting of September 22, 2009
School Administration Building - School Committee Room

Members in Attendance: Chair Debra Rahmin Silberstein, Richard J. Collins, Dennis Forgue, Annie Gilbert, David Birnbach, Charlie Smith, AHS Liaison.

Others in Attendance: Dr. Claudia L. Bach, Superintendent, Dr. Susan Nicholson, Assistant Superintendent and David Keniston, Business Manager, Michael Gilbert, MASS.

I. Executive Session

Chair Deb Silberstein called the School Committee Meeting to order at 6:02 P.M. in the School Committee Meeting Room in the School Offices. Present were: Chair Deb Silberstein, and Committee Members Richard Collins, and Dennis Forgue. Dennis Forgue motioned to enter into Executive Session to discuss negotiating strategy and to reconvene back to Regular Session. The motion was seconded by Richard Collins and voted 3-0 to approve. Roll Call Vote: Chair Silberstein-Y, Members, D. Forgue-Y, R. Collins-Y. David Birnbach and Annie Gilbert arrived after the meeting was called to order. At 7:00 P.M. on a motion duly made and seconded, it was voted to adjourn the Executive Session and return to Open Session. Roll Call Vote: Chair Silberstein-Y, Members, D. Birnbach-Y, R. Collins, D. Forgue-Y, and A. Gilbert-Y.

II. Regular meeting in the School Committee Room

A. Salute to the Flag

Chair Deb Silberstein reconvened to Open Session at 7:09 P.M. Mr. Collins asked for a Moment of Silence followed by the Pledge of Allegiance led by students, Cara Campbell, Grade 5 and Bryce Campbell, Grade 3 from South School. Mr. Collins presented the students with a Certificate of Appreciation on behalf of the School Committee.

B. Education

1. WMS Grade 6 Science Presentation

Dr. Nicholson introduced Grade 6 Science Teachers Lisa Brouillard and Marilyn Connaughton from West Middle School who brought samples of student's work for the Grade 6 Science Fair to share with the School Committee. The teachers described the individual projects and walked the Committee through the instruction book given to students outlining all the steps to be completed that guide students through the science project experience. The students are graded on each step and the teachers talked about the interactions that occur between student and teacher as they move forward in the process. Corey Thibodeau, a Grade 6 student at West Middle School, attended the meeting and presented his project "The Perfect Pass" to the Committee. Corey's project was to prove how much air pressure is needed in a soccer ball to make it travel the furthest. Corey showed the model he constructed for his project, and reviewed each step in the process he followed to test his hypothesis confirming that the ball with the most air pressure travels furthest.

2. School Department Planning for Seasonal and H1N1 Flu

Rita Casper, Head of Nursing updated the Committee on the plans for vaccines for the seasonal and H1N1 flu vaccines. Rita is encouraging everyone to get a seasonal flu vaccine this year especially the very young and the elderly. The H1N1 virus seems to be affecting people 24 years and younger as well as pregnant women. Flu clinics will be offered at the schools and the town once the vaccines arrive. The H1N1 vaccine will be provided at a cost (\$25-\$35) to students in grades 5-12. Parents are encouraged to take children in lower grades to their own pediatrician. Additional information and forms will be available on the Andover Public School website at www.aps1.net.

B. Education (Cont'd)

3. MCAS Report

Dr. Nicholson reported the Spring MCAS results were mailed home today and stated that in the past two years, we have seen at a 99% passing rate in English Language Arts at AHS and 98% passing rate in Math and a steady increase in the percentage of students who score in the AP range in ELA (96%) and math (94%). Also there was a steady increase in the number of special education students who score in the AP category in ELA and Math. For the past two years we have seen 92% of students score in the AP range in physics.

At the elementary and middle school levels the following schools were highlighted:

- High Plain Elementary ranked 4th in the State in Grade 5 Math.
- Wood Hill ranked 5th in the State in Grade 6 Reading.
- Doherty Middle ranked 3rd in the State in Grade 7 English.
- West Middle School ranked 3rd in the State Grade 8 English.

4. Special Education Quarterly Report

Dr. Kathy Fink distributed the first quarter report for the Special Education Department, which included accomplishments, current status and the challenges ahead. Dr. Fink reported on the growth of specialized programs at Wood Hill, Doherty Middle, West Middle, Andover High School and West Elementary compared to the previous year. The Program Evaluation of the Special Education Department by Walker Partnerships began this summer and they are reviewing the deployment of services to students. Evaluations of services provided by speech / language specialists, deployment of special ed assistants, home-based services, behavior services and supports are under review. Extra-ordinary relief was received in May 2009 through the Circuit Breaker in the amount of \$453,443 because Andover was able to claim nine in-district students for FY09 compared to three in FY07-08. They have received a verbal agreement for \$944,367 in IDEA Stimulus Grant funds. The status of out-of-district placements shows FY09 with 90 students and 91 for FY10. Challenges ahead include delivery of ESL, evaluation and therapy, reduced reimbursement rate this year for Circuit Breaker funds, tuition increases, and uncertainty in the out-of-district enrollment, unilateral placements, and increases in legal fees. Dr. Fink reported that they would continue to closely monitor all special education expenditures and explore cost and programmatic efficiencies for meeting student needs within the district.

