



Winchendon Public Schools

Date Approved/Released:

3/2/23

Date Approved/Hold:

School Committee Chair:

School Committee Meeting

January 19, 2023 - 6:00 pm

Town Hall, 2nd Floor Auditorium

Attendance:

Ryan Forsythe, Chair; Greg Vine, Vice Chair; Larry Murphy; Alica 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: None

4. Consent Agenda: None

5. Student Representative Report:

A. Dellasanta presents district wide student related updates. Murdock High School's National Honor Society helped at the wreath cleanup for Wreaths Across America at the Winchendon Veterans Cemetery on January 13, and the NHS will hold a bottle and can drive on January 21. Student Council is hosting the Central Region Special Olympics Bocce Tournament on January 27. *Matilda the Musical* will be performed on February 3 and 4. Tickets can be purchased by calling Tina Santos. Murdock sports updates are provided. JV and varsity boys' and varsity girls' basketball will play against Narragansett on January 20. Varsity ice hockey plays at Blackstone Valley Tech on January 21. Indoor Track will compete in the MSTCI state relays on Saturday at the Reggie Lewis Center in Boston.

G. Vine thanks the members of the NHS for their participation in the laying of the wreaths at Veterans Cemetery.

L. Murphy moves to move item number 9, New Business to the next agenda item, prior to the Superintendent's Report as it will make the report more clear. Seconded by G. Vine. Vote is unanimous.

6. New Business:

a. Organization of Instruction:

R. Forsythe explains that the organization of instruction is a policy that states the district offers

a diversified educational program compatible with the needs of the community and state standards. The organizational plan is designed to facilitate the philosophy of educating every student each to his or her fullest potential. The structure will consist of three levels: primary, elementary, middle and secondary levels. The primary and elementary level includes schools with pre-kindergarten through grade five. The middle level consists of schools for grades six, seven and eight. And the secondary level consists of schools with grades nine, ten, eleven and twelve. Finally, special education services are integrated across each grade level. Tonight's consideration is to change this policy to allow more flexibility in the organization of our educational institutions, which was brought up by K. Kast-McBride during the December meeting as a limitation of the district's ability to consider the administration's proposal of the early childhood literacy center and reorganization of the district. The suggested motion proposes a change to include grades as determined by the Superintendent or his or her designee and may change as district circumstances warrant. R. Forsythe asks for a motion.

K. Kast-McBride apologizes for being late and asks if there was any public comment. As there was not, she suggests that perhaps people could not make it due to the road conditions. She suggests that the committee table this topic as there are people who want to be heard. K. Kast-McBride moves to table this topic for a next meeting. She also states that she did not receive a packet in her email. Not hearing a second, the Chair asks for discussion. L. Murphy moves to change the policy as it was outlined in the agenda. Seconded by G. Vine. R. Forsythe asks for discussion. K. Kast-McBride states that it would have been nice to have another chance for the people that wanted to come to tonight's meeting to be able to have their say. Additionally, she feels that the committee has not actually been given feedback from the meetings. T. King replies that is partially what the presentation will address this evening. K. Kast-McBride states that it would have been better if they had had it ahead of time and believes it is detrimental as a school committee making choices like this. A. Jordan asks if this moves forward, will they have recourse to see what the impact is and make sure it is what the district needs, to revisit it another time if it is not working and if the committee can get feedback to understand and make sure it is the right decision if they decide to do this. R. Forsythe explains that right now, the committee is only voting on the policy that gives the Superintendent the authority to reorganize the district, not on the Early Childhood Literacy Center, which will come up later in the meeting. L. Murphy states that the door is not closed, and the committee can always go back and review the topic again if need be. K. Kast-McBride states that it would have been nice to hear from some of the people who wanted to come and speak. R. Forsythe reiterates that the feedback she is seeking that was received from committee members, townspeople, students and staff is in the Superintendent's report tonight. It is not something that is presented as part of the consideration of the change of the organization policy but most certainly will be provided to the entire school committee before it votes on the Early Literacy Center. Hearing no other discussion, the Chair asks for a vote. A. Jordan - Y; G. Vine - Y; L. Murphy - Y; K. Kast-McBride - N; Chair - Y. Vote of 4-1 with no abstentions, and the motion passes.

b. Mid-year Review of Superintendent Discussion:

