

Minutes of the School Committee Retreat
Superintendent's Conference Room
February 8, 2012

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

Not Present: Denis Keohane

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 February 8 meeting of the School Committee to order at 7:10 pm

Approve Agenda

The committee approved the agenda for February 8th.

The committee was meeting to review several School Committee policies as well as the Superintendent Goals, High School leadership plan and school budget timeline. The chairman informed the committee that he recently attended a meeting with officials from DESE and received a packet on how to evaluate principals, teachers and the superintendent as part of the "Race to the Top" requirements. Although Milton does not participate in Race to the Top, we may still be required to meet these new standards. Mr. Walker asked when Milton should adopt these new standards and Mr. Pavlicek said the 2012-2013 school year would be a good time. Ms. Bagley Jones thought we ought to start looking at it, perhaps begin to implement this standard.

Topic One: Policy AD, Educational Philosophy and Core Values

(Attachment) The policy begins with three paragraphs describing the philosophy of our district and goes on to list the five core values for the Milton Public School, which are:

High Academic Achievement for All Students
Excellence in the Classroom
Collaborative Relationships and Communication

Ms. Kelly asked if there was any way to reference our woodworking, auto-shop, etc. as part of introductory paragraphs. Mr. Pavlicek said the reference to "fine and applied arts," covers these subjects. Ms. Kelly also questioned the phrase "strongest possible programs in health, physical education and extracurricular activities." Mr. Pavlicek said this phrase refers to our values, not our goals. After some discussion about additions and deletions, the following wording was agreed to:

1. High academic achievement for all students

We expect high academic achievement from every student from Pre-Kindergarten through grade 12, in every subject area in every discipline -- High expectations, and the belief that every student can learn, are self-fulfilling. Our purpose is to have every child in our care reach his or her potential. Our schools therefore academically challenge all students to the best of their ability, both in the classroom and through homework and independent study. By participating in content-rich curriculum, our students will gain the ability to express ideas clearly, and to solve problems requiring skills in one or more disciplines.

Specifically, we will emphasize throughout the school careers of our students the critical skills of language -- oral and written -- in part through extensive and far-ranging reading. Equally, we will emphasize mathematics, science, technology, business, history and fine and applied arts.

Additionally, we support the strongest possible programs in health, physical education, and extracurricular activities, and community service, recognizing that these activities promote the social, emotional and physical well-being of our children, and help them reach their potential.

2. Excellence in teaching

There was some discussion of whether the wording of this core value should read "excellence in teaching," or "excellence in the classroom." The subsequent paragraphs remained unedited.

3. Collaborative relationships and communication

The Milton Public Schools strive for true collegiality among our educational community. We emphasize good communication: student to student; student to teacher; teacher to teacher; teacher to parent/guardian; school to school; and school system to parents/guardians and the community. This is the basis for effective education, and it is also the basis for strong community support. We are committed to working with all of

Milton's residents to strengthen their belief in public education, and to reinforce their commitment to our schools as a key ingredient in the quality of life in our town.

4. Respect for human differences

The Milton Public Schools continually seek to create an atmosphere in which every child and adult is valued. We acknowledge the differences among us and seek to build upon these differences as strengths; for the individual and the community.

Specifically, we will protect the rights and dignity of all individual groups at all times.

5. Innovation and risk-taking for education

The MPS remain open to new methods and practices for achieving excellence. Therefore, the MPS seek to recognize and reward members of the Milton Public School community who innovate successfully, and thereby enliven and strengthen the curriculum. Similarly, we continually seek to utilize technologies that may enhance the educational process. Finally, we commit ourselves to searching for new educational concepts wherever they may be found, to mounting sound educational experiments that may benefit our children, and to taking prudent risks that hold a strong potential to move our system forward."

The opinion was that this was first reading. It will show on the next meeting agenda as a Second Reading.

