

Minutes of the School Committee  
Retreat  
Superintendent's Conference Room  
July 10<sup>th</sup>, 2013

**Committee Present:** Lynda-Lee Sheridan , Chair; Leroy Walker, Vice Chair; Mary Kelly, Kristan Bagley-Jones, , Becky Padera. Mike Zulas

**Staff Present:** Mary Gormley, Superintendent; John Phelan, Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum & Personnel; Glenn Pavlicek, Assistant Superintendent for Business.

### **Call to Order**

The Chair called the July 10<sup>th</sup> retreat of the School Committee to order at 7pm

### **Laptops:**

Ms. Sheridan passed out laptops to School Committee members and asked them to fill out forms to “register” them. These were donated by Milton Academy. Mr. Walker inquired about the value of these laptops and what liability the School Committee members might have. Between 40 and 50 of these laptops were donated, and these are the “emergency spares.”

Ms. Sheridan instructed School Committee members on how to log onto the laptops. She asked them to use Google Chrome and talked them through to get to the School Committee page.

Mr. Walker asked if the laptops could be used for executive session/collective bargaining. Ms. Sheridan said the understanding is that if you want something in paper format, you should print it yourself.

Ms. Kelly asked if they could edit documents in Word. She noted that some of the documents are “read only” and asked why. It was explained that because they are shared documents, any notes made on the document could be visible to all and therefore, that would violate the Open Meeting law. Mr. Phelan suggested having a scratch pad at the meeting or to open the document. He also explained how these documents also went into “the cloud,” and can be accessed from home.

### **SC Goals:**

SC members were asked to come with a list of individual members ideas about “Successes and Challenges” for the district, and for the School Committee. A discussion followed about the setting of the SC goals and district goals. .

Ms. Kelly commented that she would like actionable data. MCAS, internal testing, etc. in order to evaluate successes and challenges. Ms. Gormley said that most of the testing data is not available yet.

Ms. Bagley Jones said there should be a distinction between the district goals and the School Committee goals. She noted that the district goals are set by Ms. Gormley, and the School Committee goals are set by the committee. Ms. Bagley Jones said that we should follow Mary Gormley's lead on what is the best data to supply, what should be the timeline to provide this data.

The Committee then shared their successes and challenges:

Ms. Bagley Jones:

- one of the successes is the feedback from the principals on our leadership team, on the topic of budget priorities.
- We had great talks about the advancement budget,
- we also talked about kids who were struggling.
- getting the budget out to the community was a worthwhile endeavor.
- the presentations, the teachers and parents and students who came to School Committee were valuable.
- Also, for the health community, having community members who are invested in the process is helpful. It's a good thing. To keep going in that direction is great.
- the new hires for Principals have been great. Lots of parental satisfaction.
- was more openness at MHS, according to parental feedback

Ms. Padera:

- The unanimous passing of the First-Grade assignment plan was a success; the creating, communication and implementation of First Grade Assignment.
- the passing of the Advancement Budget was a success and the communication to the public and our communication to the Warrant Committee.
- the Health and Wellness Initiative, start of the Peer Education Program, the Chris Herren presentation, the start of the Cafe at the MHS.

Ms. Kelly:

- communication in general, the Blog goes even beyond the expectations. The community appreciates it so much.
- Mary's ability to acknowledge people, not only in the Milton Public Schools, but in the town. We're lucky to have it on a continual basis.

Mr. Zullas:

- The First Grade Assignment process was great,
- Advancement Budget was a big success.
- Also, he said he noticed high morale in the community. Artistic, Athletic achievements, etc. It seems, even within the schools, lots of high morale. From the outside, he said it appeared to be a huge success.

Mr. Walker:

- the Advancement Initiates. He said we thought about these differently and with data-driven decision making. We looked at the data, then made priorities. That was

a success, both in terms of how we articulated it, and how it was embraced by the community.

- the range of programs we're able to offer at the MHS is phenomenal and makes us a top-tier high school in the state. You can be good at so many things and try so many things.
- The great participation rate for SAT and AP puts us in a top tier. It's amazing; with the amount of diversity we have, that those numbers are very high.
- the collective bargaining planning has been different this year, and it has served us really well. We have learned that we are quite competitive with other districts.

Ms. Sheridan: In addition to what others had stated

- agreed we have had great hires this year and added Courtney Walsh to the list of great hires. She noted that James and Karen both transitioned successfully
- the Superintendent mid-cycle review was a great process and very helpful.
- Good Milton High School collaborative time in response to NEASC recommendation
- the addition of wireless was a success.
- internally, the communication is great. The high school has a great newsletter. Communication was better this year, for sure.

Ms. Sheridan asked for challenges that we had in 2012-13 school year:

Ms. Padera said the fact that we had to hire so many new administrators, a business person, principals, etc. Large turnover in staff.

Ms. Bagley Jones said she found the presentation from the schools at School Committee meetings lengthy and inconsistent. Some schools gave a better sense of the schools than others.

Ms. Padera said she thinks the presentations that were the best were the ones where more of the Site Councils showed up.

Ms. Bagley Jones said the School Committee meetings are way too long. She would like to see us make something happen with that. Also, she feels strongly about the athletic process/fees. I think we need to look at funding. The warrant process, you've worked hard at making it consistent. I don't get why Ms. Kelly and Mr. Walker don't sign it. I find the process unwieldy; the business office is good about it. Maybe we need Warrant 101.

Ms. Kelly said she likes the new cable station in the Pierce Middle School. She thinks the warrant process needs to be worked on.

Ms. Sheridan said she's been working with Nancy on this topic of the warrant.

Ms. Padera said, during her training, she was instructed to pull an item out of the warrant if there is a question.