R. Forsythe opens the topic for discussion. K. Kast-McBride states that what L. Murphy got from Tracey is basically the same document that she tried to share with the committee but it failed to send. R. Forsythe states the rubric that she is referring to is the indicator rubric for the Superintendent Evaluation that is established in relative generic fashion by DESE, but it is not an evaluation form. It is the things that the committee would consider using as an evaluation outline. G. Vine states that he would like having the rubric but would appreciate a form to

actually vote on so the process can get underway. L. Murphy explains that the committee does not need a form or template. We can have guidelines and the areas that the Superintendent can provide updates on what he is working on; then after that feedback can be provided to the Superintendent. To clarify, the Superintendent needs to provide the committee with a report, and then the committee will provide him with feedback on how they believe it is going and what things they have questions or feedback on. G. Vine states his preference is to have something so that it is recorded and part of public record other than the minutes, but he believes the committee should move forward with the process. A. Jordan clarifies that the rubric will be used. K. Kast-McBride reiterates that the mid-cycle review is a conversation based on the goals that were set at the beginning of the year with Mr. King. She would like to have something that would allow the committee to use those goals as the basis of that conversation. R. Forsythe summarizes that the committee is in agreement that they will use the rubric as the framework and will ask the superintendent to provide his feedback on his performance during the first half of the year, then at the end of the year the committee will do a summative evaluation which would include full documentation from the full committee.

c. **MASC Conference Update:**

K. Kast-McBride states that she asked that this topic be moved to February to allow her time to put together a presentation. G. Vine moves to table the topic to the February 16 meeting. Seconded by K. Kast-McBride. Vote is unanimous.

d. **Cost/Revenue Sharing Committee Formation:**

R. Forsythe discusses the formation of the Cos/Revenue Sharing Committee, which is intended to make recommendations to the town on the sharing of costs and revenue that is given to the town for the purpose of multiple opportunities within the town, such as some revenue or cost being absorbed by the school department. G. Vine states that the formation was passed at the Tri-Board meeting, and the Selectboard and the Finance Committee have already chosen their members and are simply waiting on the School Committee's appointees. The committee decides to appoint two members. T. King adds that he believes the intent is to meet soon, approximately four times for our current budget season to commit to writing a Memorandum of Understanding relative to the cost and/or revenue sharing for this budget. L. Murphy moves to appoint Alicia Jordan and Greg Vine as School Committee representatives to the Cost/Revenue Sharing Committee. Seconded by K. Kast-McBride. Vote is unanimous. R. Forsythe requests that any updates from this subcommittee be included in the Subcommittee Updates each meeting.

7. Superintendent's Report:

a. **Budget Summary:**

A. Babinski presents budget summary. The budget outline has been based on location or department. She has updated the format to a summary view because MUNIS does not always show all of our encumbrances as far as salary obligations, and this format allows her to provide a tighter look at where we stand financially. She explains the color coding of the new format. For salaries, she has forecasted out what we are obligated to pay in salaries. Some line item transfers will be done before the next meeting to clean up the negatives within salaries and expenses, and those will be presented to the committee for votes when needed.

L. Murphy thanks Ms. Babinski for simplifying the format and making it more user friendly. He asks for clarification on what the pink means. A. Babinski explains the pink is for things like

substitutes, tutoring, and time slip expenses that we keep an eye on every payroll to make sure we are within budget, but they are difficult to predict. As she learns our processes, she will be adding encumbrances in there to cover things like clubs.

G. Vine asks for further clarification on the substitute teacher line items and why it says that 100% has been used. A. Babinski explains that the full amount was encumbered in anticipation of the full amount being spent, and as she gets more comfortable with how much the district is spending per month, she will move some of that money over if it is not being spent. R. Forsythe states the format is a huge improvement but that behind some of the numbers, there is a subjective analysis that Ms. Babinski does that tells whether or not these should or should not be alarming. Ms. Babinski states that she is keeping notes on things like that that should be analyzed further. K. Kast-McBride suggests color coding on the sheets just for going forward. T. King states that tonight was step one, and the committee will continue to see some pieces as we go over the budget for the next few weeks.

8. Subcommittee Reports:

G. Vine reports the Capital Planning Committee held its first meeting last night. The town manager did give initial figures of what people are asking for. There will be a lot to go through, but a number of projects town-wide and in the schools are likely going to be taken care of. The committee will go through it in more detail next Wednesday. He says there is a list that was provided by the town manager, but he would like to sit down with the Superintendent and get more detail on what he feels should be prioritized. T. King states there has been an ongoing list that has been carried year to year that has not been funded. He will sit down with Greg and the DPW Director and go over any additional items.

