

**Milton School Committee
Regular Meeting
Milton High School Auditorium
January 9, 2007
Minutes**

Meeting called to order at 7:00 p.m.

Committee Present: Paul Hogan, Chairman, Beirne Lovely, Vice-Chair, Chris Huban, Laurie Stillman, Mary Kelly and Lynda Lee Sheridan

Staff Present: Dr. Magdalene Giffune, Superintendent; Mary Gormley, Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum & Personnel; Paul Hilton, Assistant Superintendent for Business

Prior to this meeting Dr. Giffune requested a moment of silence in memory of Detective Michael Devin.

Mr. Huban made a public disclosure that his wife has been hired as an assistant to Dr. John Drottat at Milton High School. He will recuse himself from voting on matters pertaining to that administration or the duties involving his wife.

1. Citizens Speak (Policy BEDH-Residents may speak for up to 3 minutes)

Alison Corcoran, a Milton parent, spoke of the need for Administration to listen and respond to parent feedback and requested the School Committee act as advocates when making policy decisions.

Tom Hess, a Milton parent, spoke of his concern over the communication problem between administration and parents and stated that parents should be informed from the beginning on any decision that will affect their children.

Thu-Hang Tran, a Milton parent and a teacher, spoke of how children excel when taught at their own level and differentiated teaching is difficult.

Kay Bullis, a Milton parent, urged the School Committee to support the Superintendent and Pierce administration in their decision to eliminate leveling at the 6th grade.

Earl Fay, a Milton parent, stated that leveling creates labels which can be detrimental to Middle School students.

Steve Rosner, a Milton parent, stated that parents are an important asset to the school system and they deserve better in the area of communication.

Motion was made to amend the policy that refers to the format of the agenda to include a list at the bottom of each agenda of outstanding items that need to be addressed by the School Committee.

Move: L. Stillman

Second: B. Lovely

Vote: 6-0-0

3. Superintendent's Report

Student Assignment- At a recent meeting with the Advanced Planning Team an agenda plan was created for the first day long meeting on student assignment. Dr. Giffune is requesting some members of the School Committee participate in this meeting on Friday. Dr. Giffune informed the Committee electronic surveys will be used to get parental input and some primary concerns have been class size at it translates to student achievement, siblings, neighborhood schools, diversity, and having some element of choice. Minutes of this meeting will be discussed by the full team, posted on the website and sent home in the Thursday backpack express.

Mr. Lovely referred to the first time student assignment was discussed. At that time preliminary guidelines for student assignment were developed and he asked that those guidelines be included in the materials made available to all the Committee members. Dr. Giffune replied that this information has been reviewed and updated. Due to the movement in the schools, i.e. increase in enrollment, the intent is to work from the basis of the preceding plan and move from there. Mr. Huban requested that Dr. Giffune provide the entire timeframe of this plan with the end date of April so people know when meetings are being held. Mr. Lovely requested a summary of what has been discussed so far at these meetings. Although the written summary is in the process of being completed and will be ready for Friday's meeting, Dr. Giffune gave a brief update. She replied that the team met and went over local and general history, reviewed what had been done by the previous student assignment team, and discussed what the non-negotiables for a student assignment plan would be. Some of these non-negotiables are that the plan has to be driven by achievement, class size has to be maintained, the plan has to remain stable going forward and maintain current programs. Grandfathering of siblings was discussed also. If the current elementary class structure remains, siblings would be grandfathered as long as the oldest sibling is still within elementary school. The team also discussed the agenda for Friday's meeting. Mr. Lovely referred to another alternative being discussed and that is placing grade groupings in different buildings. He wanted to verify that all options were on the table so the public is aware of everything being discussed. Dr. Giffune replied that was the reason she had asked for the team to have permission to conduct wide ranging discussions. Ms. Kelly asked about the representation at these meetings and the concern she has over the fact that some people are interested in participating but cannot attend meetings during the day or take time off from work. She emphasized the importance of this issue and feels that since it deserves a great deal of community input, time and effort, perhaps making September, 2007 the implementation date for this may not be in the best interest for making such an important policy decision.

