



Winchendon Public Schools

Date Approved/Released: 6/1/23

Date Approved/Hold: _____

School Committee Chair: _____

WINCHENDON TOWN CLERK
RCUD JUN 5 2023 AM 10:41

School Committee Meeting

April 27, 2023 - 6:00 pm

Town Hall, 4th Floor Conference Room

Attendance:

Ryan Forsythe, Chair; Greg Vine, Vice Chair; Larry Murphy; Alicia Jordan; Karen Kast-McBride; 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:

R. Forsythe explains the rules associated with public comment. Anyone can address the school committee during public comment, up to two times, and comments can be related to anything on the school committee's agenda. Comments must be limited to three minutes, and the chair does have the authority to stop public comment at any time or ask individuals to cease their comments to allow someone else to speak.

A parent approaches to address the committee, sharing concerns surrounding the Director of Pupil Services and the testing that was conducted which she felt did not fully evaluate her child's writing ability. As a result of this testing, it was determined that her child did not qualify for an IEP or special education services. Parent shares concerns surrounding the district's lack of communication and the absence of principal, Mrs. Vezina.

Chair reminds members of the audience that public comment must be related to items on the agenda.

A parent approaches to address the committee, sharing concerns about her experience with the Special Education Department's handling of her child's IEP and the building principal's refusal to hold her child back at her request last school year. Concerns are shared regarding the number of families who School Choice their children out of the district.

Chair reminds members of the audience that public comment must be related to items on the agenda.

A parent approaches, sharing concerns regarding the lack of communication she has received from the district over multiple years. She discusses the absence of principal, Mrs. Vezina and why she believes Mrs. Vezina is an asset to the district. Concerns are discussed regarding her child being denied an IEP and issues with the Director of Pupil Services. She states that an advocate and an attorney have been hired and there are plans to file a lawsuit due to the middle school principal's absence, the school not offering support for students' needs and lack of communication from the superintendent.

A student approaches with concerns about teachers leaving the district and that Mrs. Vezina is gone and cannot respond to emails, that students are struggling without her.

G. Vine commends student for their courage in coming forward.

A parent approaches with concerns regarding a breakdown within the special education department, including timeline violations and students being denied access to IEPs, forcing families to consult with attorneys. Concerns are shared regarding the number of complaints that have been filed with the Department of Education and lawsuits filed. Parent addresses concerns regarding the absence of principal, Mrs. Vezina and the lack of communication from the district regarding her absence and concerns about the removal of Summit from the middle school. Parent presents a petition to bring Mrs. Vezina back, signed primarily by students. Parent discusses concerns that damages from lawsuits will fall back on the taxpayers of the town.

A member of the community approaches to address the Superintendent. Chair reminds audience that the Superintendent is not authorized to respond during public comment. Community member shares concerns regarding how the Superintendent is going to address the parent concerns brought forth.

Community member approaches with concerns regarding the mini-split system that is proposed to be implemented at Toy Town, as well as concerns regarding the playground equipment and its age appropriateness for each school building.

Chair thanks everyone for their comments, explaining the school committee's role as well as the scope of their ability to encourage action within the schools.

K. Kast-McBride thanks the parents and student for speaking, letting them know that they were heard.

G. Vine reiterates that the committee does care and the speakers have been heard.

A. Jordan thanks the speakers for sharing information and perspective.

L. Murphy commends the speakers for their courage and for sharing their concerns.

A. Dellasanta comments on the importance of sharing opinions and experiences and addressing the committee, also addressing the student who spoke, commending their courage and thanking

them for their perspective.

4. Consent Agenda:

a. Minutes:

R. Forsythe presents consent agenda. L. Murphy moves to approve the minutes of March 16, 2023 as presented. Seconded by G. Vine. Vote is unanimous.

b. Field Trip Request:

G. Vine moves to approve the PreK field trip to Troy, New Hampshire as presented. Seconded by L. Murphy. Vote is unanimous.