The calendar committee is meeting soon. The policy subcommittee meets on Monday, January 23.

9. Old Business:

a. Early Childhood Literacy Center and Schools Reorganization Proposal Update:

K. Kast-McBride moves to table this topic until the next meeting to give people an opportunity to hear it in person or see it in person; she also believes the packet was handed out last minute. R. Forsythe asks for clarification on whether she is asking to table the update or the vote. K. Kast-McBride states the update is part of the vote. Chair asks for a second; hearing none, the motion does not pass.

T. King presents an update on the Early Childhood Literacy Center and Schools Reorganization and the fora outcomes from the past couple of weeks. He clarifies that Ms. Kast has referenced a packet multiple times, but it is not a part of the proposal but includes a number of research articles summarized on the front page for the committee's review at their leisure. He thanks Stephanie Rondeau and Andrew Collins for facilitating the teacher forum and Miranda Jennings for facilitating the parent and community member fora. He explains having them run the fora was a very specific strategy on his part as he believes it is important to have people in the room with whom the stakeholders are comfortable. When an administrator is in the room with teachers, those who may have a lot to say don't say much at all. For this reason, a strategy he has used a number of times over the years is to ask for someone they are more familiar with to be in the room so they feel comfortable to speak freely. He did hold a couple of meetings to come back in with the concerns and discuss those directly with the stakeholders. Ms. Jennings

held the parent and community member fora, and a morning session and an evening session were made available for varying schedules. The fora were posted in a number of different places: ParentSquare, Facebook, the district website, the weekly newsletter as well as the winchendonk12 email, and the presentation has been shared in every weekly newsletter and has gone out multiple times as well.

Winchendon has been an underperforming district for 15 to 20 years. All three schools that qualify for any type of accountability: the high school, middle school and Toy Town Elementary, are all essentially at the 10th percentile in the state. We also have a very low high school to college matriculation ratio at the 7th lowest in the state. In the past few years, the middle and high schools have come out of turnaround status, and if you look more closely at some of those numbers, the proficiencies are not there. We know kids are falling behind, and we're making up ground, but we're still not at the proficiency level that we should be at. He believes the poor performance comes down to three separate reasons. It either means we have poor teaching, kids that can't do the work or a system that is broken. He feels strongly that we have very capable teachers and that every child can learn if given the proper opportunity. He feels the systems are designed to produce the results that they do produce...one example of this is the DCF system. He feels very strongly that we need to change our system, to focus on building from the bottom up and putting a focus on that Pre-K to K transition. This proposal is not about financial or space necessity. It is about what is best for students. We can't fix poverty, but we can give families who are struggling a better opportunity at access to the Pre-K system. Right now, we offer half day Pre-K programs, and that is not working for families, so we look to gain access to more families in Winchendon so that we bring in more of our students as we go forward.

The issues that were brought forward at the previously mentioned fora were as follows:

i. Timeline: raised by both families and community members and teachers. We have seven months before we open our doors in the fall. The window to get this work done is around the end of May or June and over the summer. This consists of the move, getting classrooms set up. He believes the most important thing is how much more time we do this for our students. We've been underperforming for 15 to 20 years. He does not believe we can afford another year. Kids in our community deserve to move on this. Steering committees will work out all the other pieces and create a timeline and meet our targets. There will be some hard and some soft targets, and that will be a part of steering committee work.

ii. The Move: Concerns about who is moving. We are planning on bringing in a moving company to facilitate a move around June to the end of summer. There were also concerns about materials making it to the right place. He suggested to teachers that we get a list of lost or broken items and the district would work to replace them. We do not want to short shift any of our teachers on their materials. A steering committee would discuss and plan how to label boxes and the move process. As we did this type of move during COVID, we can improve since we've already experienced it.

iii. Why Memorial vs Toy Town? This was a concern brought up by all groups of stakeholders. There is an additional 20,000 square feet at Memorial School, and if you look at the numbers of students based on current enrollment, there would be about an additional 18 students at Memorial School, so there would not be a significant increase in the number of students at that building. Why the Early Literacy Center at Toy Town? We don't have as many classrooms, and

it would allow us to grow the center over the next few years. We have also discussed a transitional room for students who have finished Pre-K but just are not ready for Kindergarten. We would also be looking to begin full day Pre-K, free of cost to our Winchendon families. At Memorial, we have central HVAC, and our grant for the mini-split systems at Toy Town would not allow us to go through every single room in the building.

