



Date Approved/Released: 7/13/23

Date Approved/Held:

School Committee Chair: 

School Committee Meeting

May 18, 2023 - 6:00 pm

Town Hall, 2nd Floor Auditorium

Attendance:

Ryan Forsythe, Chair; Greg Vine, Vice Chair; Karen Kast-McBride; David LaPointe;
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. Three individuals in the audience are recording the meeting in addition to the town's recording and broadcast.

R. Forsythe asks if there are any Monty Tech graduates in attendance for recognition. None are present.

3. Public Comment:

R. Forsythe discusses a Supreme Court case that changed the public meeting rules for an open meeting. Due to the Supreme Court decision, the guidelines around public comment are as follows:

- Each attendee may speak for up to three minutes at a time.
- Each attendee may speak up to two times.
- All comments must be addressed through the Chair.
- Comments are no longer required to be related to items on the agenda but must be related to items that are within the jurisdiction of the school committee. The jurisdiction of the school committee is hiring, evaluation and supervision of the superintendent, establishment of the district budget, and establishment of district goals and policies.
- The First Amendment allows broad constitutional protections to speech during this time; however, it has been ruled that free speech does not allow for any threats, fighting words or obscene content.
- All speakers are encouraged by the court to represent their remarks in a respectful manner.
- Written comments are also accepted and especially encouraged for any comments over three minutes. Written comments can be submitted by email or in person.
- Public comment is not a period for discussion.
- Members of the board and representatives of the school are asked to listen and not respond to information during public comment.
- Questions and concerns raised during public comment this evening may be addressed through tonight's meeting or after this meeting in some other form.

A student approaches and shares information regarding his IEP and learning disability, stating he was offered no help from Toy Town Elementary even though it was requested. He discusses the Summit program at Murdock Middle School that has allowed him to make straight As. He asks for help for himself and students like him. He applauds Mrs. Vezina and his middle school teachers for the difference they have made for him.

A Winchendon music teacher approaches to share concerns about his contract not being renewed. He states that he anonymously sent Memorial teachers a survey and discusses the results.

A parent approaches and discusses concerns regarding her child's special education evaluation and his being denied an IEP three times. She states that despite recommendations from his psychologist, psychiatrists and a lawyer, the district failed to provide her child with the assistance he needed. She indicates that a lawsuit will be forthcoming against the district, and she will be seeking an out of district placement.

A parent approaches and shares concerns that the complaints she has brought to the committee recently have not been resolved. She states that she is repeatedly told by the committee to use the proper channels through the school district, yet this is not working.

A parent approaches and shares a letter from DESE, from the district manager for Central Massachusetts who oversees our districts, which indicates that the typical district evaluation happens on a cycle and that it has not been six years. She would like to know why the district has an evaluation going on with the special education department that is not regularly scheduled by DESE.

A parent approaches to discuss the need for more mental health training for district staff. She feels the issues that students face are not being addressed by the district.

A parent approaches to discuss concerns regarding the complaints about the district that have been brought forth. She states the school committee's role is to manage the superintendent, and she feels they are not doing enough. She references several staff members and administrators who are non-renewed or on leave and suggests putting the reorganization on hold.

A parent approaches and asks how the reorganization plan is going to be evaluated, asking what proactive things have been shared with the students or parents. She suggests the district reconsider reorganization.

A parent approaches and discusses information that was sent out about the reorganization, including budget cuts. She states that staff members are being moved or non-renewed and asks for transparency on why these changes are being made.

A resident alum and track coach approaches to discuss what he sees as a revolving door of people who come and go within the district, including Jessica Vezina, who is a very close friend of his. He feels the building is coming apart and everything is being dismantled. He admits to not knowing the details of why the principal is not there but feels there has been no transparency around it. He discusses the

Athletics Director and her position within the district, as well as the district leadership positions that are going to be vacant.

