

Minutes of the School Committee
Regular Meeting, Interviews
Milton High Library
June 13, 2012

Committee Present: Glenn Pavlicek, Chair; Lynda-Lee Sheridan, Vice Chair; Kristan Bagley-Jones, Leroy Walker

Not Present: Mary Kelly

Staff Present: Mary Gormley, Superintendent; John Phelan, Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum & Personnel; Matthew Gillis, Assistant Superintendent for Business.

Call to Order

The Chair called the June 13th, 2012 meeting of the School Committee to order at 7:10 pm

Approve Agenda

The committee approved the agenda with no edits.

Chairman's Report: The Chairman explained that the purpose of tonight's meeting is to interview the 11 candidates who were interested in filling the vacant School Committee seat for the next 10 months. This will be an appointed position and the candidate, once appointed, will serve until the fourth Tuesday in April of 2013. The candidates were assigned a random order by Mr. Walker and will all be asked the same questions.

Candidate #1: Adrienne Sullivan.

Ms Sullivan outlined her qualifications, including her MBA in finance, her experience with technology, her current pursuit of an educational degree, and as a parent and Milton resident.

She listed the budget and stressing the positive achievements of MPS as priorities for the district, as well as STEM and achieving 21st century learning goals.

Ms. Sullivan has volunteered with "Meet the Artist" program, chaperoning the recent trip of the Pierce Latin Club.

She praised the cooperative spirit of the School Committee and its support of the administration. She suggested that communication be improved, particularly website and digital types of communication.

She stressed the importance of having a balanced perspective and participating as a member of a team.

Candidate #2: Kathleen Conlon

Ms. Conlon's experience includes five years on the Warrant Committee, including serving as Chairman for three years; Town Meeting Member and a member of the Board of Directors for Milton Hospital.

She listed maintaining the quality of education for our students as a top priority, as well as maintaining the French Immersion program. She spoke about the changes in administration with new principals and the importance of funding and budgeting.

Ms. Conlon volunteered with the Boston Bar Association and the US Bankruptcy Court to bring financial literacy programs to schools.

She praised the School Committee for its communication style and said they have done a good job balancing the needs of the district.

Ms. Conlon said that, because she is neither a parent nor a teacher, she has a different and perhaps more objective perspective. She also has a good grasp of the budget, both presently and historically. She believes this would help her to focus on the district as a whole.

Candidate #3: Justin Renz

Mr. Renz has experience as a CPA and holds two master's degrees in Business Administration and Taxation. He has a large extended family, many of whom attend the Milton Public Schools, and a strong commitment to Milton.

He listed moving towards a more sustainable model for the budget as a priority for the School Committee and the district, as well as ensuring that the resources go to the right places.

Mr. Renz has volunteered as a baseball and soccer coach in the town of Milton; as well as organizing an annual road race to benefit Milton students.

He praised the School Committee for its relationship with the Superintendent; he thinks that the district needs more support in terms of resources and he noted that our schools are very well-thought-of both locally and nationally.

Mr. Renz said the co-taught program is the "jewel" of MPS, and is also committed to both French and English programs. He mentioned augmenting these programs with STEM.

Candidate #4: Julio Varela

Mr. Varela's has been involved as Vice President of Literacy for Houghton Mifflin in the Software Reading Technology for 22 years. He has worked in issues such as common core standards and other issues that pertain to schools.

He said it is a priority to ensure every student who walks through the door gets an opportunity to succeed. He also listed class size and upcoming changes to the French Immersion program as issues that need to be tackled within the context of keeping our standards for education high.

Mr. Varela has volunteered in several override campaigns, beginning when he and his wife were preschool parents. He also served on the Milton Foundation for Education.

He praised the School Committee for its level of communication, as well as presenting information on the budget in the right way. For improvement, he suggested that the School Committee often sells itself short in what it does. He would be more vocal in celebrating the accomplishments of the committee. He mentioned using methods other than email, including a personal web page or a dedicated phone number for parents to be able to reach him, in order to be more responsive.

