



SCHOOL COMMITTEE

BUSINESS MEETING OPEN SESSION MINUTES

September 6, 2022

Meeting:	School Committee
Date:	09-06-2022
Location:	MERMHS Library
Attendees:	Pamela Beaudoin, Superintendent Avi Urbas, Director of Finance Theresa Whitman, Chairperson Jake Foster Matt Harrington Kate Koch-Sundquist Anna Lin Mitchell Chris Reed Erica Spencer
Absent:	None
Guests:	None
Recorded by:	Maria Schmidt
Link to Reports and Presentations	https://www.mersd.org/domain/785

A. Call to Order – Ms. Whitman called the School Committee Business meeting to order at 6:00 p.m.

1) Public Comment – There was no public comment this evening.

2) Chairman's Report –

Ms. Whitman opened the meeting with a gracious welcome for new School Committee Recording Secretary, Maria Schmidt. Ms. Whitman shared her recent experiences attending both the MERSD new staff orientation and the MERSD district-wide gathering as a representative of the School Committee. She expressed gratitude at being part of both events for the opportunity to

connect with staff. Ms. Whitman was also able to participate in Michael Eatman's workshop first-hand. Ms. Whitman described tonight's School Committee meeting as non-traditional in that its focus is business usually covered during the summer workshop.

3) Consent Agenda –

- Acceptance of Warrants – FY22 V1080; FY23 V1009; FY23 V1010
- Minutes for approval: *Completion of minutes for several SC meetings is pending but in the works.*

Ms. Koch-Sundquist moved to approve the Consent Agenda; Mr. Reed seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

4) Sub-Committee Reports

- **Elementary Facilities/MSBC Sub-Committee** (Theresa Whitman/Matt Harrington, Committee Chairs) – No Report
- **Finance Sub-Committee** (Anna Lin Mitchell/Theresa Whitman, Committee Chairs) – No Report
- **Policy/Communication Sub-Committee** (Erica Spencer/Jake Foster, Committee Chairs) – No Report
- **Negotiation Team** (Kate Koch-Sundquist/Chris Reed, Committee Chairs) – No Report

- 5) Superintendent's Report** – Superintendent Beaudoin said that all buildings reported smooth back-to-school transitions, despite local on-going traffic. The short opening week allows students to ease into the new school year. Superintendent Beaudoin also announced that Boston Magazine released their rankings of public high schools, and MERSD earned the number four spot. This is a credit to our high school staff and to the elementary and middle school programs in our district that provide the critical foundations to academic success at the high school level.
- <https://www.bostonmagazine.com/education/best-public-high-schools-boston-2022-chart/>. District-wide, staff had two days of preparation, including orientation for new staff, school-based professional development, and a district presentation by Michael Eatman. Mr. Eatman's program aligns with two of the MERSD strategic priorities that are cornerstones of our strategic initiative – integrating SEL and celebrating and nurturing an inclusive and diverse culture. Superintendent Beaudoin expressed gratitude for the students who participated in our back-to-school staff events by greeting arriving teachers, providing a piano accompaniment to the opening breakfast, and reading a poem for the assembled staff. It was also a time for recognizing the service accomplishments of our teachers, including middle school teacher, Vidula Plante, honored by the American Legion with their Teacher of the Year Award for her work developing projects that honor our community's service members.

Superintendent Beaudoin concluded by noting that there are no Covid restrictions in place this year outside the health guideline to remain at home when ill.