Ms. Bagley Jones said, regarding the subcommittees, she finds it helpful to report back out on these. She can't get to all of them, so a report helps.

Ms. Kelly said posting on the calendar, when the subcommittees are, would be helpful. It's not posted on the Milton Public Schools website. The town clerk's website is a nightmare as far as posted meetings.

Ms. Bagley Jones said she wanted us to get more health educators in our schools, but she does feel good about what we accomplished for music and art.

(??) for challenges, I had special ed placements. Also, fundraising for clubs and sports as challenges.

Mr. Walker: On SPED budget management, I'm not ready to say there's nothing we can do. It is a problem that's largely out of control. This year, we did everything right on budget, and then the SPED budget threw it out of whack. There are so many priorities here, at some point, we have to say, how do we create a reserve or buffer to mitigate these costs. If we don't, then we have the same problem as we have this year. It required us to under-fund or not fund things that we thought were important. He thinks we do a good job of managing our budget in general, but SPED costs haunt us. He said that the Achievement Gap is still a challenge. He said it would be helpful for everyone if there was an evaluation schedule for School Committee and leadership team. Planning schedule. Starting with strategic plan, that should drive the other schedules, including evaluation schedule.

Mr. Zullas: Regarding the achievement gap, that could be the most pressing thing going forward. I also wonder if there's a personnel retention challenge. It seems that there are a lot of good people that the system has lost. I wonder if we should look at this.

Ms. Padera: It seems that this is more at the leadership level, and not unique to Milton.

Ms. Bagley Jones said, regarding Public Relations, meaning the front desk, there has been some improvement. "Customer service," has gotten better. It's still an issue with some of the schools, but there have been fewer complaints. It's all schools, not just the front desk at the high school.

Ms. Padera said, at committee meetings, bringing the successful sports teams was a great idea. Good way to boost morale of the school.

Ms. Sheridan then asked members to brainstorm a list of general priorities or goals for the district.

Mr. Walker presented his list of goals in the next 2 or 3 years:

- Planning driven by Strategic Planning

- Integrated Science Enrichment Track: created a curriculum and now we should build on that through high school.
- Course Track - programming code at PMS and MHS. We should start teaching this
- Deeper bench issue. We've filled a lot of positions, but need a deeper bench
- No Achievement Gaps
- Broader AP offerings and other college-credit opportunities
- Fully-funded low-fee Athletic Program.
- More diversity in Athletics and more diversity in Academic Excellence.

Ms. Bagley Jones' goals:

- STEM was a great success, but I'd like to offer it to everyone
- Focus on growth for MCAS
- Mentoring Program
- Fundraising Issues
- Behavior Issues -- not sure if there's a district-wide push to address behavior. Positive behavior programs.

Ms. Padera's goals:

- Implement a zero-gravity robotics program. Need a leader
- Increase the number of times students take the SAT
- Decrease in class sizes at Elementary
- Increase in outreach to families before coming to Kindergarten to improve early literacy, especially for those without preschool.
- No-cut policy for Freshman sports.

Ms. Kelly's goals

- Add Financial competency added to Graduation Requirements
- Understand Common Core and how we're implementing it. Be sure we're not downgrading standards for this.
- Regarding AP, I'd like an assessment of AP offerings. I feel like we should be broadening the classes and experiences.
- More info on SPED in terms of IEPs. Are they in place, on time? Are the aides properly qualified? Implement a process where we get info on IEPs.
- For finance, get back to quarterly reporting
- Create an "accepting donations" process.
- Continue on Internal Testing, so we don't have to wait for MCAS as benchmark
- Sports and Club strategy, in terms of making it affordable.
- Be sure we connect with PAC better.

Mr. Zullas' goals:

- Consolidation of the business office functions with the town
- “Perception problem” at the high school -- needs to compete with private school. Continue to leverage the success of art, music, drama, athletics and the guidance department.

Ms. Sheridan’s goals:

- Provide rich early-childhood opportunities for those who need it.
- Hire a Director of Educational Technology. Someone with a district-wide vision of opportunities.

Ms. Sheridan then asked member to outline their goals for the School Committee.

Ms Padera:

- To track the Advancement Initiatives to see how they are working
- Build community support for our budget challenges early

Mr. Walker said he does not have independent School Committee goals.

Ms. Kelly:

- To have the budget done early so that we can communicate it well. Inclusive of teacher-up.
- Minutes: In particular, Finance Subcommittee minutes, getting them approved in a timely fashion.
- Gets Parents Guide to SPED updated. Also, there’s a National Organization guide. Lets get that on the web.
- Open up the Job Postings more broadly than just our website. Include in blog?
- To get to shorter meetings, perhaps we could acknowledge the great work of the district in a format outside School Committee meetings. Different show?

Ms. Bagley Jones:

- I think it’s helpful that School Committee members sit on the hiring committees.
- Shorter meetings
- We work well together, lets strive for collaborative tone, consensus when we can. Strive for respectful dialogue at all times.

Ms. Sheridan

- Using laptops this year
- Reflect and revise subcommittees
- Continue Policy Reviews
- Based on discussion tonight, revise the Warrant Issue.

Ms. Sheridan said the next steps would be to schedule the next meeting. We need to look at the next set of data.

Ms. Gormley said she would give dates and asked the School Committee to prioritize the goals. Ms. Sheridan asked what the order should be -- data first, prioritization second? Ms. Kelly said she thinks we should review the data first. There was discussion about the dates for the next retreat / meeting.

The chair entertained a motion to adjourn:

Move: Mr. Walker

Second: Mrs. Bagley Jones

Vote: 6-0-0