

SCHOOL COMMITTEE

(Official Report)

Special Informal Meeting

Tuesday, February 23, 2010

Called in accordance with Chapter I, section 3.2, of the Rules of the School Committee, for the purpose of a roundtable discussion on middle grades option #3.

Members Present: Mr. Fantini, Mr. Harding, Mr. McGovern, Ms. Nolan, Ms. Tauber, Ms. Turkel,
Mayor Maher

Mayor Maher in the Chair.

The Chair called the meeting to order at 6:15 p.m. and turned the meeting over to Superintendent Young.

The Superintendent detailed the process and timeline for meeting with school communities culminating with a city-wide school council meeting March 4. He will bring in a more detailed plan and answers to questions on option 3 April 6.

Ms. Turkel presented an alternative trial motion.

Members raised the following questions, comments and concerns:

- Concerned that the Superintendent will come up with one option on April 6 that the Committee could not vote
- We should let some of this play out before other options are presented
- Does not want to be faced with one fully developed option or “do nothing”
- Need to know what it will be if we don’t go with a middle school
- Need to be clear that some schools may change
- Consolidation was done to address small schools – since consolidation the district has lost 1000 students
- Feels uncomfortable putting all energy into one option
- If we don’t support the Superintendent’s proposal it won’t look good to the public
- What happens on April 6 if we decide this is not the way to go
- Need to respect the process
- Have other options been thought of
- Meeting on March 4 will yield other ideas
- Believe that option 3 is the best choice to improve students experience in school
- Once a plan is recommended for schools, reality will set in
- Making changes to our system without process is when the public feels they have not been heard
- Consolidation process had too many plans
- How does school community deal with three options
- Members need to agree that the option presented by the Superintendent is the best one
- Developing another option is not inconsistent with what was voted
- Whatever the options are cannot be focused on only the glitter of a new middle school
- Administrative time and resources should not be put into a middle school
- Look at achievement data for K-5
- Superintendent is in the best position to bring forward a sound educational recommendation
- Need to look at success for the system – too many schools in restructuring and too big an achievement gap
- Middle grades is the next big area that needs to be dealt with

- Schools can become charter schools or partner schools (innovative schools)
- We have too many buildings to support low enrollment
- Would like to see growth analysis for all schools
- There may be other options generated from school council meetings
- Are schools allowed to be creative
- Look at this not as a middle school plan but as an entire middle grades plan
- An unintended consequence could be what is one middle school going to do to other schools
- What will teaching structure look like in K5 schools
- Have no interest in putting struggling students in one building
- Are other options open as school councils meet
- Are schools being stymied
- Need to see what schools will look like if we do or do not reconfigure schools
- Are we comfortable leaving very small cohorts in schools
- Need to come up with something that works for all children
- Some models will be attractive to certain groups further contributing to imbalance
- Would like to see two plans – one with middle school, one without
- Need all school communities to feel good about any change
- Doing nothing is not acceptable – it does not solve the Haggerty issue nor two schools in one building
- If schools can be creative, it should be made known
- Need to insure that all schools will be taken care of
- In describing schools, what is the definition of “strong”
- Does not think people are saying they want to sign up for middle school
- If the middle school is not a magnet, why will people want to go there
- 7th and 8th graders were very excited about the possibility of a middle school
- Has similar attrition in middle grades been seen in other districts
- Need to trust that a plan will not be recommended that is not viable
- Is there time and room in the process for other options to be developed
- Need to have difficult discussion about race and class
- Have heard from a range of people interested in middle school
- If hybrid model is the way to go why aren't we doing it for everybody
- How do we pick who goes where
- Literature suggests that K-8 model is best for students who are most vulnerable
- Don't understand why Longfellow building would be an interim solution – it does not have an outdoor playground or an auditorium
- If we end up with 13 schools, the other 12 will be even smaller
- Why is 5-8 being proposed instead of 7-8
- Should K-5 be Arts or International Baccalaureate
- What will be done to insure a socially/emotionally healthy environment if we move to a middle school
- Need to see more evidence that middle school can serve the needs of 11-14 year olds better than a good strong K-8
- Need to hear what is going to happen in the day-to-day teaching
- ISP is a disservice to our system and should be ended
- Goal of ISP was to drive improvement in all schools
- ISP needs to be replaced with something that can give students a life-altering experience
- Need to have challenging materials in schools to make them better
- Insure that we are thoughtful about using teacher retirement to help maintain staff
- Need to find a place to consolidate special needs classes
- It is reasonable to close a few schools and keep K-8
- Let Committee know rationale for changes
- Invite staff from Simmons to share their experience with K-8 model

- Cannot take something away without giving something back
- Need to know there will be some instructional changes and how they will be measured
- Structures need to be put in place so teachers can meet regularly
- School of 450 is small but some of our schools are teeny
- Talking to parents of younger children is different from talking to parents of older children
- Insure that we do not set up a structure with de facto segregation
- Transition plan needs to be the same for everybody
- Need formal communication to schools re thinking creatively
- Need to see some versions of Option 3
- What will happen if Option 3 is not voted
- Superintendent should present recommendations he feels best
- Same values need to be incorporated if there is a second recommendation

The Chair thanked everyone for a productive discussion.

On a motion by Mr. Harding, seconded by Ms. Nolan, the meeting was adjourned (8:16 p.m.).

Adjourned
Marilyn Y. Bradshaw
Executive Secretary to the School Committee