Mr. Varela said it is a priority to him that we put our students in a position to become the best learners they can be. He would ask a lot of questions, and he understands the challenges that school districts face.

Candidate #5: Brian Burns

Mr. Burns has experience as an administrator at Northeastern University for 25 years. He has both a business and a legal background and has worked in insurance, risk management, environmental health and safety. He holds a marketing and management degree from Northeastern and a law degree from Suffolk University.

He listed the priorities for the school committee as resolving the French/English student assignment issue; teacher contracts; leadership transitions in the high school, middle school as well as two elementary schools; and the budget.

Mr. Burns has volunteered as a coach for Milton Travel Soccer, the town's recreational basketball league and Milton National Little League.

He praised the School Committee for its level of transparency, which he noted has improved markedly since 2006-7. He cited the strategic plan as a good blueprint for the district, especially the "customer service" model.

Mr. Burns stressed that he is not a one-issue candidate. He sees the district on the precipice of doing greater things and the School Committee can make changes that can last 15-20 years.

Candidate #6: Becky Padera

Ms. Padera's qualifications include being the parent of elementary-aged students, a demographic which is not currently represented on the School Committee. In addition, she has worked as a guidance counselor for 10 years, has coached high school cross-country and track. While employed at Arlington Catholic High School, she served on the steering committee for the accreditation process.

Her priorities for the School Committee would be to pull parents with younger students into the process.

Ms. Padera has served as the President of the Glover PTO for two years and also served on the Principal Screening Committee at Glover. She served as a Precinct Captain for the override and continues to serve on the PTO.

She praised the School Committee for going to each of the schools during budget season and making presentations. She suggested reaching out to the school community to emphasize the good news.

Ms. Padera said she has an open mind and a positive attitude and would strive to represent what's best for the school system as a whole.

Candidate #7: Chuck Karimbakas

Mr. Karimbakas' qualifications also include being the parent of elementary-aged children. Professionally, he has extensive experience in budget and finance. He is a team-builder at work and knows how to both interact with and manage a board.

For School Committee and district priorities, Mr. Karimbakas listed academic excellence, including high MCAS scores. He is interested in compiling data on what keeps students in the public schools, rather than leaving for private schools -- and what can be done to retain those students.

Mr. Karimbakas is the treasurer-elect of the Collicot PTO, where he currently serves on the leadership team. He worked on fundraising to furnish all Collicot classrooms with SmartBoards.

He praised the School Committee for making budget presentations at each of the schools. He also read and admired the work of the World Language committee. He urged the committee to keep up the levels of both transparency and availability.

Mr. Karimbakas said he would work to represent all levels of the system by being open to hear all perspectives. He believes in a data-driven approach and not forming a pre-conceived notion on any issue.

Candidate #8: Meg Kasuba

Ms. Kasuba said she is qualified because she is passionate about the schools and also a MPS parent of French, English and special education students.

She listed the priorities of the School Committee as resolving the French Immersion/English divide. She suggested beefing up the English program to make it more desirable. She also mentioned maintaining the new buildings as a priority.

As a school nurse, Ms. Kasuba said she has a unique perspective on what goes on within the schools. She has volunteered on the School Choice committee and on the Milton High Principal screening committee. She also served on the site council at Pierce and co-chaired the Pierce fundraiser for three years. She has volunteered within the classrooms and helped to organize the Spring Fair at Tucker, as well as worked on several override campaigns.

She praised the School Committee for its budget presentations and for its ability to make cuts that have the least impact on the least amount of students. For improvements, she would like to see more parent engagement, possibly with town-hall type School Committee meetings within the schools.

She said she would be able to represent the district as a whole because her children have been in all levels and all programs. She feels she can come to the table and represent nearly every parent in the district.