6) Continued Business –

FY 23 Planning: SC & Superintendent Reflection & Goal Setting

- [School Committee Goals - Draft](#)
- Ms. Whitman expressed that a recurring question is how the goals as developed by the School Committee will be employed. She underlined that the goals have historically described the priorities of the School Committee and do not need to delineate the “hows” of accomplishment, but asked that Superintendent Beaudoin speak to the difference between the School Committee’s goals, the superintendent’s goals, and the DIP. Superintendent Beaudoin emphasized that although the goals have historically been a way to align the School Committee with its subcommittees, it is for the School Committee to determine how they function. However, they were established as an annual alignment check, a hierarchy of goals that guide the work of all the parties involved. The goals express where the school committee fits within the strategic plan and upon what they will focus during the current fiscal year. The goals also guide the superintendent’s office in directing staff.
- Hierarchy of Goals: School Committee Goals are the piece that comes between the grand ten year vision and the short term work over the current year as we work towards that vision:
 - Strategic Plan
 - School Committee Goals – where the School Committee fits within the Strategic Plan
 - Superintendent’s Goals/Work
 - District Plan
 - School Plans
 - Teacher Plans
- Ms. Whitman asked for confirmation that this is how the School Committee wishes to use this document.
- Ms. Mitchell expressed concern that these goals should reflect alignment with the District Improvement Plan (DIP), the School Improvement Plan (SIP), the School Committee’s goals, and the superintendent’s goals. In addition, Ms. Mitchell wondered if it was important for the subcommittees to meet before reviewing the goals, which they have not yet been able to do. As a case in point, Ms. Mitchell remarked that she has not yet been able to review documents relating to the budget and feels ill-equipped to set budgetary priorities. Ms. Whitman made a Point of Response that many of these goals are the product of the School Committee’s historical work to formulate goals. Ms. Koch-Sundquist noted that the subcommittees do not have the direction needed until these goals inform their work. Ms. Whitman asked whether the School Committee was in agreement to employ these goals, as done historically, to set the priorities of the SC and inform the public. There was further discussion about how the School Committee goals are communicated to the public. Superintendent Beaudoin expressed that the School Committee Goals

document has not previously been highly publicized, as it is more of an internal document used to sync the internal work of the School Committee. Mr. Foster stated the he appreciates putting off review of these goals until this meeting, allowing the School Committee to consider them as they align to the DIP and other hierarchical goals. Mr. Harrington noted that while some aspects of the SC goals feel negotiable, he believes the goals around the budget are more fixed. Mr. Reed expressed that he perceives the current goals as being well tied to our general goals and reflective of the direction toward which all school committees should work. Ms. Mitchell noted that the current goals center around the budget, school facilities, and student well-being and asked whether the SC's responsibility of evaluating Superintendent Beaudoin should be added. However, there was quick input that the evaluation process is a mandated task versus a goal.

Noting the need to more fluidly discuss the matter, Ms. Whitman suggested setting aside Robert's Rules of Order for the purpose of discussing the issue at hand. Ms. Spencer made the motion and Mr. Reed seconded. The motion passed.

- Superintendent Beaudoin expounded that there are many aspects of the School Committee's function that are not detailed in the stated goals, particularly required issues that are managerial in nature, like approving vouchers. Superintendent Beaudoin also recognized the need to re-word the current goals to reflect the greater challenges the SC will face, including the repeated, structural incompatibility of the towns' desire to fund at a certain level that is not aligned with the rate of growth of the cost of level services. She expressed frustration that the current language does not reflect the underlying issue of the districts funding source. Ms. Beaudoin urged the School Committee to consider expressing this issue in the goals. Further concern was expressed by Ms. Spencer that the goals, as stated, do not include academic-focused objectives. Mr. Foster emphasized that he believes the Strategic Plan should be explicit in the SC goals as a critical means to achieving academic excellence. Ms. Whitman suggested utilizing input from members to re-word the School Committee goals outside of the current meeting and resubmit them for consideration at the next School Committee meeting. Mr. Foster offered to work on this outside of this meeting, utilizing current input. Additional discussion focused upon the need to review the schedule to understand the "how" of meeting the SC goals and on the use of the term "pursuit of correction." Superintendent Beaudoin elucidated the term as applying to any of three avenues available to our communities to meet the deficit in revenue: our towns agree to a higher growth rate and fund the increase from existing sources; our communities seek an override; or the district reduces its budget by an anticipated \$1 million, which will necessitate a reduction in staffing. The term "correction" is not specific to an override.
- Superintendent Reflection
 - Remove Covid-management goal
 - Professional practice goal –

