



Winchendon Public Schools

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School Committee Chair: _____

WINCHENDON TOWN CLERK
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School Committee Meeting

March 2, 2023 - 6:00 pm

Town Hall, 2nd Floor Auditorium

Attendance:

Ryan Forsythe, Chair; Greg Vine, Vice Chair; Larry Murphy; Alicia Jordan (by telephone);
Angelina Dellasanta, Student Representative; Thad King, Superintendent; Amanda Babinski,
Director of Finance & Operations

1. Call to order

2. Pledge of Allegiance

R. Forsythe reads audio visual disclosure.

3. Public Comment: None

4. Student Representative Report:

A. Dellasanta presents district wide student related updates. March 8-9 will be half days for parent-teacher conferences. No school on March 10 for professional development. March 29 will be a half day for professional development. Murdock senior, Tiana Graessle will be performing at the Massachusetts Music Educators Association 2023 All State Festival at Boston Symphony Hall on March 4 at 1pm. Tiana placed in the top 25% of all 106 sopranos who auditioned. Murdock High School Student Council Delegation will be attending the Mass Association of Student Council's annual conference from March 8-10, where they will partake in the Polar Plunge for Special Olympics. Donations can be made to the team at fundraise.specialolympicsma.org. The annual Tournament of Plays will be rehearsing to perform in the competition for best play. Tickets will be available starting next week for any cast member on Friday, March 31. Two students from MHS will attend Student Government Day at the Statehouse, when delegates participate in different legislative sessions with students acting as senators, representatives and the governor. A bottle and can drive benefiting the Dominican Republic Service Trip will take place on March 18. March 31, Toy Town Elementary will hold a talent show for elementary students grades 3-5. The Boys Co-op hockey team was eliminated in the 2nd round of the tournament last night in the State Divisional meet. Sophomore Avery Murphy broke the school record and placed 2nd in the one mile run and 4th in the two mile run in the all state track meet. She finished 18th in the state after qualifying for the two mile 400m and 800m. She will head to nationals on March 12. March 15, middle school cheerleading will be showcasing their routine from their undefeated season. Spring sports registration is now open. Practices begin on March 20; times will be announced at a later date.

5. Consent Agenda:

a. Minutes:

L. Murphy moves to approve the minutes for the January 19 meeting. Seconded by G. Vine. Vote is unanimous.

6. Superintendent's Report:

a. Budget Update

A. Babinski presents monthly budget report and MUNIS report through March 1. The expense and salary transfers that were presented to the committee at the last meeting were done, so the available budget as forecasted through the end of the year can be more clearly seen. There are significantly fewer negative balances. The forecasted salaries through the end of the year have been encumbered. R. Forsythe asks if the adjustments were made with town hall. Ms. Babinski explains that the requests were sent to town hall, but they are not reflected in the MUNIS report yet. G. Vine asks for clarification on the encumbrances under the MHS Assistant Principal salary line. Ms. Babinski explains that the encumbrance is obligated but it has not been paid out yet. T. King adds that when you see those numbers in the encumbrance, it is considered spent.

Ms. Babinski presents the FY24 Budget Overview. Changes to the FY24 budget will be made to reorganize it according to the chart of accounts, which will make it tell a story and allow the committee to analyze it by data. Winchendon is going to see a benefit from the Student Opportunity Act. Ms. Babinski briefly explains the SOA, stating that it was formed for communities such as Winchendon who rely heavily on Chapter 70, whose foundation budgets are not meeting student needs. T. King explains there is no vote tonight, but the district wants to give the committee a high level overview so it can be prepared two weeks from now, when they give an actual full budget presentation. G. Vine asks about ESSER funds. Ms. Babinski confirms ESSER funds are ending. Discussion is had regarding the trust funds from the Robinson-Broadhurst Foundation and Murdock Trust. L. Murphy asks for clarification about the trust funds and whether they will be used for supplies. Ms. Babinski explains that it will be used for student enrichment. R. Forsythe asks for clarification on the Circuit Breaker increase and the decrease in School Choice Allocation for FY24. Ms. Babinski explains that it is based on our Cherry Sheet estimate. Both sending and receiving School Choice numbers were down significantly this year. T. King adds that it is good news that we are not sending as many students out of district, but we are also not receiving as many as we have in the past. Ms. Babinski states the out of district tuition went up significantly; the reimbursement rate went up slightly, depending on how the district is compliant filing its claim. We are able to use collaboratives, which keeps the tuition lower, but it also means that our claim for Circuit Breaker is also lower, so some reimbursement rates are based on whether students are going to collaboratives or private schools. She believes last year, it was about \$42,000, so if we spend more than that to educate a student, that amount goes towards our Circuit Breaker claim and we would receive a portion of that back as reimbursement. T. King adds that we might spend \$60,000 on a student's tuition for the year at a Co-op as opposed to a private school. He explains that we still have ESSER funds to use, but they are not new funds for FY24.