iv. Bathrooms: Brought up mostly by teachers, concerns over the height of the toilets and access to the bathrooms. We addressed concerns about how close to the bathrooms classrooms would be. Steering committees will be addressing these concerns in more detail, including touring the building to determine how it would work best. Also, there are multiple private bathrooms in the building. Currently, Pre-K has diaper changing areas, but the way it is set up is by having a drape across some urinals so they don't have to look at the urinals while they have some sort of table set up to change diapers. The proposal would be that we have some private restrooms with proper changing stations. There is an ability to lower urinals as needed as well.

v. Specialist Concerns: Referring to music, PE, etc., concerns were raised about how they would be split, whether they would be considered part time. We are not trying to do this on a shoestring. We're in a period of growth for our district, not trying to reduce numbers of positions but to grow and be more effective in what we do. He has stated several times that there will be no cuts to any union positions; no part times, and in terms of how they will be split, the steering committees will make determinations on what will work best for our students. Teachers were concerned about sharing specialists across buildings; that there might be part time administrators. The answer is no. This will be a full on facility that will be staffed appropriately. There will be no part times nor sharing of administrators.

vi. Steering Committees: When will these begin? On a vote of support from the school committee, we would have emails going out within the next day or two to formulate steering committees. These will likely be staffed by one person from each grade level of that particular building, specialists, special education, someone from the union. If this proposal were voted on tonight, we would have steering committees up and running next week. There would be one for each building, special education, etc. They would meet after school during the week in order to remain focused on the work we are doing.

vii. Support Staff: T. King does not believe there were any custodians or tech people. Those in attendance were concerned about secretaries and paras and verifying their positions would not be reduced or eliminated.

viii. Fifth Grade Moving to Middle School: While this was brought up, there were no new concerns. We have looked around at other local middle schools, and most of the time moving 5th grade to middle school seems to have been motivated by money or space. There are also Pre-K to 12 schools in the state. There are schools with grades 1 through 3. We have looked at curriculum and have said that grade 5 is about content. Content happens in middle school, and that is why we deem it appropriate. Most of the concerns from families are about safety. There are not a lot of schools like ours, where middle and high school share a physical space, but we are fortunate to have a neighbor that is exactly like that: Narragansett has grades 5-12 all in one building. Their middle school is grades 5 through 7, and high school begins at grade 8. They share the same building, the same buses, and in a conversation with the superintendent of Narragansett, he was very clear that it has been a very long standing practice and they do not

have issues with their juniors and seniors interacting with fifth graders. The high school students at Murdock look out for the younger students on the buses, and complaints are made to the middle school if something is seen. Narragansett was very clear that there are no bus issues; in fact there are more issues with elementary school bussing than the upper levels. While Murdock has the middle school students sitting up front and high schoolers sitting in the back, Narragansett does not separate it out.

R. Forsythe asks for questions or comments. He asks for a motion to return to the public comment section. K. Kast-McBride makes that motion. Seconded by L. Murphy. Vote is unanimous.

Renee Eldrige approaches as a community stakeholder, asking that many different social media platforms in addition to all of those the district has already done. She states that the district did do a lot with the fora offered. She tried to educate herself before coming here tonight, and she asks the district to keep in mind the community stakeholders who do not have students in the district, as their opinions matter. She states that Gardner also has middle school with grades 5 through 7. She has concerns about the social emotional piece for children, sharing feedback from a local clinician who used to be in the Winchendon school district and she had great concern for the students because of the delays from the pandemic. She has not seen the social emotional concerns discussed as of yet and would like to. She also appreciates the literacy piece, believing it to be very important. She is also concerned about moving too quickly and whether there will be a budgetary impact due to staffing.

Public comment is concluded and the meeting returns to Old Business. L. Murphy asks that the principal of the middle school be allowed to address some of the concerns brought forth because she is getting 5th graders. J. Vezina states that the health and wellbeing of the students comes first, and these concerns will be discussed within the steering committee, determining how best to support our students. Discussion is had about PBIS - Positive Behavior Intervention Supports, teaching perseverance and stress management to students. Everything done at the middle school is very deliberate in terms of when the students come in, preparing them for the school year in terms of social emotional, behavioral and academic expectations.

