

Minutes of the School Committee  
Regular Meeting  
Milton High School Cable Access Studio  
Date: March 15, 2017

**Committee Present:** Leroy Walker, Chair, Dr. Kevin Donahue, Vice Chair, Kristan Bagley-Jones, Sheila Varela, Margaret Eberhardt, Dr. Elaine Craghead.

**Staff Present:** Mary Gormley, Superintendent of Schools; Glenn Pavlicek, Assistant Superintendent for Business, Janet Sheehan, Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Human Resources

### **Call to Order**

The Chair called the March 15th meeting of the School Committee to order at 6pm

The chair noted that this meeting was originally scheduled to be a joint meeting with the Warrant Committee. But, in light of the recent incident at Pierce Middle School, the School Committee felt there should be a community response. Asked Rabbi Benjamin, Milton Police Chief John King to join the School Committee at the table. Mr. Walker reminded the audience that, based on legal advice, one ground rule is that we cannot talk about the incident, details, response or any individuals involved.

### **Superintendent's Report**

Topic One: Pierce Middle School Incident. Ms. Gormley asked Dr. Spaulding to join the School Committee at the table. Rabbi Benjamin started the conversation by speaking about his idea to convene, "It's Time to Talk about Hate." This would be a community response with the goal of gathering leaders throughout Milton to create age-appropriate guidelines to discuss the swastika incidents at home. The tone would be to encourage civility and respect. Rabbi Benjamin reported that, in the past 48 hours, many town organizations have signed the letter, including both Little Leagues, St. Mary's School, the Board of Selectmen, the Town Moderator, etc. The Rabbi said he is looking forward to having all the PTOS involved.

Mr. Walker asked Chief King how the MPD could be of assistance. Chief King noted that any time we have a hate crime, it's important to realize that it doesn't just affect the one victim. It affects the whole community. There has been an uptick in hate crimes throughout the country, which are targeting certain groups. Chief King said there will be training for all staff. He offered the resources of the MPD to the schools. He also noted that there is a big difference between a hate crime committed by an 11 year old and an 18 year old. Both should be investigated, but the outcome should be different. There should be a school investigation and a police investigation simultaneously. With a hate crime within a school, there are possible outcomes, the criminal one and the school one. Chief King said he is encouraged to see a strong community response to this incident.

Dr. Karen Spaulding spoke next. She thanked the community members who were present. She noted that they have a positive power to re-frame and re-script these events, through the love,

compassion, and the desire to part of a community. Dr. Spaulding reached out the ADL after the first set of incidents. A group of PMS staff will be attending the ADL's annual conference. In addition the ADL will be sending representatives to the Pierce, to provide an overview of their peer leadership program. Pierce staff members will be attending a "summit" this summer for teachers and administrators facilitated by the ADL.. In addition, the Pierce has gathered a teacher/leader group named "We Are Pierce," to provide support. Dr. Spaulding has been working with Dr. Carlos Hoyt, a social worker with diversity training to help on issues of diversity. Dr. Spaulding is putting together a Professional Development string of experiences for next year and is working on ways of re-scripting and putting our best foot forward in terms of who we are. The Pierce Student Council has been working, as well -- building off the assemblies -- on what does it mean to be a member of the Pierce Community, and who are we?

Rabbi Benjamin, said on behalf of his congregation, he appreciates the way that the Milton Public Schools have reached out.

### **Citizen Speak:**

Karen Cousman spoke as the parent of 8th grader at PMS. She spoke about how accepting PMS is and said that her daughter's impression is that PMS embraces diversity and tolerance. Ms. Cousman would like to see something as simple as a vigil, which she thinks would send a really powerful message about what we believe in, what our community stands for and it's empowering for our kids.

Jenny Mulqueen, a Milton Public Schools parent, thanked Mary Gormley and Karen Spaulding. She said communications have been strong and swift and the response has been to scale. She said she is not proposing that we can entirely eradicate hate, and does not think it's the job of the MPS, she does believe the MPS has a role to play. Schools in our district are operating independently when it comes to cultural programs. Programs are reflective of the individual schools, rather than the district.

She suggested implementing unified and districtwide cultural and civil programs. She asked, how will the MPS engage students, staff and community in a ongoing town/school initiative?

Ms. Gormley thanked Rabbi Benjamin, Chief King and Dr. Spaulding. She said that Dr. Spaulding's remark about being "appalled and heartbroken," summarized how we all felt. She reiterated that the jewel of the MPS is its diversity. She said our students are the most fortunate students in the commonwealth because they have the sense of growing up in a diverse community. She said it's important for the community to know that Rabbi Benjamin and Chief King are the school's partners. Ms. Gormley said there is a meeting tomorrow afternoon with the DA and our principals and administrators about what is a hate crime.

Mr. Walker thanked Ms. Gormley. He said it's important to remind ourselves how fortunate we are. It has to do with the leadership we get from the administration.

Ms. Bagley Jones thanked the speakers for coming. She said Dr. Spaulding's comment about being heartbroken is very true. Parents want to know what's going on. The schools all have a handbook of discipline. There is a progressive discipline that happens and she wants to remind

parents that the schools are doing what we're supposed to be doing. She said she's interested in the prevention piece of this. W

Dr. Donahue said, as we look at this incident, there are two components. How we deal with this incident, and how we manage the fallout from it. He said he is pleased with what's happened so far. He would like to discuss in the future what policies we can put in place to prevent future incidents.

Ms. Varela said she was impressed with the response, and having the community support is valuable. This will be discussed all over town. Dr. Spaulding has put into place many action items and they are on the right track.

Dr. Craghead said that this incident shook her, not just because I am on the School Committee , not just because a large portion of my family is Jewish and some belong to the Congregation Beth Shalom of the Blue Hills, but because she is a resident of Milton. She spoke to the rabbi about the upcoming forum and wholeheartedly supports this.

Ms. Eberhardt echoed Dr. Spaulding's comments. She thinks this initiative will be very powerful. As a district, we can talk about how curriculum touches on these topics.

#### **Citizen Speak** (continued)

Jen Erbe Legget, a Milton Public Schools parent and a mental health professional said she sees a lot of anxious middle schoolers in her practice. She applauds every step that has been mentioned this evening and loves the idea of a vigil. The MPS does an exceptional job of promoting positive culture. She would like the schools to speak even louder about the positive. She would love to see Mr. Redden's "Kindness Campaign" spread to all the elementary schools and to the Pierce.

Mr. Walker moved to take an 8 minute recess while they switch and then reconvene with the Warrant Committee.

(minutes end here ... at 6:52pm.)