Candidate #9: Michael Zullas

Mr. Zullas has experience as a member of the Warrant Committee and the Capital Improvement Committee. He has been a lawyer for 23 years and has been involved in business negotiation, budgeting and decision making. He is a parent of two daughters who have not entered school yet.

He outlined the priorities of the School Committee as resolving the French Immersion issue, while preserving the program. He also pointed to the upcoming teacher contracts and emphasized that teachers are the greatest asset. He also said the budget is a priority, as is the need to grow the pie bigger.

Since Mr. Zullas' children have not yet entered school, he has not volunteered within the MPS yet, though he expects to. He has volunteered on town committees.

He commended the School Committee for its work on advocating for the schools and for its transparency. He also cited the committees work on the budget process.

Mr. Zullas said he could represent the entire district because, although he has his individual perspective, he is able to see the big picture. He stressed that schools should give children a board exposure to as many things as possible.

Candidate #10: Veronica Guerrero-Macia

Ms. Guerrero-Macia has experience as an educator, having taught everything from preschool to PhD candidates. She has a degree in bilingual education and has worked in an immersion program in Los Angeles.

She listed the priorities of the district and School Committee as figuring out how to make French Immersion work in a way that makes people in town comfortable. She also listed meeting the school's financial responsibilities as a top priority. She said we need to be sure the high school does not lose its accreditation and continues on the right track.

Ms. Guerrero-Macia has volunteered in the schools for many years. She has served on the School Site Council at Cunningham, volunteers in the classroom, participates in Meet the Artist and was on the Superintendent screening committee for Dr. Giffune.

She praised the School Committee for the smooth transition between superintendents and in moving the schools in the right direction. She also praised the School Building Committee for their work.

Ms. Guerrero-Macia said she has the time and interest to be a good candidate who will represent the entire district. Ms. Bagley Jones noted that Milton High School did very well on its recent NEASC accreditation report.

Candidate #11: Michael Chinman

Mr. Chinman said that, while he may not be the best-qualified candidate, he said the committee will choose who is best for this job. He believes that the decision of the committee and the administration will be better if more voices are brought into the process.

Regarding the priorities of the School Committee, Mr. Chinman said he thinks the committee has sometimes dropped the ball, particularly on transparency. He said he is disappointed in some of the past practices of the committee with respect to the Open Meeting Law.

Mr. Walker replied that the School Committee is in a better position to define what their task is regarding the appointment of a candidate.

Mr. Chinman went on to outline what he sees as other priorities of the School Committee and district. He mentioned addressing the French Immersion/English program issues and said that diminishing French Immersion is a bad idea. He disagreed with capping and said the committee should look into why more people are favoring the immersion program. He suggested making the English program more appealing.

Mr. Chinman said he has been an active volunteer in the schools, including in classrooms, activities and sports. He recently volunteered to coach the new Milton High Mock Trial team.

He praised the district and School Committee for the recent announcement by the Washington Post that MHS placed in the top high school nationally. He said the School Committee does a good job of not intruding with the professionals in the

schools. He reiterated that he has an issue with compliance on Open Meeting Law and cited the hiring of a new Pierce Assistant Principal as an example. He mentioned that some meeting minutes have not yet been posted. He suggested the Superintendent produce a video Eblast to summarize each meeting. He said the FY13 budget document on the website is incomplete, citing the music teacher salary as missing data.

Mr. Chinman feels he would be able to represent the entire K-12 spectrum because he is willing to embrace the diversity of the population.

Ms. Sheridan expressed the difficulty of narrowing the field from 11 candidates to one. The Chairman said his vision would be to go through the field and see if there was consensus on a nominee. There was some discussion and then it was agreed that each candidate would list their top 3 candidates at the next meeting. Mr. Walker moved to adjourn the meeting

Move: Mr. Walker

Second: Ms. Sheridan

Vote: 4-0

The meeting was adjourned at 9:40 pm.