Mr. Lovely responded that the Superintendent has been given guidelines as to what we need but the last time we did this there was more time given for public forums, etc. He brought up the question of what the implications would be of not doing this until 9/08 but starting now with the discussions. What are the pros and cons of waiting and doing this in a longer, more methodical way and what is best for Milton? Ms. Sheridan asked why no action was taken previously on this matter, and it was explained that at that time we had just hired a new Superintendent, there were many special education issues to resolve and it would have been a big undertaking for the Superintendent's first year. The delay in construction was also a contributing factor. Ms. Stillman felt the April/May timeframe reasonable and still gave people time enough to apply for private schools if they desired. If we can meet that timeframe and have the proper community input necessary to make this decision, we should try to do this and move forward. One concern she did mention was having to move students twice if this timeframe cannot be met. Mr. Huban feels since this matter has been discussed and the Advanced Planning Team has met, we should continue and go forward with the April/May timeframe.

The Committee discussed this further and Dr. Giffune suggested that we go forward with the scheduled meetings and then decide from there. Ms. Stillman and Mr. Lovely said they could rearrange their schedules to attend these meetings. Again, the question was raised as to whether or not we had sufficient continuity of commitment for parental involvement to go through these meetings. Ms. Gormley confirmed that PTO Presidents and Site Councils found parents within each school who would commit their time. The head of the Union was consulted with regard to the teachers being part of this Committee. The teachers involved have committed to the four days of these meetings. Ms. Kelly wanted to confirm there will be 2 parental representatives (1 from PTO and 1 from Site Council) for each elementary school. After the team meets, it is then the representative's responsibility to share information with the body they represent. For example, PTO representatives should hold meetings with PTO members to give updates. The meeting schedule is as follows: January 12th, 8:30 a.m.-2:30 p.m. @ Winter Valley, 600 Canton Ave., Knowlton Building; January 24, 2007 to be announced; February 2nd, 8:30 a.m.-2:30 p.m., @ Winter Valley, 600 Canton Ave., Knowlton Building; and February 12th, 8:30 a.m.-2:30 p.m. @ Winter Valley, 600 Canton Ave., Knowlton Building.

Although people can come to these meetings to listen, it is not a time questions will be answered. If someone has a question after attending these meetings, they can communicate with one of their representatives on the Committee. This meeting information will be included in the elementary packet and also posted on the website. Ms. Kelly suggested having a section on Student Assignment on the website which would contain all the data and a summary of the meetings held.

Kindergarten Screening – Kindergarten registration is central this year, and feedback has been positive. We currently have 220+ children registered. Screenings will be held the last week of January.

Residency – Detectives Charles Paris and Louis Bullard will be our attendance officers for the rest of this year. Dr. Giffune explained that after the first of the fiscal year this would become one position. Five students registered in the Milton Public Schools have been removed after investigation of their residency. Once approved, the Affidavit of Residency previously discussed by the Committee will be added to the Kindergarten Screening Packet. This affidavit had been given to the Policy Subcommittee for review and is currently with the Town Counsel for approval.