5. Superintendent's Report:

a. District Reorganization Update:

T. King provides updates on the district reorganization, first addressing concerns brought forth by Mr. Barbaro. The steering committees have not been meeting recently, but work is being done and deadlines are being met in the process. The bins for disposing of outdated materials were delivered on pallets to the buildings today. The WTA requested an early disbursement of assignment letters for next school year, and those were distributed to all staff before spring break. Room assignments will be sent out soon. The HVAC grant is explained as the funding source for the proposed mini-splits for Toy Town.

A. Babinski explains the HVAC grant eligibility and allocation, which for Winchendon Public Schools is around \$260,000 for air quality improvements. The grant goes until 2027. The process of requesting funds is explained, as well as rebate guarantees from utility providers and the way the units work in the buildings, feeding anywhere from 4, 8 or 12 classrooms from one unit.

G. Vine asks for details on the timeline for the mini-splits. Ms. Babinski explains the district's goal of having the system running from the start of next school year. T. King explains the air exchange at Toy Town and the upgrades that were done during the COVID-19 pandemic, and the proposed upgrades will compliment the system that was installed at that time. A. Babinski explains that the HVAC grant is similar to the ESSER funding, but it is specific to air quality improvement.

T. King continues with details surrounding the cost of moving for the reorganization. During COVID, the district was forced to pack up the Toy Town building and move it to Murdock. The cost was just under \$8,000. For the reorganization, the district has conservatively estimated \$30,000 for the cost of the move, including boxes and moving. Discussion is had regarding contacting moving companies and the number of boxes per teacher that the district is estimating. T. King goes on to give details surrounding the playgrounds at each building. The ESSER III grant has funds reserved for playground equipment and installation in the amount of \$400,000. Equipment for younger children will be placed at Toy Town. Details are provided on the playgrounds at Memorial and the district's plan for looking at height of the equipment and student access. Those playgrounds at Memorial are the same heights, so the district will not move that playground equipment.

Ms. Babinski explains the process the district is using in creating a plan for investing in a playground for early childhood, including exploring what other districts have done. G. Vine asks if the district is looking at cameras for the playground area. T. King explains the district evaluates this every year by examining where the holes are with exterior cameras and adding where needed. K. Kast-McBride asks for clarification on timelines and if the district should look at pushing this back until the fall. T. King clarifies that the window of time for work is not going to change; it will always be from the last day of school, regardless of what year the project will begin.

6. Student Representative Report:

A. Dellasanta provides updates on student activities in the district. April 29, the Memorial/Toy Town PTO will hold a Spring Fling vendor fair at Memorial. May 1 is our annual town election. May 3 & 10 are Pre-K Screenings. May 3 is the grade 3 field trip to the Hanover Theater. May 8-12 is Teacher Appreciation Week. May 16 is Scholars Dinner for Murdock High students. May 17 is a half day. May 19 is prom. May 26 is Special Olympics, and May 29 there is no school due to Memorial Day. May 30, 31 are senior finals. May 31 and June 1 are Kindergarten Screenings. June 1 is class day, and June 4 is graduation. Details on Pre-K screenings are provided. High School Student Council was awarded the National Gold Council of Excellence for its 9th consecutive year. Travel Club just returned from Italy; details of the trip are provided. Details on prom tickets are provided. The District Attorney presented Murdock High School with a check for \$1,375 that will help offset the cost of prom. The Murdock High School honor roll breakfast will be May 2. Updates are provided on Murdock sports teams.

7. Subcommittee Reports:

R. Forsythe provides updates on the Policy Subcommittee. The Subcommittee is delayed in getting out the information on policy changes for the committee to review. Updates from the MASC will be translated into Winchendon policies. Three policy revisions and one new policy are coming from school administration.