A parent and paraprofessional at Memorial School approaches and states that she feels very unheard. She feels the reorganization is not what is needed right now and that the district should focus on the people who have invested in the lives of students.

A parent who has spoken twice attempts to speak again. R. Forsythe reminds the audience that speakers are welcome to speak up to twice but no more. K. Kast-McBride moves to let people speak a third time. Seconded by D. LaPointe. R. Forsythe asks for discussion. K. Kast-McBride states that the law does not govern public comment; that there is no regulation to limit people to three minutes, but it is something the committee has put in place. She believes an exception should be made or that the committee should do more than one public comment period. G. Vine states that there is a large crowd tonight, and he does not believe changing the practice will work for this evening's meeting. He asks for the public to allow the chair to run the meeting as he was elected to do. D. LaPointe states that he needs to hear the public's voices if he is going to come up with a solution to the problems the district is facing. He supports the motion. R. Forsythe asks for clarification on whether the motion is meant for this evening only or to change the policy. K. Kast-McBride clarifies the change would be for this evening only. R. Forsythe summarizes the motion to suspend the policy to allow public comment speakers more than two times for up to three minutes each time for this evening only. Roll call vote: K. Kast-McBride - Y; D. LaPointe - Y; G. Vine - N; Chair - N. Motion fails.

A parent approaches and voices concerns about the number of parents suffering with the same problem. She challenges the committee to reconsider the three minute rule.

A parent approaches and states the committee is hearing the same problem over and over because they are all having the same problem.

A parent approaches to discuss concerns about the many transitions that are happening in the district. He suggests the district hold on the reorganization until it has a superintendent who is going to stay and see it through. He references the survey from a previous meeting that indicated teachers and staff do not feel supported by administration and that students and teachers felt things were handled differently depending on the student. He believes discipline is key and references a recent incident where a student made verbal threats but the school was not locked down and parents were notified after the situation was handled. He feels the same students are making the same threats and nothing is done, yet another student who does nothing wrong makes one mistake and is crucified for it. He asks what the district is going to do to entice new teachers in. He states that by the end of the year, if there is no positive change, he plans to pull his three children out and put them somewhere else. He challenges the committee to fix the schools.

A parent approaches and discusses the social emotional issues the district faces.

A parent approaches and states that this is the first time she has considered removing her children from the district.

A Winchendon teacher approaches and discusses the changes happening in the district and whether the

reorganization is best for the students. She states some of the youngest students are going to be placed in what is an old high school. She asks the committee to take those students into account.

A parent approaches and discusses challenges in the district, including her children not wanting to come to school, the teachers leaving and the lack of transparency. She discusses her child who was refused an IEP or 504, but once he moved to a different school, he had an IEP. She discusses the need to advocate for her children. She questions the plans for fifth grade students to move to the middle school.

A parent and paraeducator approaches and asks the committee to stop the reorganization. She asks the committee to look at the level of maturity of current fourth grade students and reevaluate and come up with a better plan.

A parent discusses her middle school child who was physically assaulted by high school students and shares concerns about fifth graders being on a bus with high school students.

An unidentified speaker states the committee has underestimated them, the town, students, teachers and parents.

R. Forsythe thanks everyone for coming. He states this is one of the best ways to communicate with the committee. He commits to them that it is impossible for the committee not to hear their concerns. K. Kast-McBride adds that people who contact the Chair by email should send it to the entire committee because it doesn't always make it to the rest of the committee.

4. Welcome New School Committee Member, David LaPointe:

R. Forsythe welcomes newly elected committee member, David LaPointe. Mr. LaPointe thanks everyone who supported him and states he is ready to go to work for the students. He states that there will be transparency and the public will know what the committee is doing at all times and that they will see results because they all need to be part of the solution not the problem.

5. Reorganization of Committee:

R. Forsythe asks for nominations for the chairperson of the school committee. G. Vine nominates R. Forsythe for Chair. Seconded by D. LaPointe. R. Forsythe accepts the nomination. Roll call vote: K. Kast-McBride - Abstained; D. LaPointe - Y; G. Vine - Y; R. Forsythe - Y.