b. District Reorganization Update:

T. King explains that due to February break, the steering committees did not meet last week, but Monday several of the committees did meet. The primary piece they worked on was planning

building tours and room placement. The district will still have a timeline that will be going out; we will begin ordering boxes and packing supplies to meet those April deadlines.

c. Data Presentations - Memorial School; Murdock Middle School

Principal, Chante Jillson approaches to give Memorial School data presentation. DIBELS is the primary assessment that is used at Memorial to figure out where our students are at for supporting reading interventions. STAR is also used. DIBELS stands for Dynamic Indicator of Basic Early Literacy Skills, and it measures letter naming, phonemic awareness, letter sounds decoding, word reading, reading accuracy and reading fluency. All those are combined to give a composite score. At the beginning of the year, 87% of Kindergarten students were below or well below benchmark. The amount of work that our Kindergarten teachers and students are doing this year is substantially more. 19 students have now moved out of well below. 13% of those moved into benchmark. First grade is also making progress. In the beginning of the year, 65% of first graders were well below or below. Now, mid-year we have moved 26% of students out of well below and 1% out of below. 14% are into benchmark, and 11 into above benchmark, showing a 15% difference overall. STAR literacy measures some of the state standards, like comprehension, numeracy and foundational skills. The two assessments come together to present a photo of each student's skill base. Second grade is trending in a similar way, with some moving out of the red, 70% of the students according to DIBELS are at or above benchmark. Some of our second graders who are identified as learning challenged are not ready to take the STAR because they are not yet reading. G. Vine asks how these numbers compare to those before COVID. T. King states that we do have historic data around DIBELS but not with STAR, but we can dig up the DIBELS scores. G. Vine comments that we are truly seeing the need for the initiative that the district is starting with the Early Literacy Center because it is scary the kids are coming in that unprepared, even for Kindergarten. T. King replies that the district was aware that Kindergarteners had been behind as a result of COVID, and it needs to be addressed. The teachers at Memorial are working very hard, but the district wants to put a tighter focus on the early literacy piece. L. Murphy asks what kind of programming and assessments will be done at the Early Literacy Program. T. King explains that is still being discussed in the steering committees, but one of the things the district will focus on is ensuring we are aligned all the way up. R. Forsythe asks how these numbers compare with national data. Mrs. Jillson replies that the district does not set the benchmarks but instead uses the benchmarks set by the programs.

Director of Curriculum, Dr. Jonathan Landman approaches to give Murdock Middle School data presentation, noting that there has been improvement between the fall and winter. Sixth and seventh grade look relatively flat, but the number of students not meeting expectations went from 18% to 12%. L. Murphy questions whether the middle school students will be prepared for high school based on these numbers and if we know how ninth grade students are faring. Mrs. Rondeau approaches and reminds the committee that ninth grade students will be retested due to a power outage that occurred during their testing, as well as the teacher being out for a funeral. Discussion is had regarding when the data from the retesting of the ninth graders will be presented to the committee. G. Vine asks for explanation of the term "partially meeting expectations." Dr. Landman explains that these phrases were introduced by the state years ago and addressed four categories but they wanted to try and present in a positive spin that students needed improvement. Discussion is had regarding the phrasing. Dr. Landman discusses math outcomes, which appear more positive, but we are not moving students to the exceeding zone. Discussion is had regarding Project Lead the Way.