Dr. Giffune reported that the advertisement for the new Principal will be in the Sunday paper and run for four weeks. This will be a generic advertisement for an elementary Principal. Once an application is received, a response will be sent with a write-up regarding our schools. Dr. Giffune reserved the right to determine what Principalship it will be. Student assignment will certainly come into play when determining where this Principal will be assigned. Ms. Kelly strongly feels this position should be advertised as the Principal for Cunningham and parents and teachers from Cunningham should be involved in the selection process. Mr. Hogan stated he did not believe it was within the School Committee's purview to state where the Principalship would be. Mr. Huban then read what had been discussed at the October 3, 2006 School Committee meeting for which the minutes were approved tonight. "Chris Huban asked that the Superintendent hire a fourth principal and assign them to buildings as appropriate. The Committee concurred." Ms. Kelly asked if other elementary schools will be represented in the selection process. She mentioned that when she participated in the selection process for the Tucker Principal, the teachers and parents had a vested interest in choosing someone who fit their school. She feels we owe it to the Cunningham community, given the administration structure they have had and the conditions they have been in at the 1909 building, to say this will be the Cunningham Principal and that they will be involved in the selection process. Ms. Kelly feels the Committee should be clear in this process for hiring a Principal and asked the Superintendent to present what her goals are. Ms. Sheridan asked about the timeline for the hiring process, and Dr. Giffune replied we advertise for four weeks, paper screen candidates, put together an interview team which will interview several candidates, candidates will then be narrowed down to finalists and make site visits of our schools. The end date for this hiring process will be between late March/early April. Dr. Giffune also explained to the Committee the reason why she was reserving judgment in specifying a school for the Principal is that the student assignment plan is a consideration and she has not had discussions with current principals yet. She also wants to see what the candidate pool looks like. As the student assignment plan evolves, she will have a clearer idea.

Budget Discussion – The budget documents indicate the need for an additional co-taught classroom but it was unsure where that would occur. We have three second grade students in co-taught classrooms and according to Jeffrey Rubin, Director of Pupil Personnel Services and Dr. Dore Korschun, Principal of Glover, that class will be a second first grade rather than a third grade class. They explained that out of those three second grade students, two students are going without an aide to a regular third grade classroom and the third child is going with an aide. This is a great success.

Field Trips (Policy IJOA) – First approval is requested for the trip to Russia (April 14-22, 2007) – Dr. Giffune included in the Committee’s packet the sample permission slip and stated that also on page 14 of the Passport Folder is the Release and Agreement for parents to sign. First approval is requested for the trip to Spain (April 14-22, 2007). Permission slips and release forms are in the packet provided to the Committee. The trip to Notre Dame (January 12, 2007-January 15, 2007) indicates that each hockey player be accompanied by one parent /guardian. Mr. Lovely stated even though parents are attending this trip, we do need a release form. The release should be approved by Town Counsel. The trip to Costa Rica (April 7-22, 2007) is still in planning stage. Mr. Lovely inquired if our policy addresses age limitations for out of the country trips and Dr. Giffune replied it does not. Ms. Stillman inquired if the field trip policy addresses any public health guidelines since some of these trips are to countries that have public health emergencies. She would like to require that the leader of each group run the trip by the school nurse to see if there are any CDC guidelines having to do with updated immunizations or precautionary measures students should take. She would like to insert this as part of the field trip policy and the Committee agreed. Mr. Huban will get the wording for this policy and talk to the school nurse. Mr. Lovely would like to have the timelines for the field trip policy reinforced so the Committee has adequate time for 1st and 2nd approval. Safety is the first concern.

Motion was made to give the second approval for the trip to Costa Rica, April 7-21, 2007, with the condition that releases are signed by each student and approved by the Superintendent and the Chairman of the School Committee.

Moved: B. Lovely
Second: Chris Huban
Vote 5-1-0 (M. Kelly)

The Committee then had some discussion about the trip to Costa Rica. Ms. Kelly asked if we screen the Costa Rican families students will be staying with. Dr. Giffune replied that faculty members propose these trips and they deal with reputable companies. The school does not screen families; however, the tour companies do. It is an individual parental decision to send a child on such a trip, and this is the reason the release form is so important. As previously mentioned, this release is with the Town Counsel. Ms. Kelly also inquired about the age limit and wanted to confirm that this trip is available to any 6th – 8th grader as long as they are taking Spanish. Dr. Giffune verified that there was not an age limitation. Ms. Kelly also brought up the fact that while the policy does allow for some fundraising for these trips, the financial aspect can put parents in an awkward position. For this concern and the others she mentioned, Ms. Kelly informed the Committee she will be voting against this trip to Costa Rica.