III. School Committee Workshop

1. To discuss School Committee Policy Updates

Michael Gilbert from the Massachusetts Association of School Superintendents attended the meeting to assist the School Committee with Policy changes and updates.

Use of School Facilities: APS did have a policy previous to the new policy book. The statute gives control of the School Buildings to the School Committee with the caveat if the Town requires a specific way of handling otherwise. Dr. Bach explained various fee schedules and situations and believes the School Committee set the fees if they control the building. Mr. Gilbert said the school has a hybrid facilities program, fees must offset expenses by budget or collection of fees. The only other vehicle for change to our policy would be a town meeting vote. Deb Silberstein said the recommendation in the memo sent to the Town from the Superintendent is a good recommendation to start with. Mr. Gilbert recommended looking at the history of how space has been utilized

Richard Collins motioned to approve exploring the possibility of leaving open West Middle School providing there is a need and a cost structure is determined. The motion was seconded by Dennis Forge, voted 5-0 and approved.

III. School Committee Workshop (Cont'd)

Deb Silberstein suggested a letter be sent to the Board of Selectmen and the Town Manager to schedule a discussion on using school facilities and the setting of fees.

Residency Policy:

With a greater number of people sending children to school in Andover stricter guidelines for documents are required to prove residency. Mr. Gilbert suggested requiring a mortgage commitment in place of a purchase and sale agreement and to ask the Police Department to verify residency. You can also request leasing agencies fax or mail a copy of a lease agreement rather than having the parent provide it. Legal Guardianship – it is the school district's right to require notification of a legal guardianship of a student living with the guardian. Divorce – the parent with the Andover address has the authority, but custodial situations are different. Mr. Gilbert will mail a packet of information to the School Committee

Out-of-District Special Education

The three boards should create a sub-committee to work on out-of-district special education. Mr. Gilbert provided an update on IDEA money, and how it can be used. He also said the commitment from the State for Circuit Breaker could be less than expected if Stimulus Funds are used to fill the gap.

Funding Contracts

Mr. Gilbert does not encourage contracts be funding contingent upon Town Meeting approval.

Financial Implications of Grants

Some competitive grants come with financial implications to sustain a responsibility after the grant money has expired. Do we have to sustain something we can't afford to? Mr. Gilbert will provide policy language to put into effect to require a review by the School Committee if it has a financial implication on the budget.

Class Size

Policies on class size should have "above/below" contingencies. This will also depend upon the outcome of the Strategic Plan.

Health Related Policies

Mr. Gilbert will review the policies and report back.

Other

School activity accounts and senior class funds - Mr. Gilbert will send the policy he has on senior class funds to David Keniston.

Mr. Gilbert has included social networking issues for staff and students that concern rights and free speech issues in the School Committee packet for them to review.

New Open Meeting Laws and use of documents and restrictions which could be considered violations were discussed. David Birnbach asked about using 'Sharepoint' as a communication tool available to School Committee members only.

There is a change in the statute on the idling of vehicles. Signs can be posted, no idling. Towns are not requested to enforce, just inform.

IV. Return to Regular Meeting

C. Recognition of Achievement

D. Communications

Dr. Bach announced that the architectural firm of Symmes, Maini & McKee Associates has been chosen for the Bancroft School project and is the same firm that designed the Wood Hill Middle and High Plain Elementary School complex.

Dr. Nicholson said the School Committee has not clearly communicated what they want the Superintendent to do with her Performance Goals. Dr. Nicholson stated that the entire organization was reset this summer, and curriculum reviews were scheduled in January setting the tone for summer curriculum work and in turn, the curriculum councils. There have been several meetings with teachers to discuss E-textbooks and textbook adoptions need to be included into the plan. The Wellness Council has been established and members are working on ideas to deliver the curriculum. Dr. Nicholson and teachers are trying to embrace everything the School Committee talked about through the curriculum council by grade level. She will provide a review of what all the councils are doing based on the direction set by the School Committee while trying to support the system through the critical needs faced on a daily basis. The School Department has reached a breaking point and cannot absorb further reductions. The School Committee's support is needed to help move the district forward with the limited resources we have.

