



SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEETING

Wednesday, March 14, 2018

2nd Floor - Town Hall Auditorium

Date Approved/Released: 4/11/18

Date Approved/Hold: _____

School Committee Chair: [Signature]

1. **Call to order:** 6:00 pm/ Pledge of Allegiance

Present: Larry Murphy, Danielle LaPointe (arrived 6:02 pm), Dawn Fronte, Felicia Nurmsen, Greg Vine, Steve Haddad, Superintendent, Richard Ikonen, Business Manager

2. **Audio/Video Disclosure**

G. Vine moved to take Agenda Items 3 Student Representative Report & 4 Student/Staff Recognition out of order. Second by D. Fronte. Approved 4-0-0.

4. **Student Representative Report:**

5. Nicole Lemire reported that 19 Murdock Student Council members attended the Mass. Association of Student Councils on March 7-9. Almost 1,00 students from 86 high schools attended the 40th anniversary of the conference. Students attended a combination of workshops, key note addresses and social events. Alex Marshall, Michaela Benedict and Nicole Lemire presented a student workshop. The group received a Gold Council of Excellence Award, achieving 46 out of 50 points in 31 indicators. Murdock is also one of only 8 high schools in Massachusetts to receive the award. Students work all year on events in the school and community and submit evidence to be reviewed for consideration. Michaela Benedict, Nicole Lemire and Breanna St. Pierre received a Commonwealth Award for going above and beyond the norm with their efforts in the student council. The students participated in The Polar Plunge, a fundraiser for Mass. Special Olympics. The group won 1st Place for costumes, dressed as Noah and the animals, complete with an ark and the slogan "We NOAH thing or two about Inclusion". The council is holding an American Red Cross Blood Drive on Friday, March 16 from 8-1. There will be a Bottle & Can Drive on March 17th to benefit the Sophomore Class. G. Vine congratulated N. Lemire and the council members on their recognitions, noting very few districts are so honored.

6. **Student/Staff Recognition:**

Student of the Month for March 2018 – Pre-K – Jolee Brown; Memorial Grade 2 David Phillips, Toy Town Elementary Grade 5 Colton Cochran, Murdock Middle School Grade 6 Lauren Laprise, Murdock High School Grade 12 Molly Murphy, Murdock Academy for Success Grade 9 Joseph Bonaccolto. Blue Devil Cool Recognition: None

6:37 pm. G. Vine moved for a 5-minute recess. Second by D. Fronte. Approved 5 -0-0.

6:44 pm. Reconvened in Open Session.

3. Citizen Questions and/or Comments:

A parent group called Families for Empowering Education expressed deep concerns for the Summit program that was rolled out at Murdock Middle School (MMS) in September. They say the computer-driven program was introduced on the first day of school with no thought as to how it would be supported or whether it is an appropriate tool to address the challenges the school faces. Scott and Kimberly Gahagen, parents of 8th grade twins and a 4th grader, noted they had always spoken highly of the school system. Mrs. Gahagen stated the complaints voiced are not against the teaching staff. Nicholas Gahagen, an 8th grader at MMS, read a self-written statement, in which he referred to the students as guinea pigs in the new program, and asked the committee to take his concerns seriously. He stated the self-guided learning has the potential to place enormous amounts of stress on students, creating a constant mental and emotional battle to stay up to expectations. He gave examples of the negative affect the program has on student learning, including additional unhealthy time on a computer. He said the tool dominates every corner of the school day, yet does not satisfy every student.

Andy Spivey, parent of 8th grade student at MMS, noted his students' difficulty with the new learning platform and negative attitude about school.

Mr. Gahagen presented a PowerPoint presentation that outlined parents' concerns. The presentation included safety, privacy of student personal data, collected information of users, access to and quality of content, health concerns regarding screen time, and overall student well-being. Additional concerns were, insufficient or unavailable internet access, the amount of time needed after the school day to complete assignments, including vacations and missed extra-curricular activities, the lack of a late bus and the need for tutors.

Chad Dufour, parent of students in Kindergarten and 8th grade, suggested alternate teaching strategies to improve student learning and performance. He also noted that the program is out of alignment with the Massachusetts Frameworks and subjects on the MCAS are not included in the Summit Program Platform.

The parents voiced concern that their students are frustrated and unhappy at school, a big change from prior years. Some students are choosing not to continue their education at Murdock; parents fear the district will lose more students.