- META negotiations – resolving contract issues is critical to our management of culture and climate as uncertainty weighs heavily on staff. Goal is to resolve by October 22 so that staff can focus on teaching. Second negotiation is TA contract
- Student Learning– Phase one of the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) initiative, born out of School Committee resolution on anti-racism. Anticipate an eight-year process for cultural change. The Superintendent is tasked with making sure the principals have the tools to take on this work.
 - Ms. Mitchell questioned why the current goals are focused on the staff and not the students, to which Superintendent emphasized that before the current goals focus on student curriculum, teachers need a foundation of common understand and tools at their disposal.
- Diversification of Workforce – The goal is to, before recruiting begins, ensure that we have an environment into which people can be recruited and sustained once they are here. This comes back to the “starting with self” where our whole school community is the self.
- Mr. Foster asked about including in the Superintendent’s goals language about implementing the Strategic Plan as embodied in the District Improvement Plan. Ms. Mitchell pointed out that the Strategic Plan includes years in which deliverables are intended to be measured and asked how deliverables in the DIP are represented in the Superintendent’s goals. Superintendent Beaudoin expressed that her goals relate more specifically to the areas that she has a direct hand in. Ms. Whitman emphasized that the School Committee appreciates the language of the Strategic Plan and, while she does not believe that Superintendent Beaudoin should change her goals at this mid-cycle point, she trusts that the next time around Superintendent Beaudoin will utilize that language. Mr. Foster asked for a clarification on whether there is a current mechanism for changing the stated goals. Ms. Mitchell also stated a dissatisfaction with the superintendent’s goals based on misalignment and gave, as an example, areas from the DIP that specifically mention oversight of elementary programs while the Superintendent’s goals do not mention this. Mr. Harrington asked about whether there is a School Committee process for accepting the Superintendent’s goals as he does not agree with changing them. Ms. Whitman clarified that the SC could ask her to change them and suggested a straw poll on whether they would do so. Superintendent Beaudoin expressed that most deliverables of the DIP are not hers specifically except as a steward.

Ms. Whitman re-instated the formality of the meeting and conducted a straw poll regarding whether to request Superintendent Beaudoin to re-work her goals. The motion failed with one vote for and one abstaining vote.

- Superintendent Beaudoin noted that the DIP has a year-end goal review that may address some of the expressed concerns. Ms. Whitman emphasized the importance of completing the current cycle to better understand the functioning of the School Committee and underlined that the objectives of the

DIP have already been approved by the School Committee and that it is the actions and deliverables that are the current focus.

- [District Improvement Plan](#) Within the ten-year life of the Strategic Plan there are three three-year cycles of the District Improvement Plan. The DIP informs the School Improvement Plan (two year cycles), which informs Educator Plans. The DIP is also informed by federal and state mandates and student data and local needs assessments. The DIP has four major tracking initiatives, each including objectives, actions, and deliverables. The district is looking to participate in the NEASC Elementary Review (New England Association of Schools and Colleges). They will set up a series of self-assessments and send in a team to observe if they see what we are and make recommendations. This was previously done at the Middle School. This will help to guide our elementary programs and inform the pursuit of alignment between our two schools regarding how buildings are run and common practice. To Mr. Foster's point, there is an investment but these programs have historically been managed within the existing budget or through grant allocation because these undertakings have been planned in advance. In regards to authentic learning in the classroom, Superintendent Beaudoin expressed that we are off to a slow start because the requirements of planning. Social emotional and cultural competence initiatives do a lot to create a more adaptable and adept culture for delivering authentic learning. Changing to more authentic learning environment means that you are going to be less controlled. Therefore the more equipped staff is to deal with the diverse student before them, the better the experience they will have and the better their impression about authentic learning.

Mr. Reed moved to reinstate Robert's Rules of Order; it was seconded and passed unanimously.

- Before moving to questions, Ms. Whitman clarified that the School Committee is working toward a vote on whether to approve the DIP actions, as the objectives were approved previously. Ms. Whitman also stated that the vote is for the full DIP and not sections. Superintendent Beaudoin emphasized that this is their best plan for meeting goals of the SIP over the next three years, however if the School Committee voices concerns about misalignment or has misgivings about definitions, she is happy to look at those flagged items.
- Ms. Mitchell asked for a definition of student-centered learning, which Superintendent Beaudoin explained is one of the first tasks before the district. However, it can be conceptualized as experiences that are less controlled and rote in nature and more authentic to real life. Ms. Mitchell expressed the desire to see the initiatives reaching students and incorporated into the curriculum sooner. Superintendent Beaudoin stressed that the student piece would be more evident in years 3, 4, and 5. The key to cultural competence is for our staff to understand what cultural competence is. For staff to deliver, they need to be aware and trained on how to lead students through their work. Ms. Mitchell believes this is a real life experience that should be addressed immediately. Superintendent Beaudoin stated that current pieces are in place to address these issues (ADL, Facing History, Gay-Straight Alliance). The current object has been less about