E. Personnel

1. Superintendent's Evaluation/Performance Goals

Deb Silberstein asked what the major challenges facing the district are that the Superintendent should be working on.

Goal 1 of the Performance Goals is to develop a 5 year Strategic Plan in collaboration with other stakeholders. This goal is on-going as the pieces of the Strategic Plan are flushed out. Deb would like the Superintendent to meet with her, Annie and Dr. Nicholson to discuss the Strategic Plan. David Birnbach would like dates of completion added for measurable goals, with time frames and bullet lists included along with dependencies needed to complete the goals.

Goal 2: To ensure that the School Department functions effectively for students. Dr. Bach stated this is a maintenance year with basic elements of goals entered due to major changes and shifts due to the reductions in staff.

Objective 1: Deb Silberstein said student achievement and educational quality; reorganizing and restructuring should be connected to student achievement. Annie Gilbert would like to see integrating initiatives (i.e. wellness program) connected to this objective. Deb Silberstein asked about the writing program for grades 6-12. Dr. Nicholson responded that there is no one writing program out there and that we hope to have writing practices to meet the needs of all students. The focus should be on the assessment of the K-5 writing program this year with a direction to look at a writing program for grades 6-12 next year.

Michael Gilbert said we should assess the K-5 writing piece before moving onto the secondary level. Look at the risk/rewards if going to grades 6-12 before looking at K-5 first. The Committee had a protracted discussion on quantifiable measurements of the goals and how to quantify them for the Superintendent's evaluation. Mike Gilbert said the Strategic Plan should drive the objectives and measurements.

F. Citizen Input

Finance Committee member Jon Stumpf disagrees with the School Committee Chair's statement that the Board of Selectmen and the Finance Committee are not working together to solve the budget crisis and explained why they voted on the school number that was in front of them at the previous night's meeting expecting the clarification by the School Department at tonight's meeting and before the Finance Committee Report is sent to print.

Peggy Kruse asked when the School Committee would address class size particularly at Andover High. She feels there should be an exception to the cap of 29 students per class and would like to see flexibility and an appeals process in place. Dennis Forgue assured her that Mr. Harris does have the power to make appropriate decisions on class size. Dr. Bach said this is an example of the point that has been reached where we can't serve students in the fashion this community expects us to with the significant reductions made.

G. Consent Agenda

Approval of Warrants

David Keniston said the Warrants are in order.

Dennis Forgue motioned to approve the Warrant as presented. The motion was seconded by Richard Collins, voted 5-0-0 and approved.

H. Finance

1. Preparation for October 7th Special Town Meeting

Warrant Article 5

Acceptance of MGL Chapter 64L, Section 2(a) – Meals Tax

Richard Collins motioned to recommend support of Warrant Article 5 - Acceptance of MGL Chapter 64L, Section 2(a) – Meals Tax. The motion to support was seconded by Annie Gilbert, and voted 4-1 to support.

Warrant Article 6:

Amend FY-2010 Capital Improvement Projects Fund Appropriation

David Birnbach motioned to hold on Warrant Article 6 and to take a position at Town Meeting. The motion was seconded by Dennis Forgue and voted 5-0-0 to hold.

The Committee requested the wording of the first line of the article be changed to This article was inserted upon request of the School Committee to provide a potential mechanism for reducing the FY2010 Capital Projects Fund appropriation as one element of a budget-balancing plan.

Warrant Article 7:

Amend Appropriations voted under Article 4 of the 2009 Annual Town Meeting

Dennis Forgue motioned to not support the Town Manager's FY10 Budget Number of \$59,512,687 for the School Department. Richard Collins seconded the motion to not support. The Committee voted 5-0-0 to not support.

Dennis Forgue motioned to recommend the amount of \$60,003,158 for the School Department Budget for FY2010. Annie Gilbert seconded the motion to recommend approval of the School Department Budget for FY2010 in the amount of \$60,003,158. The Committee voted 5-0-0 to recommend approval of \$60,003,158 for the FY-2010 School Department Budget.

H. Finance (Cont'd)

1. Preparation for October 7th Special Town Meeting

Reductions to the School Department Budget for FY2010 are significant and have implications that compromise the quality of education throughout all our schools. The School Committee is continuing to work with the Finance Committee and the Board of Selectmen to identify areas of shared interest where further savings and reductions can be made to close the remaining deficit prior to Town Meeting.

I. Motion to Adjourn

Mr. Forgue motioned to adjourn the Regular Meeting of the School Committee. The motion was seconded by Mr. Collins, and voted 5-0 -0 to approve. The meeting adjourned at 10:48 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Dee DeLorenzo, Recorder