Mrs. Gahagen read the closing statement, noting she spoke not as an educator but a very concerned parent whose kids loved school and now do not want to go. She has heard the same feedback from other students, adding they are not happy and are not learning. The group has started a petition that calls for the suspension of the Summit Learning Platform: it has 100 signatures so far.

Renee Eldredge, parent of a 4th grade and an 8th grade student at MMS, voiced concerns about students who are on an IEP and questioned whether the research was thorough enough to rollout grade wise. She also noted that she supports the schools and thinks very highly of administration and staff. L. Murphy thanked the speakers. He acknowledged that the program did not roll out as smoothly as hoped and planned. He urged parents to work with the teachers and the principal to improve things for the students and to help them succeed. The matter will be included in

future meetings. J. Vezina, Principal and middle school staff will meet with parents and students upon request. Concerns about the incoming 6th graders were noted. There are no immediate plans to introduce the program into the high school. F. Nurmsen thanked the parents for the work they put into the presentation and bringing forth this information.

6. **Teaching and Learning Highlights:** Footsteps2Brilliance presentation of Kick Off –Suzanne Michele and Nicole Cormier. S. Michele reported that several parents from the Special Education Advisory council planned to attend tonight but were unable to. They approached her to discuss ways to increase inclusion with regards to students with disabilities across the district and in the community. Teachers and parents formed an Awareness Planning Committee to educate the public about students with different abilities. S. Michele acknowledged Sam Oliveira, Pam Smith, Deborah Vaughan, Jennifer Haddad, Nicole Cormier and herself as group members. She noted that March is Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities Month. March 21st is Down Syndrome Day, April 2nd is Autism Recognition Day and May 21st is Cystic Fibrosis Awareness Day.

Nicole Cormier noted the group wants to include any of the student population who wants to be included for their Different Abilities next year. She stressed that inclusion is the most positive and beneficial thing for our schools and community. Information and events will be shared over social media. The group hopes to expand the program to encompass March 2019. F. Nurmsen offered free staff training and to share her resources.

There will be a Literacy Night on March 29th at Memorial School targeting ages 2 to grade 3 and all families are invited. The Footsteps2Brilliance program will be launched that night. She shared an application for that age group designed to build vocabulary and literacy skills and creates a quality 15-minute parent and child interaction. The School Committee was invited to attend. S. Michele reviewed the April, 2018 Brain Building calendar that offers activities and gives parents and care givers great resources. The calendar is available online using the hyperlinks. S. Michel explained the Community Passport program that encourages students to get involved with and to know about their community. The School Committee commended all for a job well done.

7. **New Business:**

a. **Director of Pupil Services search begins:**

The Search Committee will meet tomorrow, March 15, 2018 and G. Vine is the School Committee representative and chair the committee. S. Haddad reviewed the search process; first the search committee will review all candidates together using the documents submitted. Then the search committee will narrow down to the top four candidates and schedule interviews with the entire search committee. After the interviewing of the four candidates the search committee will choose the two finalists and bring them forward for the Superintendent to interview. The Superintendent will choose the final candidate to bring forward to the School Committee to approve. He hopes to introduce the chosen candidate at the March 28th Budget Public Hearing. D. LaPointe noted the current Director Kristina Mecelicaite is leaving the district due to her husband's incredible job opportunity in another country.

8. Consent Agenda:

- a. Minutes - Regular Meeting February 14, 2018
- b. Minutes - Special Meeting February 22, 2018

D. Fronte moved to approve/ accept the corrected March 14th, 5:15 pm emailed version. Second by G. Vine. Approved 5-0-0.

9. Superintendent/Business Office Report:

S. Haddad read a statement he had sent to the staff on February 15th about the Parkland, Florida school shooting. He reported that about 120 Murdock Middle School and Murdock High School students participated in the nationwide walk out today to honor the 17 victims. It was a peaceful and positive event. He also reviewed what the district has done using the ALICE Program, to prepare students and staff in the event of a similar solution in any of the schools, adding he wanted parents to be aware. Police cruisers have access to the school cameras when responding to any emergency at the schools. G. Vine congratulated the students for having the social, civic and political awareness to take part in the walk-out today, adding it brings focus to issues that have been too long ignored. He stated “They deserve credit for doing it peacefully and without incident”. F. Nurmsen thanked the administration for supporting the students and allowing them to act without repercussions, for being there and supporting them and having those discussions. L. Murphy noted it is a great civics lesson. D. LaPointe stated she would like to say in addition to, not instead of, noting the power of words. This civic engagement is part of the students’ education and what they need to be supported in. Committee members commended the students for standing up with their peers.