R. Forsythe nominates G. Vine for Vice Chair. Seconded by D. LaPointe. Roll call vote: G. Vine - Y; D. LaPointe - Y; K. Kast-McBride - Abstained; Chair - Y.

Subcommittee Assignments are as follows:

- Policy: K. Kast-McBride; R. Forsythe
- Collective Bargaining - Teachers: G. Vine; D. LaPointe
- Collective Bargaining - Custodians: D. LaPointe; G. Vine
- Collective Bargaining - Secretaries: R. Forsythe; K. Kast-McBride
- Collective Bargaining - Paraeducators: R. Forsythe; K. Kast-McBride
- Capital Planning: G. Vine

- Finance: D. LaPointe; A. Jordan
- Communications: K. Kast-McBride; A. Jordan
- Wellness: K. Kast-McBride; A. Jordan
- Calendar: R. Forsythe
- Sick Bank: R. Forsythe
- Townwide Audit: D. LaPointe
- Monty Tech Representative: D. LaPointe; Tamarah Estes
- CAPS Representative: T. King
- Keystone Representative: T. King

G. Vine moves to approve the subcommittee appointments as presented. Seconded by D. LaPointe. Vote is unanimous.

6. Consent Agenda:

a. Minutes:

G. Vine moves to approve the minutes as presented for April 27. Seconded by K. Kast-McBride. Roll call vote: K. Kast-McBride - Y; D. LaPointe - Abstained; G. Vine - Y; R. Forsythe - Y.

b. ALL Program/Leadership Class Field Trip Request:

T. King explains the committee's approval is required because it is an out of state trip. The trip is led by one of the high school teachers in combination with the ALL Room as part of the Best Buddies inclusion event. It is in New Hampshire. G. Vine moves to approve the field trip request as presented. Seconded by D. LaPointe. Vote is unanimous.

7. Superintendent's Report:

a. Update on Progress of District Reorganization:

T. King explains that he has heard the crowd this evening and will be taking it under advisement with the leadership team around the reorganization. K. Kast-McBride asks for clarification on why people are being laid off when the committee was assured there would be no cuts to staff in the reorganization. K. Kast-McBride moves to postpone the reorganization until a more in-depth plan is in place. Seconded by D. LaPointe. G. Vine opposes the motion because he feels the district has a lot of younger children that could be going into the Early Literacy Program that would not get the head start they deserve. He reminds the committee that when they moved 6th grade students up to the middle school, it was hard and not popular but the district has always survived. He states that it has been proven that the earlier children begin learning, the more likely they are to succeed in the future, and he does not want to leave children behind. K. Kast-McBride states that Early Childhood Headstart is not going away. Headstart is zero to three and is not controlled by the district but by the state. She agrees early literacy is important, but she feels the children at the upper levels are being ignored. She feels the reorganization has caused so much consternation, and the district may not have the leadership to keep moving it forward. She suggests the district take a step back, look at what needs to be fixed and move forward from there. D. LaPointe appreciates what has been done to address the literacy issue in the town, but he feels we are simply rearranging chairs on the Titanic. He feels the district needs a rock solid foundation before it can build upon it. He believes the Early Literacy Center is a great idea, but it should be done with the proper physical building; therefore, he supports this motion. R. Forsythe adds that one of the most important things heard tonight is the parents' voices on the concern over the reorganization as it relates to instability of the district as a result of losing staff. He agrees we need a rock solid foundation and believes we have the opportunity to invest in our kids with a portion of that foundation in providing them literacy education at a

young age; however, to pull it off, we need the right people in the right seats. He will vote against the motion because he believes in early literacy and if there is a change where we do not have a superintendent or we do not have a principal at multiple schools, then he will reconsider his position. D. LaPointe moves to table the motion until a full committee is present. G. Vine seconds. K. Kast-McBride withdraws her motion. No vote is needed.

