

Minutes of the Milton School Committee
Regular Meeting
Milton High School
November 2, 2011

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

Staff Present: Mary Gormley, Superintendent; Matthew Gillis, Assistant Superintendent for Business

Not Present: John Phelan, Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum & Personnel (due to family commitment)

Call to Order

The Chair called the November 2, 2011 meeting of the School Committee to order at 7:03 P.M.

Approve Agenda

The Agenda for the evening was approved with no changes.

Citizen Speak

Members of the cast of “Footloose” gave the committee a sneak preview of the performance scheduled for the weekend of November 4th and 5th. Ms. Gormley commended the talented students for their hard work and dedication and encouraged the Milton community to attend.

Approval of Minutes

The Chair entertained a motion to approve the October 6, 2011 minutes of the Regular Meeting of the Milton School Committee. Ms. Kelly noted errors in the recorded votes, which were corrected. Mr. Walker offered a friendly amendment, inserting language requesting the administration for an analysis of MCAS scores for those students who have been in the MPS for their entire academic career and those who entered in later years. After the changes, the committee approved the minutes.

Move: Sheridan

Second: Walker

Vote: 6-0-0

The Chair entertained a motion to approve the October 11, 2011 minutes of the Finance Subcommittee where a quorum of the School Committee was present. Mr. Walker offered a friendly amendment adding language to the last sentence in item 5 a. which stated, “*The union received a commitment that there would be no further plan design changes during this period.*” After this change, the committee approved the minutes.

Move: Walker

Second: Kelly

Vote: 4-0-2 (Sheridan and Bagley-Jones abstained)

The Chair entertained a motion to approve the October 24, 2011 minutes of the Finance Subcommittee where a quorum of the School Committee was present. Mr. Walker offered a

friendly amendment adding language to item 2 e. related to keeping funds in the School Department budget for maintenance and facilities needs. Ms. Kelly noted that Mr. Walker's name had been left out of those in attendance. After the changes, the committee approved the minutes.

Move: Kelly

Second: Sheridan

Vote: 5-0-1 (Bagley-Jones abstained)

Superintendent's Report

Science MCAS Data Presentation

Marilyn Decker, Science Director for Grades K-12, presented an analysis of the results of the Science MCAS for the elementary, middle, and high schools. Her presentation can be found on the MPS Web site:

<http://www.miltonps.org/documents/ScienceMCAS.pdf>

Although the science MCAS trends are generally moving in a positive direction, Ms. Decker stated that there is more work to be done to improve and standardize curriculum and to develop common assessments across the district.

At the elementary level, her goal is to increase the number of students in the proficient and advanced MCAS groups. To do so, new units covering the Earth Science topics of Landforms and Oceans were introduced after a thorough curriculum review. The curriculum review also highlighted the need for accessible, hands-on materials for classroom activities to enhance learning. A review of middle school science pointed to the need for consistent curriculum and common assessments. Chemistry will be added at seventh grade to strengthen students' foundation for ninth grade Biology.

The MCAS report from the high school shows solid gains in the percentages of students scoring proficient and advanced and a passing rate of 98%, which is above the state average. Efforts underway at the high school to strengthen science include:

- Using Study Island to prepare students for the Biology MCAS
- Focusing professional development on 'vertical teaming' from grades 6-12 to provide students an adequate foundation for AP science classes
- Developing interest among high school students for science activities outside of school including:
 - Laboratory research internships for students during the summer
 - A robotics team at the high school

As reported by Ms. Decker, new standards for science teaching, due to be released in 2012, will emphasize student inquiry and investigation. Students will pose the questions and design their own investigations and solutions. As Mr. Pavlicek pointed out, the new inquiry-based teaching will require significant professional development.

In response to a question from Mr. Walker about the challenges of improving performance at Pierce, Ms. Decker noted the following areas of focus:

- Standardizing the curriculum to ensure that every student has access to a high level of instruction
- Providing better instructional materials and technology
- Ensuring that every teacher is teaching to the same high standard
- Peer observation of the teachers who have demonstrated success
- Looking at MCAS data to determine where there are weaknesses
- Adding an introduction to chemistry to the curriculum

School Committee discussion then focused on challenges at the elementary level, where, as Ms. Kelly noted, roughly 40% of students are not proficient. Ms. Gormley and Ms. Decker spoke about efforts underway to develop science expertise at the elementary level where most classroom teachers have broad-based knowledge and are responsible for covering all subjects. Ms. Decker stated that she has set up teams at each school to review and develop the curriculum and has put together kits for hands-on projects. New topics from the Museum of Science have been introduced to add engineering content. Ms. Decker also noted that good elementary teaching skills could be transferred to the teaching of science. A strong Language Arts teacher can, for example, help students prepare thorough science journals.

Study Island Presentation

Holly Concannon, K-5 Math and K-8 Technology Coordinator, gave a presentation on Study Island, a Web-based program used in the MPS to provide support primarily for Math and ELA in the elementary and middle schools as well as for Biology at the high school. The program is accessible through the Internet and available to everyone. Those students who do not have home computers are given time during the school day to access Study Island. Ms. Concannon encourages parents to use the program and offers instruction to parents through PTO events. Brochures about Study Island have also been distributed to parents.