Topic Two: Policy ADA, School District Goals and Objectives

There was general agreement that this section needed to be re-worded. It was suggested that we strike the policy altogether, since it is the superintendent who sets the goals for the system. Ms. Sheridan suggested we word this policy as follows: "The goals of the MPS will be drafted by the superintendent on a bi-annual basis, as prescribed in the superintendent evaluation policy." She also suggested the formation of a policy called "preparation and approval of district goals." Ultimately, the chairman suggested this policy be tabled for a future meeting and Ms. Sheridan asked for the Policy Subcommittee to draft a policy. Later in the meeting Topic Two was revisited and there was consensus that one of the core values, "excellence in the classroom," should be changed to "excellence in teaching," since there is some discrepancy in some MPS publications. Ms. Gormley's opinion was that she would consider this and it should be further discussed at the second reading.

Topic Three: Superintendent's Goals for 2011-12.

Ms. Sheridan suggested that all three pages of this document be approved as submitted.

Move: Leroy Walker

Second: Lynda-Lee Sheridan

Vote: 5-0-0

At this point, Mr. Walker distributed a handout on potential goals/objectives for the School Committee for the 2012-2013 school year. They are as follows:

1. "Introduce a customer service standard that ensures every interaction between students and/or parents and members of the Milton school community (e.g., teachers, staff, coaches) is respectful, helpful and uplifting." Mr. Walker said he still gets reports about interactions between staff and parents where one party feels disrespected and/or not listened to.

2. "Articulate and Execute Closing the Achievement Gap strategies for the elementary, middle and high school levels that show positive, measurable results." Ms. Kelly was concerned that the phrase "closing the gap," might be controversial, since the public might think this means bringing the top down, not bringing the bottom up. Ms. Bagley Jones said there are so many ways to measure achievement, not just MCAS scores. She cited graduation rates, participation in extracurricular activities, AP enrollment, etc. Ms. Kelly said she would like the French/English and the co-taught programs looked at for data.

3. "Develop an 'Advancing the System' proposal that anticipates and addresses the MPS challenges and opportunities over a rolling three-year period." Mr. Walker explained that we should have a plan to restore services that have been cut over the years, on a rolling three-year schedule.

4. Develop a proposal that creates or strengthens elementary and middle school visual arts, music and physical education/athletic programs.

School committee member then discussed other potential goals Ms. Sheridan suggested that one goal should be to remove the administration from the business of school fundraising. The amount of time administrators spend on fundraising is huge and should be minimized. Ms. Bagley Jones then asked how fundraising would get done and who is going to drive it. Mr. Phelan added that the current infrastructure is unsustainable. One third of the athletic budget is currently funded by the taxpayer, the other two thirds

are funded by parents and fundraising. Ms. Sheridan said this is a worthwhile goal to pursue.

Topic Four: High School Leadership Plan/Principal Search

Ms. Gormley described the situation regarding the current principal at Milton High School, Dr. Joseph Arangio, who was hired as interim principal in the spring of 2011. The administration has posted this job and four qualified candidates have applied and have begun the interview process. If a qualified candidate is not found, the MPS will request a waiver from MTRB. Ms. Gormley asked for salary recommendations. Ms. Kelly asked how we are communicating to the public on the status of the MHS principal. Ms. Gormley explained that the Milton Public Schools are communicating with MTRB regarding Dr. Arangio's employment. The Milton Public Schools are in compliance with the state regulations on this topic.

Topic Five: Annual School Budget/Timeline

Mr. Pavlicek updated the committee on the work on the Warrant Committee and said that members may be asked for "on the spot" presentations. School Committee members then discussed the fact that Consolidated Facilities met last night to prepare for FY 13 Budget. Mr. Cichello was asked what budget additions, besides personnel, would be made. For example, would they be adding supplies, energy, discreet contracts or other items? Ms. Kelly said the School Committee's message should be clear. We can't be moving money in and out of the Consolidated Facilities Budget.

The Chair entertained a motion to adjourn the meeting

Move: Mr. Walker

Second: Ms. Kelly

Vote: 5-0-0

The meeting adjourned at 9:55 pm.