8. New Business:

a. Student Opportunity Act Update:

R. Forsythe defines the Student Opportunity Act; WPS is a beneficiary of SOA, which was approved by state legislature based on a threat of a lawsuit by another district against the state of Massachusetts; the SOA was created to provide equitable access to students in economically disadvantaged communities, for students with disabilities, and English language learners. T. King provides history and details of SOA within the district. Presentation shows the investment of SOA funds into early literacy initiatives for the district, including grade 2 phonics programs. DIBELS scores are explained as progress monitoring for the district. Students are also being assessed using Renaissance, looking at where they are as readers. The dual enrollment program for early college enrollment is discussed. In examining why a dual enrollment program would not work, it was determined that students did not have transportation to attend the program, so an in-house dual enrollment program was created. Since then, students who participate in the program usually graduate high school with around 19 college credits. The district also hired two additional grade level teachers at early literacy grades and additional allied artists to allow for more robust common planning time and data analysis and an elementary math coach to complement our math program and additional special education administrators. A. Babinski adds details regarding the recording features which correlate back to the budgeting process last year. T. King discusses early literacy in the press nationally and details on the science of

reading.

A. Jordan asks if the district is tracking to any college placement or career placement or just for the coach. T. King responds that the district tracks four year placement and two year placement as well as persistence rate, but the numbers are not reliable because we have every student in terms of alternative pathways. He discusses certificate programs that are going to be offered through MWCC to complement our dual enrollment program. Full details are on the MWCC website, but the offerings will include programs such as CNA, EMT, phlebotomy, other allied healthcare options. This program will allow students to graduate either with a certificate in their chosen field or very close to having a certification and will give students access to vocational programs.

K. Kast-McBride asks for clarification on the slide that says Special Education Administrators at \$192,000. A. Babinski explains that this is referencing the addition of an assistant special education director and assessment coordinator, as well as professional oversight and administration in the curriculum department.

R. Forsythe explains the difference between regular grants the school district receives, which prohibit them from hiring staff due to the temporary nature of grant funding, versus SOA, which is not a grant, not time bound, and continues indefinitely. SOA has given the district the ability to add those additional positions previously discussed.

9. Old Business: None

10. Future Agenda Items:

- a. Special Education Presentation
- b. Monty Tech Local Graduate Recognition
- c. Conditions for Learning Survey Results
- d. Update on District Complaints and Lawsuits

11. Executive Session:

L. Murphy moves to table Executive Session until May 4, 2023. Seconded by G. Vine. Discussion is opened. G. Vine asks why tabling is needed. Chair explains there are no items to discuss requiring Executive Session. K. Kast-McBride states she will not be available to attend the May 4 meeting. Chair asks L. Murphy to change his motion to a future date, not specifically May 4. L. Murphy rescinds previous motion and moves to table Executive Session until a more appropriate meeting is available. Seconded by G. Vine. Vote is unanimous.

12. Closing Comments:

K. Kast-McBride thanks everyone for being there tonight and bringing their concerns to the committee. She assures them they were heard.

L. Murphy thanks the public for attending and congratulates the students of student council and National Honor Society. He is happy the Special Olympics are returning to Murdock as it is a big honor.

G. Vine echoes other members, thanking the public for attending and expressing their concerns. He would love to see this many people at other meetings, even when things are going well. He invites the public to contact the committee via email if they have concerns that need to be addressed. He wishes the district reorganization could be called something else as it is truly about the expansion of an early literacy program. He believes the program is too important to delay.

A. Jordan appreciates all the information and people stepping forward.

R. Forsythe appreciates everyone who came whether they addressed the committee or not. Receiving information in a timely manner so they can act on it is helpful. The committee is not permitted to respond to posts on social media as they must follow open meeting law. Monday is the town-wide election. May 4 is the next school committee meeting. May 15 is the special town meeting which is when the vote will take place for funding related to the ability to have more audiovisual interaction with the school committee and other meetings in the second floor auditorium.

13. Adjournment:

G. Vine moves to adjourn the meeting. Seconded by K. Kast-McBride. Vote is unanimous. Meeting is adjourned.

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

Documents Attached: None