The content of Study Island covers topics written from the state standards and includes many practice activities—tests, worksheets, and games, which help students to stay engaged and focused. The program is dynamic and provides opportunities for students to master the material by repetition. Ms. Concannon stated that a review of Study Island usage showed that 70K questions had been answered by two fifth grade classes from two different schools.

Teachers and parents can easily monitor student effort, engagement, and progress. After logging onto Study Island, students are required to take a pretest, which will give students and teachers immediate feedback as to their areas of strength and weakness. Study Island also has a reporting feature, which measures student performance compared to the school and the state and highlights the topics that need more attention. Ms. Concannon stated that improvements in achievement have been correlated to use of Study Island. Teachers are also using the application in the classroom to reinforce learning.

The school system has spent \$28K for three-year licenses funded by the MFE, PTOs, and the school budget for grades 3-8. The licenses cover:

- Grades 3-8 Math
- Grade 5 Math and Science
- Grade 4 Math and ELA

- MHS Biology, Math, and ELA

Ms. Sheridan requested that Ms. Concannon pull together a chart for parents to indicate what grade levels and what subjects are accessible to students through the school licenses. Ms. Kelly requested a link on the MPS home page to direct parents and students to the Study Island information. Mr. Walker stressed the need for access to computers and parent orientation. Ms. Concannon stated that teachers are finding time to offer support to those students who do not have a home computer. She pointed out that computers are available at the Milton Public Library and in the schools. In response to a question from Ms. Bagley-Jones, Ms. Gormley stated that the school libraries are open until 4:30 P.M. every day. Ms. Gormley asked Ms. Concannon to circle back to the principals at each school to ensure all children are using Study Island.

US Healthy Challenge Award, Bronze Level

Ms. Gormley introduced Ms. Jacqueline Morgan, Food Service Director, and congratulated her for the US Healthy Challenge Award won by Perce Middle School. The award, sponsored by the USDA, recognizes excellence in nutrition and physical activity and has been presented to only 1% of schools in the country. Ms. Morgan stated that the Milton schools have been in the forefront in changing the nutritional standards of school meals. She thanked the Food Service staff for their hard work and recognized the support of Pierce administrators and staff. Other schools in the district missed the opportunity to win this award because the amount of physical activity did not meet the standard of the challenge of 45 minutes of activity each week offered to all students.

Ms. Morgan also reviewed recent changes in state law, which define very specifically the nutritional content of foods offered during the school day. In response to a question from Mr. Walker, Ms. Morgan responded that the law would have an impact on all foods offered and served in the school, which include, not only school lunches and breakfasts, but also celebrations, events, concessions, and fundraisers. Ms. Bagley-Jones expressed concern about revenue loss from school-sponsored fundraisers and the Boosters' concession stand.

In response to a question from Mr. Keohane, Ms. Morgan emphasized that all students need to eat a nutritional breakfast before school to carry them through to the late lunch served at 1:00 P.M. She mentioned that a healthy breakfast is served every morning at the high school. Mr. Keohane also asked about the incidence of obesity in the schools. Ms. Gormley recommended that Margaret Gibbons present on this issue at a later meeting.

School Happenings

Ms. Gormley announced the recent and upcoming school and community events.

- Production of "Footloose" at MHS November 4th and 5th
- Glover Fall Social at the Milton Hoosic Club November 4th
- NEASC visit to Milton High School November 4th-6th
- "Monster Dash" fundraiser rescheduled for Sunday, November 6th
- Collicot Night Out at Abby Park restaurant on November 15th to benefit the "One Book, One School" project in memory of Collicot parent Jennifer Kelly
- Parent/Teacher conferences are coming up in mid-November; the goal for this year is 100% participation by parents and guardians

- The Milton Food Pantry is looking for help from the schools creating Thanksgiving baskets for needy families
- The Girls' Volleyball has won a spot in the state tournament
- The Resource Officer has been reinstated at the high school. Ms. Gormley and Ms. Kelly commended the Police Department and Chief Wells on their supportive collaboration with the schools.

Ms. Gormley also stated that she would provide Mr. Walker with the analysis he requested on SAT performance for those students entering the system after the sixth and eighth grade.

Chairman's Report

Ms. Sheridan read an invitation to the Milton community from the Milton Historical Society to attend the program in honor of Milton's Civil War soldiers at the Council on Aging at 7:00 P.M. on November 10th.

Mr. Pavlicek reviewed the five resolutions from the MASC to be voted by the School Committee members in order to give Mr. Keohane, Milton's MASC representative, direction for participation in the upcoming MASC conference.

Resolution 1—Providing Greater Access for Students to Visit State Approved Vocational Education Programs.

The committee members, while noting it would be beneficial for students to explore options beyond the college track, objected to the mandatory nature of the resolution. Mr. Walker moved that the committee not support the resolution.

Move: Walker

Second: Sheridan

Vote: 6-0-0 not to support MASC Resolution 1

Resolution 2—Teacher Evaluation.