- a. Superintendent Evaluation: Neither the Superintendent nor the committee members had brought a copy of it. L. Murphy noted he compiled the committee member’s comments; S. Haddad received a proficient from the majority of the board in all areas. There were also some ‘needs improvement’ items. L. Murphy has reviewed it with S. Haddad.

S. Haddad reported the teacher negotiations are ongoing and are very close to a tentative agreement. L. Murphy noted the negotiations sub-committee hammered out language and financial matters. He added, “it’s been tough at times and we have a good deal on the table”. G. Vine stated they met the goals the committee laid out going into the negotiations. L. Murphy added it will be good for teachers and allows the district to move the 5-year plan forward.

S. Haddad reported the search for the Director of Pupil Services is ongoing; he hopes to introduce the chosen applicant at the April 11th meeting.

There will be a Public Hearing on Wednesday, March 28th at 6:00 pm to present the proposed 2018-2019 budget to the School Committee. The approved budget will then be presented to the Finance Committee at a date to be determined later.

R. Ikonen provided the year to date figures and the negative balances will be resolved when the encumbrances are satisfied. R. Ikonen will be providing cliff notes for the Joint Meeting of the Board of Selectmen, Audit Committee and Finance Committee on Monday, March 19th. Many of the identified items have already been addressed and he will continue to correct line items that have been troublesome. R. Ikonen has worked with the Town Manager and the Town Accountant to review the audit line by line and each of the items will be addressed as they become identified. L. Murphy commended R. Ikonen on his work with the negotiations and determining the financial impact of the proposals.

10. Sub Committee Report: None

D. Fronte announced that the Winchendon Drug Task Force will make a presentation on March 29th at The Winchendon School and there will also be a Murdock High School assembly/presentation that afternoon.

11. Old Business:

a. Principal Search Completed:

S. Haddad introduced Thaddeus King as the new Murdock High School Principal. He reviewed T. King's academic and professional history. T. King stated this move was a family decision and he wanted to come to a community where education is as important to parents as it is to him. He is looking forward to the transition to a smaller district, noting the magnitude is greater in a small district. He is working on a transitions plan with S. Haddad. L. Murphy noted T. King turned the alternative school he worked in around. T. King acknowledged the importance of understanding the data that is presented.

12. Future Agenda Items:

- a. Policy BHC School Committee & Staff Communications
- b. School Committee Day Meeting Schedule Retreat Agenda
- c. FLLAC & CAPS Reports

13. Committee Member Comments:

G. Vine noted the Day on the Hill is April 25, 2018; he urged committee members to attend if possible. D. LaPointe thanked the parent group and teacher group for talking, noting her high excelling 7th grader has struggled but adapted. Her incoming 6th grader is not the same person and she feels he will struggle. She stressed the balancing act required as the district strives to educate every student. She made assurances that the comments and opinions were heard and will be acted on, adding the roll-out could have been slower and better communicated. D. Fronte noted there will be a Blood Drive at MHS on Friday, March 16th and a Bottle & Can Drive on Saturday, March 17th. The Tri-Board and Audit Committee Meeting is Monday, March 19th. F. Nurmsen noted her daughter hated Summit but has turned a corner, has adapted and does enjoy some of the learning activities. She added more parents need to be involved and advocate for their children's' education. She urged parents to

fill out papers for the vacant school committee seat(s). She has immense respect for MMS Principal J. Vezina and the teachers for having the courage to take the chance on a new learning program.

L. Murphy echoed the above sentiments, noting it was great to see parents take such an active interest. He praised the administration and staff for being open to suggestions and are keenly aware they need to make some significant changes. He commended the many great things going on, and wishes the committee could acknowledge more. F. Nurmsen noted there are 42 students in Murdock Academy now. G. Vine seriously stated it would be nice if parents also came to express enthusiasm when things are going well.

14. Executive Session: None

15. Adjournment: 8:30 pm. G. Vine moved to adjourn. Second by D. Fronte.
Approved 5-0-0.

Respectfully submitted: Barrie E. Martins, School Committee Recording Secretary