T. King agrees that social emotional is a common concern. Teachers who work with seniors often speak about the development that normally happens at around 10th grade that our students are lacking as a result of the pandemic. That is nationwide. This means that fifth and eighth graders alike are all working at a different social emotional level than those of the same age pre-COVID. His response is that we are working on that across the board. Some of the teachers discussed not wanting to walk away from the current interventions they're doing for students because they're seeing growth. It may be called something else, but we are not walking away from interventions. Kids are going to get what they need. Staffing is step one; we are reorganizing and putting people in different places, but we are not going to require additional staffing, nor will we reduce staffing. When we start getting numbers from the state, there is potential that it may provide the opportunity to grow this year that we were not expecting. Year one is put people in the right places; focus on Pre-K; get the current curriculum that aligns with kindergarten. Years two and three are to expand the program to have better access for our community.

K. Kast-McBride asks how many people attended the fora. T. King states about half a dozen

family/community, not including teachers who are also parents. There were five meetings total, two for faculty; three for community members and families. K. Kast-McBride asks if a survey was sent out. T. King defers to Stephanie Rondeau for info about the survey sent out to students. She states that we have not had an advisory block since the last time the committee met because of midterms. The survey is ready and will likely go out on Monday. They had conversations with student leadership about the move, but the survey results should be in next week. As far as sending a survey to staff, the district reached out and had over 40 teachers, which represents 14% of our staff at one meeting and 30 at the second meeting. K. Kast-McBride clarifies that she meant a survey to the community and families. T. King replies there has been no such survey. K. Kast-McBride asks if the district is planning on having any family involvement, any community steering committees. T. King states that there will be family/community on the steering committees. K. Kast-McBride asks who will make the choice of who ends up on the committees. T. King states it depends on how many volunteers we get. We get fewer volunteers, especially from the community. From a grade level perspective, we will look for one representative from each grade level within the schools. K. Kast-McBride states the SPED committee could be in conjunction with the SEPAC, and even if we end up with a lot of parents who happen to be special ed parents, don't count them out. T. King replies that we are not looking to restrict voices, but we need to be reasonable and keep the steering committees appropriately sized and manageable. He states that parents do come to things and gives examples of the packed parking lots for school events. He did not want to do a Zoom for the for. He wanted to talk to people and have conversations. K. Kast-McBride states that it is easier to show up for something that your child is in than for something that's more work. She believes an opportunity was missed with the survey piece.

R. Forsythe states that this is a proposal focused on literacy, which is in our strategic plan, and the data that was presented on the need in our community to focus on literacy cannot be argued. He points out one area of question, that this may cause more work for teachers...packing up classrooms, adjusting curriculum, availability of course materials, setup of new classrooms. The district will find a way to make sure that teachers are appropriately recognized and/or compensated for that type of work. Additionally, he questions whether the committee and district administration understand that the steering committees would have influence on the ways in which things would be set up but ultimately those decisions would be made by the administrative structure of the school system. T. King agrees, stating that the steering committees would have a voice and input to make recommendations on what seems best, but the administrators will make the decisions.

G. Vine states he is excited by this opportunity. This is the sort of thing he wants to see given support, and he wants to see support for the students from an early age and for families and ultimately the community.

G. Vine moves to support the district's proposal to proceed with the reorganization of schools and the creation of an Early Childhood Literacy Center as presented. Seconded by L. Murphy.

A. Jordan - Y; G. Vine - Y; L. Murphy - Y; K. Kast-McBride - N; Chair - Y. Motion passes
4-1-0

10. Future Agenda Items:

- a. MASC Conference Review
- b. ELA Curriculum Update

- c. Early Learning Center Update
- d. Data Presentations - Renaissance Scores
- e. Superintendent Review

11. Closing Comments:

K. Kast-McBride thanks everyone for their hard work put into the reorganization, information and meetings. She looks forward to the student feedback. She thanks the parents and community who made it to the meetings.

L. Murphy thanks everyone for the lively discussion on the Early Literacy Center and other decisions.

G. Vine congratulates Superintendent King for the report last night from the audit committee in terms of the steps that have been taken to get the finances in the district in the shape they need to be.

A. Jordan echoes L. Murphy and quotes the Greek philosopher, Heraclitus, who said there is nothing permanent except change.

R. Forsythe congratulates the school administration on an amazing audit report last night.

12. Adjournment:

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

Respectfully Submitted:

Liz Latoria

Liz Latoria, Executive Assistant to the Superintendent

Documents Attached: None