The resolution refers to pending state regulations regarding teacher evaluations in the effort to secure "Race to the Top" funding. The committee expressed concern about the impact of the resolution on collective bargaining at the local level and concluded that the resolution was poorly constructed and represented another mandate that would burden the system without adequate funding. Mr. Walker moved that the committee not support the resolution.

Move: Walker

Second: Sheridan

Vote: 6-0-0 not to support the MASC Resolution 2.

Resolution 3—Charter School Funding

Mr. Walker moved to support the resolution in favor of changing the state funding mechanism to Charter Schools by the state. Ms. Kelly expressed concern that changing the mechanism by reducing the bottom line of state aide in total could have the potential to negatively impact Milton, which has few Charter School students.

Move: Walker

Second: Sheridan

Vote: 5-1-0 (Kelly opposed) to support MASC Resolution 3.

Resolution 4—Enactment of a Freeze on No Child Left Behind

Committee discussion centered on the fact that the law pushed school systems to focus on the achievement gap of those students who might otherwise fall through the cracks, and Mr. Walker expressed concern that freezing or deregulating “No Child Left Behind” would leave no guidelines. However, those in support of the resolution reiterated that “No Child Left Behind” represented yet another unfunded federal mandate. Ms. Bagley Jones moved to support the resolution.

Move: Bagley-Jones

Second: Sheridan

Vote: 3-3-0 (Walker, Keohane, Kelly opposed)

Resolution 5—State Educator Evaluation Process

Mr. Walker moved to support the spirit of the resolution, but recommended changes in the language to tone down the rhetoric.

Move: Walker

Second: Kelly

Vote: 6-0-0

Superintendent’s Evaluation

The Chair postponed taking a vote on his summary of the Superintendent’s Evaluation and requested that committee members review the document and send edits in time for the next meeting.

Ms. Sheridan wished to clarify that the process of evaluating the Superintendent’s performance is driven by the state’s Open Meeting law and not by the School Committee. The process, she stated, is not a choice, but a mandate.

Finance Subcommittee

School committee members discussed the budget process for FY13 and the tight timeframe to submit information to the Warrant Committee, which is holding its daylong meeting in early February. The committee members sought clarification as to 1) how much budget detail was required so early in the year and 2) whether or not developing a level-dollar budget was an efficient use of time, given the more optimistic news from the state, potential casino revenues, and potential local sources of new revenue from redesigning the employee health plan and the free cash fund.

Mr. Pavlicek recommended that the committee produce a general estimate of the impact of a level-dollar budget rather than a position-by-position breakout of budget reductions in the first round of budget deliberations. Per Ms. Kelly, the level-dollar scenario would necessitate \$1.75 million in cuts. In response to a question from Mr. Walker, she stated that salary increases account for \$1.6 million in the FY13 budget. Committee members expressed concern about the impact on staff morale by discussing specific personnel cuts so early in the school year.

Mr. Walker spoke about the obligation of the committee to be as specific as possible, communicating to staff and parents that this was a necessary process each year. The Warrant

Committee must take a conservative position given the uncertainty of future funding and unexpected contingencies. Ms. Bagley-Jones recommended that the Chair seek further direction from the Warrant Committee, and the Superintendent offered to meet with the Warrant Committee in the near term. Ms. Sheridan advocated waiting for a more realistic financial picture before going through the extensive exercise of developing a level-dollar budget. In the meantime, however, Ms. Gormley stated that the leadership would begin the tough work with the Finance Subcommittee.

The School Committee plans to meet November 17th to continue budget deliberations in public session. Ms. Kelly stated that the Finance Subcommittee Meetings are posted, although not all members are required to participate.

Ms. Bagley-Jones requested an update on the Banner fundraising program at a future School Committee meeting.

Health and Wellness Subcommittee

Ms. Bagley-Jones began her report by acknowledging the participants and community partnerships of the Health and Wellness Subcommittee. She stated that the goal of the committee was to support programs related to health and wellness in the schools at all grade levels. Last year's accomplishments included 1) a substance abuse program in collaboration with Dr. Knight, 2) a bullying prevention program under the leadership of Alan Cron, and 3) efforts to secure a grant for a mentoring program. Ms. Bagley-Jones stressed that budget cuts had stripped much of the health program over the years and stated she hoped to keep this important aspect of education on the front burner. This year the group has planned a number of initiatives:

- “Operation Eat Right” for third and fifth graders—a pilot program to be run in partnership with Milton Hospital at Cunningham School
- “The Great Body Shop” curriculum from Mr. Traister for the elementary grades
- Mentoring program from Dr. Arangio for eighth and ninth grades
- Survey of high school students about risky behaviors administered by the University of Massachusetts, which provides comparative data to other cities and towns in the country

Next Meeting Agenda Items

FY13 budget review

Mr. Pavlicek deferred the Executive Session to a later date and entertained a motion to adjourn the meeting.

Move: Sheridan

Second: Kelly

Vote: 6-0-0

The meeting ended at 10:15 P.M.