introducing a thing than about crafting the way the adults will go about interacting with the students. Ms. Mitchell underlined that she would like to see it done in tandem. The superintendent pointed out that initiative two has the student component. Mr. Reed made a point of information that he agrees with Ms. Mitchell's perspective that there could be a quicker integration of what the staff is learning with actions directly targeting students. Ms. Koch-Sundquist acknowledged these points, but pointed out that the School Committee's task is not to pick specific curriculum material and that it is important not to ask teachers to teach material before they are prepared to do so. She also pointed to current standards for cultural proficiency geared directly to students. Mr. Foster echoed the concern that the current initiative seems very passive and that he does not hear the impact on students. He did not feel comfortable approving the DIP until he could understand what the two-year outcomes are. Superintendent Beaudoin emphasized that the outcomes are objectives and that the action is seeking how to get there. The objective is cultural, not curriculum based. Ms. Spencer asked about promoting cultural change through outside speakers and recounted that she has spoken to staff who do not see themselves as the best teachers of DEI. However, Superintendent Beaudoin reiterated that the mechanism of cultural change is a journey as a community. Mr. Foster made the point that DEI is not a subject. Superintendent Beaudoin expressed that she has delivered a DIP heavy on cultural work and the goal of helping staff who may not be comfortable delivering this kind of material to become comfortable. She asked to go back to the school committee resolution on anti-racism –to achieve those deliverables, the entire community needs to go through an evolution. Ms. Whitman emphasized that, having served on the school committee during the adoption of that resolution, she is confident using this road map as laid out in the DIP. Ms. Mitchell re-stated that she does not think it is doing enough and that more specifics are needed about what is being done. Mr. Foster stated that what is missing is how this will inform curriculum. Several members were eager to meet with Michael Eatman. Ms. Koch-Sundquist pointed out that schools do not operate in a vacuum and pointed out the community outreach that needs to happen. Mr. Reed expressed interest in doing more as quickly as possible. Ms. Whitman summarized that the expressed concern is for more to be accomplished quicker and that the why of this concern may be addressed through meeting with Mr. Eatman. She asked for additional concerns other than the DEI connectiveness. Mr. Harrington asked about creativity and the arts and asked about how that is viewed in relation to budget constraints. Mrs. Beaudoin stated that the district action specifies a reorganization in this regard so that it would function under the current budget constraints, or it could be built into an override. Mr. Harrington expressed the need to have a broader conversation about having a stronger arts program that could be part of the conversation of an override. Ms. Spencer asked about why only the elementary school will be reviewed. Superintendent Beaudoin that the other schools have already been reviewed within the ten-year cycle, and this is the first time that the elementary review has been offered. The recommendations from the assessment will guide the principals as they craft their plans for improvement,

with support from the district. Mr. Reed asked again about the definition of authentic assessment and Superintendent Beaudoin contrasted taking written tests versus project-based learning. However, further defining authentic learning is part of the objectives of the DIP. Motion to approve the DIP was made by Mr. Harrington, seconded by Ms. Koch-Sundquist.

After discussion re-emphasizing concerns, Ms. Whitman moved the vote. Ayes: Ms. Whitman and Mr. Harrington; Nays: Mr. Reed, Ms Spencer, Ms. Mitchell, Mr. Foster, and Ms. Koch-Sundquist.