d. **ELA Curriculum Adoption Update:**

Dr. Landman discusses the previously proposed new ELA curriculum adoption for the district. It was determined that it is not a good time to roll out a new curriculum this year. Lengthy discussion is had regarding the decision and how the district plans to improve instruction and then bring in new curriculum without the expectation that the instruction will change again. The district is currently working with a contracted specialist to ensure vertical alignment across key standards. She has been modeling the process for the district and helping the district learn to do this well. Orton Gillingham has also been contracted to bring in a real evidence-based approach to foundational skills instruction. A lot of time was spent figuring out what screening assessments should be used for each tier to ensure students are getting all of the skills they need.

R. Forsythe asks for clarification on SRSD and the next steps. Dr. Landman explains SRSD as a scientifically proven approach to writing that helps students self regulate how they are feeling about their writing and talking about it, analyzing their own practice, setting goals for themselves and monitoring their progress toward those goals.

7. Subcommittee Reports:

a. **Joint Committee on Cost/Revenue Sharing:**

T. King explains the committee's most recent discussions regarding personnel sharing to improve efficiencies district and town wide. There is still some work to be done on the revenue sharing topic, but the committee is looking at several alternatives.

b. **Calendar Committee:**

L. Murphy states the calendar is almost done. A few new recommendations have been made that need to be reviewed as a committee, and hopefully the school committee will be able to vote on it at the next meeting.

R. Forsythe states the policy subcommittee will meet on March 17.

8. New Business:

a. **Murdock High School Program of Studies:**

Principal, Mary Jane Rickson presents changes to the MHS Program of Studies. Two new classes are added, including the History of Film and the History of Hip Hop. The foundations classes were deleted because the district wishes to increase rigor. Graphic Communications is gone, but when Mr. Collins came, he brought the Blue Devil Weekly which fits the standards a little better. A few new pieces of literature will be introduced as well. A Sports Management class will be added. L. Murphy asks what freshmen will take for social studies. Mrs. Rickson explains that students take World History, United States History 1 and United States History 2, then the rest of the histories are electives. L. Murphy asks if there is advanced placement. Mrs. Rickson states there is an AP history. L. Murphy asks what happened to Civics. Mrs. Rickson explains that Civics is embedded in the actual curriculum. R. Forsythe comments that the foundations courses can be detrimental to a high school student's transcripts as they are considering undergraduate and graduate admission, so he is glad to see the removal of those courses. Discussion is had regarding the embedding of Civics into the curriculum. L. Murphy has concerns about the lack of teaching students Civics and Financial Literacy. He would not support Sports Management unless it could be fit in with Civics and Financial Literacy. T. King explains that Sports Management is an elective course, and Murdock High School still has the graduation requirements that were discussed and agreed upon by the committee in a previous meeting. The high school does offer a personal finance class. DESE has made changes to actual Civics requirements across the state, and one of those

requirements is that Civics is a required course in eighth grade. The others require that Civics be incorporated into other course work, and the district is following DESE guidelines in that regard.

9. Old Business: None

10. Future Agenda Items:

- a. Calendar Committee Update
- b. MASC Conference Review
- c. Cost/Revenue Share Update

11. Closing Comments:

L. Murphy thanks everyone for their presentations and all the hard work that was done.

12. Executive Session: The Winchendon Public Schools' School Committee will meet in Executive Session under M.G.L. Ch. 30, Sec. 20 (3) to conduct strategy sessions in preparation for negotiations with nonunion personnel or to conduct collective bargaining sessions or contract negotiations with nonunion personnel.

G. Vine moves to enter executive session to conduct strategy sessions in preparation for negotiations with nonunion personnel or to conduct collective bargaining sessions or contract negotiations with nonunion personnel and to adjourn from Executive Session. Seconded by L. Murphy. Vote is unanimous.

13. Adjournment:

Meeting adjourned from Executive Session.

Respectfully Submitted: Liz Latoria
Liz Latoria, Executive Assistant to the Superintendent

Documents Attached: None