Motion was made to approve the first presentation of the trips to Russia, Spain and Notre Dame subject to obtaining release forms.

Moved: B. Lovely
Second: L. Sheridan
Vote: 6-0-0

Motion was made to waive the rule for a second approval at a separate meeting, on a one time basis, for the trip to Notre Dame and give final approval for this trip subject to obtaining release forms.

Move: B. Lovely
Second: L. Stillman
Vote: 6-0-0

Ms. Kelly would like updated information on fundraising for the upcoming trips, and Dr. Giffune replied Ms. Gormley can obtain that information.

5. **Chairman's Report**

School Building Committee – Mr. Hogan reported that Collicot and Cunningham are on schedule. Ms. Sheridan reported the final punch list for all the building has been addressed and everything is moving forward. Mr. Lovely referred to a memo distributed by the Superintendent regarding the audit of the schools by the state. This audit has been completed and we have been denied reimbursement for administrative space (\$299,000). Although this had been anticipated, Mr. Lovely was disturbed that we have been denied reimbursement on the middle field (High School). The middle field had been part of the original project and was approved by the state. It appears the reason we are not entitled to reimbursement is the transfer arrangement between the parks and the schools. Mr. Lovely stated it had never been disclosed that we would lose 90% reimbursement. Now we have to spend extra money (\$600,000-\$700,000) and are not getting reimbursement for the original work. He would like an explanation as to why that occurred and what we can do about it. Mr. Hogan was surprised about the middle field also and stated there has been a review of the documentation regarding this matter. Mr. Lovely said this could be a non-event if we exceeded our maximum allowable reimbursement; however, he would like to know that. Ms. Kelly feels we did, without a doubt, exceed our allowable expenses.

Ms. Kelly would like to make a site visit to the Collicot/Cunningham to see the progress and also to view the recreational space. Ms. Sheridan will get some dates from Charlie Winchester and plan a walk through for the School Committee. Ms. Kelly brought up her previous question regarding the technology budget and asked if there was any opportunity for us to avail ourselves of improvements in technology by utilizing those funds that seem to be sitting in that budget. Mr. Hilton replied the School Building Committee has reallocated those funds to the contingency budget for the current projects. For the finished schools there is a small amount remaining on two of the buildings that

are associated with closing claims with the contractors. The technology dollars were moved into a contingency budget.

Finance Subcommittee – The Finance Subcommittee met with Administration recently regarding the FY06 budget. Mr. Hilton restated that to show the actual budget figures for FY06. They discussed the financial impact of the Professional Development needed for differentiated instruction for the 6th grade teachers. No extensive amount will be needed for this. The Committee is also discussing other items that may impact the budget going forward. Several questions were raised at the last meeting and they are either in the process of being answered or have been answered.

Ms. Kelly mentioned that at the last meeting a vote was taken to post the request to the Warrant Committee on the website along with the guidelines. This has not been added yet and Ms. Kelly requested that be done. She also asked about the binders for the Warrant Committee and wondered if the Committee would receive them over the next few meetings so there would be sufficient time for Committee members to add anything if so desired. Dr. Giffune said these binders would be put together with the Subcommittee and then presented to the full Committee.

Annual Report – Mr. Hogan said there is a draft of the statement going into the Annual Report in tonight's packet. Comments/edits to this draft should be given to Administration within the next week. Ms. Stillman suggested since the Annual Report has important information, perhaps we could send this to people with a cover letter from the Superintendent as part of the school newsletter mailing. Dr. Giffune replied this could be done.

5. **New Business**

No new business.

The next meeting will be held on January 23, 2007 at 7:00 p.m.

By roll call vote the Committee unanimously voted to adjourn and move to Executive Session not to return to Open Session.

The meeting adjourned at 9:30 p.m.