

SCHOOL COMMITTEE

(Official Report)

Special Informal Meeting

Tuesday, April 24, 2007

Called in accordance with Chapter I, Section 3, of the Rules of the School Committee for the purpose of a roundtable discussion on Middle Schools.

Members Present: Mr. Fantini, Mr. Grassi, Mr. Harding, Ms. Nolan, Mr. Schuster, Ms. Walser,
Mayor Reeves

Mayor Reeves in the Chair.

A quorum of the School Committee being present, the Chair convened the meeting at 6:08 p.m. and turned it over to the Superintendent. The Superintendent and Maryann MacDonald walked members through the following Agenda:

1. Overview of the work of the Middle School Task Force
 - Background
 - Current Program Initiatives in Grades 6-8
 - Goals of the Task Force
 - Middle School Research and Best Practices
 - Summary of the Work to Date
 - Next Steps
2. Middle School Class Size
3. Thoughts on the Future Middle School Structure
4. Discussion

Mr. Fantini in the Chair.

The Superintendent asked members of the Task Force team to comment on their work. Barbara Boyle, Joellen Scannell, Tim Groves, Kathy Greeley, Vincent Mili, Joe Petner and Carolyn Turk were heard and the following five guiding principles for effective middle school programs in CPS were shared:

1. Rigorous and engaging curriculum - Provide a curriculum that is:
 - Rigorous with high expectations for all students
 - Developmentally responsive and relevant to students' lives
 - Integrated and exploratory
 - Based on MA Curriculum Frameworks & CPS Learning Expectations
 - Consistent across the schools
 - Guided by clearly articulated student proficiencies
 - Driven by assessment
2. Developmentally-appropriate instruction – Use research-based instructional practices designed to prepare all students to achieve high standards
3. Staffing and professional development – Staff the middle grades with teachers who are experts in adolescent development, academic content and best teaching practices and are committed to knowing the whole child. Support teachers through the development of

professional communities in which they work collaboratively toward student achievement and growth.

4. Safe and respectful school culture – Provide a safe and respectful school environment, free from bullying, in which healthy relationships and communication are fostered in order to improve academic performance and develop caring and competent citizens.
5. Strong Connections to families and the community – Work in partnership with families and communities to support student learning and development.

The Superintendent and staff responded to the following questions, comments and concerns:

- What is the middle school turnover compared to elementary and high school
- Looking at a 7-12 model, will 7th and 8th grades fit into 9th-12th
- Don't lose sight of outside factors like putting an 11-year old in class with a 19 year old
- Stay consistent with the Task Force and bring forth recommendations that are educationally sound
- Numbers are not there for middle school to work
- What is driving elementary school curriculum
- Form a Blue Ribbon commission to look at the next five years
- ISP needs to be done differently
- Allow the Task Force time to complete its process
- How can a 7-12 model work if 29% of our students have special needs
- College readiness begins in 7th grade
- How is effectiveness measured and defined – do we know how students do in high school and college
- Look at longer days
- High-performing schools require extracurricular activity
- Coordinate extracurricular activities city-wide to expand peer groups
- Be as inclusive as possible with our programs

Mayor Reeves in the Chair

- Complaints about middle schools have decreased
- Find out why parents are unhappy with middle schools – ask students
- There is a difference between changing grades and changing a school
- Make time for teachers to get together to know each other and their students
- Everyone is working hard – let's move from a good system to a great system
- There needs to be a transition from 5th grade to make students know they are moving on – a right of passage
- Re-examine the role of Principal and Vice Principal – they need to work effectively with Superintendent's Management Team
- Consider a model like the HSEP for middle schools
- We should not need to have Principle #4
- Having 7th and 8th grades at the high school will fly in the face of 8th grade graduation

The Members thanked the Superintendent and Task Force members for the presentation.

On a motion by Mr. Harding, seconded by Ms. Nolan, the meeting was adjourned (8:17 p.m.).

Adjourned
Marilyn Y. Bradshaw
Executive Secretary to the School Committee