8. Student Representative Report:

A. Dellasanta provides updates from around the district. May 19 is Junior/Senior Prom and Promenade. May 21 is the Freshmen bottle and can drive. May 24 is the Middle/High School spring concert. May 25 is Memorial School's Memorial Day Concert. May 26 is the district Special Olympics Tournament. May 29 there is no school for Memorial Day. May 30 -31 is Senior finals and rehearsal. May 31 is the Junior/Senior Flag Football game. May 31 and June 1 - 2 are Kindergarten screenings for the district. June 1 is Class Day. June 4 is graduation, and June 9 is Memorial Fun Day. Taste of Winchendon took place last Saturday. Students from the Leadership and Citizenship class along with Murdock NHS took part in volunteering. May 16, MHS hosted its annual scholars dinner. Murdock's robotics team competed at the Vex Robotics Competition today. One Murdock team took first place. The Travel Club will be taking a trip to the Dominican Republic to participate in the Bridges to Community program from June 10-17. Senior Softball day will be Tuesday May 23.

9. Subcommittee Reports: None

10. New Business:

a. Monty Tech Local Graduates Recognition:

As no graduates are in attendance, D. LaPointe moves to pass over this item. Seconded by G. Vine. Vote is unanimous.

b. Food Service Bid - Vote:

A. Babinski provides a brief update on the bid for a new Food Service Management Company. Two outstanding bids were received and are being reviewed. The district has reached out to DESE for clarification on the conversion chart for scoring the evaluations and hopes to have it resolved by the end of the week. For this reason, the district is not ready to move forward with a vote. G. Vine moves to table the topic until the next meeting. Seconded by D. LaPointe. Vote is unanimous.

c. Superintendent Evaluation Update:

R. Forsythe discusses the superintendent's evaluation. The committee plans to do a summative evaluation for the current year. The committee was emailed a summative evaluation report, which will be the document the committee can complete to identify the items within the superintendent's evaluation. The committee was emailed the evaluation rubric which is provided by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education.. The committee will have the prerogative to evaluate on things that DESE recognizes as functions of the superintendent, as well as the district improvement plan. He invites the public to email the committee with regard to feedback and information on the school system. R. Forsythe makes the public announcement about the beginning of the summative evaluation of the superintendent, which will be a multiple week process. D. LaPointe asks for clarification on whether he should complete the evaluation since he just came on board. R. Forsythe explains that DESE allows all committee members that served during the evaluation period to assess the superintendent based on their terms of service. This would include L. Murphy and Mr. LaPointe, and their evaluations would be bound by the amount of time they served on the committee. Discussion is had about

the timeline of events for the evaluation process. G. Vine suggests adding the topic as a future agenda item. K. Kast-McBride asks to set a date as the discussion has been ongoing for three months. Discussion ensues. K. Kast-McBride suggests having the evaluation completed by June 15. The committee agrees.

11. Old Business: None

12. Future Agenda Items:

- a. Superintendent's Evaluation - June 15
- b. Special Education Update - June 1
- c. School Committee Retreat Date

13. Closing Comments:

K. Kast-McBride thanks everyone in attendance and those who voiced their concerns.

D. LaPointe challenges everyone to continue to be involved, not on the sidelines and states that he is honored to serve on the school committee.

G. Vine apologizes for yelling at the parent who tried to interrupt. He thanks the parent who said that the problems of the district are only going to be solved when everyone works together. He reminds the public that the committee is not their enemy. He thanks them for coming and encourages them to email the committee with their concerns.

A. Dellasanta thanks everyone for voicing their concerns and hopes they will come to the events coming up. Hearing their voices and their passion is encouraging.

R. Forsythe thanks everyone for coming and speaking and sharing their concerns.

14. Adjournment:

A. Dellasanta moves to adjourn the meeting. Seconded by G. Vine. Vote is unanimous. Meeting is adjourned.

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

Documents Attached: None