- [Budget Update](#) – FY22 closeout and FY23 Start-Up Typically at this time of year Mr. Urbas continues to provide context in preparation the official budget cycle. The final 2022 report comes closer to when we submit our final report to department of education. In June, the final school committee closeout process were conducted, and budget-to-actual figures were discussed. Today's report is closely aligned with that with the addition of revenue. There is not a lot of change since June. Typically, when we provide the final 2024 budget, it will contain very detailed, line-by-line budget to actuals. Focusing on revenue, transportation aid comes from the department of education under the premise that regionalized districts will have more expenses that way. Not as large an issue with our small district, but we do receive a small amount of revenue. The total has not been officially reported yet, which is common. There is a provision of state law that allows regionalized districts to take any award, in excess of their budget estimate, and transfer it into a one year stabilization carry forward, and we have made use of that to ease planning when we don't know what the state will do. We have a \$150K excess, up from the previous year. We have to spend it in the next year, and it becomes an offset to our expenses. This, and the other listed surplus, would reduce the E&D. Covid spending from non-reimbursable expenses has slowed, but the total will be hitting our reserves unless new funding sources become available. FY22 Reserve Update: Stabilization monies have been gradually depleted for facilities projects, including the EES playground, EES tech upgrades (Promethean boards), and security equalization (updated software at the MS/HS). E&D estimate 1.23 million.
- FY23 Reserve Needs – Jason Waldron will provide input tonight. Commitments (including boiler work at EES, turf design, and the and implementation of Project Adventure at Memorial to match the EES program), phase two security proposals bring the stabilization balance to \$80K at FY 23 year end. Mr. Waldron presented an examination of needed safety upgrades to have equity across buildings and to meet best practices. Of special interest, the Raptor System is a visitor entry platform that allows tradesmen and other visitors to scan their license upon entering the building, rather than use a paper sign-in. Raptor then performs a background check and prints a badge. They rescan when exiting. Additional security features to implement include door alerts and Won Door to link doors to an office panic button. Mr. Urbas pointed out that this list is a priority list, understanding that we may not be able to fund all of the proposals.

- Reserves outlook: Currently \$2.9 million available for FY24 to fund the turf fields, short term findings from the Habeeb FCI facilities review, and operating deficit of \$1 Million if the FY24 revenue correction does not materialize. The assumption that expenses for turf fields at Hyland Field and Coach Field will be split with the Town of Manchester is not a given. Utilities expenses have increased following the current war in the Ukraine.
- FY23 Update – Chapter 70 usually signed after the fiscal year starts, but it is close to what was budgeted. Expenses are close to expectations, although transportation expenses continue to rise. Again, utilities are anticipated to have a significant overage due to global rate spikes.
- Ms. Whitman asked if there is anything that Mr. Urbas needs from the School Committee. Mr. Urbas replied that he will eventually need a vote to transfer to the stabilization account and for security updates. Ms. Whitman proposed postponing the vote due to the lengthy run of tonight's meeting. Mr. Foster asked about the bump in estimates for the work on the turf fields, and Mr. Urbas reported that we have seen a steady rise in work estimates since we began approaching contractors about the work roughly five years ago. The last estimate from Gale that came in around \$600K, however with each delay and increase in timeline, the result has been a noticeable rise in cost. Ms. Whitman clarified that we are under no commitment to move forward with the field work unless the town agrees to pay their portion. Superintendent Beaudoin and Mr. Urbas pointed out that the current agreement specifies that the town is responsible for a portion based on use. It is still to be agreed upon. The district is responsible for initiating the project and completing it and the town is responsible for whatever their portion is determined to be. Ms. Whitman asked about where we are in that process of conversation. Mr. Urbas highlighted that we are prioritizing getting the design process underway and making decisions on materials etc. The subcommittee has agreed to start the process of working toward that agreement. Ms. Spencer asked if there is a general expectation about when the funding split estimate will be communicated. Mr. Urbas believes that may be by the next subcommittee meeting but it will still have to proceed through the political process on the town side. Mr. Urbas would like to get it working through the budget process on our end. Ms. Spencer asked about the additional time required at Brook Street given the conservation commission requirements. Gale has advised that it could be faster because it is a replacement and not a new field. Ms. Koch-Sundquist asked if this could be referred to subcommittee and expressed concern about the lateness of the meeting. On the issue of panic buttons, Mr. Harrington asked if there are sites that do not have them and if it would be possible to prioritize and implement them quickly. Mr. Urbas stated that, although we do not want to discuss specifics in public forum, there are provisions in place at all buildings for security. He agreed that this is a priority issue. Ms. Whitman asked about possible state support for rising utilities and health care concern, though nothing is on the horizon. Ms. Mitchell asked about gaining access to school financial data in the hopes of reviewing and educating the community about what the numbers mean. Ms. Whitman stated that it would be discussed further in subcommittee. Mr. Foster requested an opportunity to review the schedule. Ms. Whitman expressed the closing comment that striving to get

background information ahead of time could help to reduce the length of the future School Committee meetings.

Adjourn

Mr. Reed moved to adjourn the meeting; Mr. Foster seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously. The meeting was adjourned at 9:09 pm.

School Committee Future Meetings

- September 20, 2022
- October 4, 2022

WebEx Call-In Information Available at <https://www.mersd.org/domain/818>