

# SCHOOL COMMITTEE

(Official Report)

Special Informal Meeting

Tuesday, January 26, 2010

Called for 6:00 p.m. in accordance with Chapter I, Section 3, of the Rules of the School Committee, for the purpose of a retreat to discuss communication and goals.

Members Present: Mr. Fantini, Mr. Harding, Mr. McGovern, Ms. Nolan, Ms. Tauber, Ms. Turkel,  
Councillor Reeves

Councillor Reeves in the Chair

Also Present: Superintendent Jeffrey Young, Deputy Superintendent Carolyn Turk, Chief Operating Officer James Maloney, Facilitator Glenn Koocher, MASC Executive Director

The Chair called the meeting to order at 6:12 p.m. and turned the meeting over to Mr. Koocher. Mr. Koocher gave a summary of the work done leading up to tonight and outlined the following goals for this retreat:

- Focus on the next few months leading to the vote on middle grade education and come up with some agreements of how to build a collaborative process that generates trust and consensus.
- Follow-up on work done by the previous Committee; presentation by the Superintendent on policy prior to a School Committee meeting; and to talk about how to proceed with any recommendation from the Superintendent.
- Review potential topics for upcoming retreats: trust, focus, priorities, goals, communication, operating principles, sub-committees, meetings and agendas.
- Preview of the February 2 presentation regarding middle grade education (Jeff Young).

Discussion took place around:

- The need for two extended retreats to get the business of the Committee done more efficiently and effectively
- Important issues that need to be done in this term, i.e. budget, Controlled Choice, middle grades, strategies for closing the achievement gaps.
- Goals vs. budget
- Shared priorities
- Need to have another retreat sooner rather than later
- Topics for future discussion, i.e. goals, budget, operations, model for subcommittees, general budget guidelines, broad topic areas for the next two years.

The Superintendent gave a preview of what the middle grades presentation will look like next week and said he is recommending option 3 of the following five:

1. Maintain existing structure, 11 K-8, one K-6
2. Eliminate K-8 and make K-5 with one or 2 middle schools
3. Hybrid, some K-8, some K-5 and one middle school for 450 students
4. Sister schools, i.e. geographic, etc.
5. Maintain K-8 model with fewer schools

The following questions, comments and concerns were raised:

- What process should be put in place
- What will it take for the School Committee to know the process was handled well
- Send the School Committee a written report in The Weekly explaining background including a section called "Problems we need to solve"
- Qualitative and quantitative feedback from surveys and teachers
- Existing assets we need to develop or build on
- We should not be running a two-tiered system some schools with mostly Black students and only 15 graduates
- Is there a reason that schools with 15 graduates are not doing as well as schools with 60
- Does maintaining K-8 structure include other changes
- What are key questions people have now
- What is the status of ISP in this process
- It will be too difficult to vote without specifics
- It is critical that school communities be involved
- Case has never been made and problems never described regarding middle grades
- Why do we need a big middle school
- Why 6-8 and why not 5-8
- If schools were centers of excellence, all Black classes would not be of concern
- Timeline is of concern because the change would come in an election year
- If we decide to do nothing, we need to explain the rationale
- During consolidation, nothing happened for some schools
- Superintendent needs to give School Committee some idea of what and why the change is
- Insure what the values are in making a recommendation
- Improvements were made at the high school – middle grades are our next job
- Need to be bold – there is a sense of urgency to move forward
- Is there a plan to figure out what schools will be what
- Think of ways for schools to have meaningful input so they know when and how to do it
- There needs to be balance between time for the change and buy-in from the community
- Keep children at the forefront of the conversation
- Look at the impact on diversity
- How will we deal with children stuck in the middle
- Address improvements that need to be made
- How will we as a Committee handle this
- Key question is what will happen in the next few months
- If the hybrid model doesn't involve closing a school, we will have 13 schools
- We do not want a magnet school
- Instill some measures to inhibit mass movement
- Develop a process for visiting schools
- Will Members attend school meetings with Superintendent
- There does not have to be winners and losers
- Community is upset when they think a decision has already been made – process has to be transparent
- Focus on positives rather than negatives
- Have dinners break into groups (World Café style)
- Need to get input from schools we do not hear from

The Superintendent will prepare and give to Members a schedule for school meetings.

On a motion by Mr. McGovern, seconded by Mr. Harding, it was voted to adjourn (8:50 p.m.)

Adjourned  
Marilyn Y. Bradshaw  
Executive Secretary to the School Committee