

WEST BOYLSTON SCHOOL COMMITTEE

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF
WEDNESDAY, November 14, 2012**

LOCATION: West Boylston Middle/High School Media Center

PRESENT:

<u>SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEMBERS</u>	<u>ADMINISTRATORS</u>
John Owanisian, Chairman	Elizabeth Schaper, Superintendent
Jennifer Breen, Vice-Chairman	Lawrence Murphy, Principal Middle/High School
Richard Shaw	Christopher LaBreck, Associate MS Principal
Erin Palumbo	Marjorie McCarthy, Principal Elementary School
	Sherri Traina, Director of Special Education
	Eric Bokankowicz, Technology Coordinator

COMMUNITY

Faculty & Staff: 14 Guests: 14
Student Advisors: 2 Press: 1

Mr. Owanisian opened the meeting at 7:00 p.m. and welcomed everyone to the November 14, 2012 School Committee Meeting.

**Approval
Of Minutes**

Ms. Palumbo made a motion to approve the minutes of the regular School Committee Meeting of October 10, 2012; Ms. Breen seconded. Motion approved. **Voted 4-0-0.**

**Student
Recognition
Awards**

Mr. Owanisian introduced the presentation of Student Recognition Awards beginning with Major Edwards School.

Ms. Marjorie McCarthy presented an award to 5th grade student, Abdulrahman Saeed; the student of the month for November.

Mr. LaBreck presented the middle school student recognition award to 7th grader, Katie Dagle, who was nominated by Mr. Palmer.

Mr. Murphy presented the high school student recognition award to Katelyn Scholwin.

**Student
Advisory
Council**

Mr. Owanisian welcomed the members of the Student Advisory Council; Rachel O'Connor and Tyler Armev.

Rachel stated that the National Honor Society is currently working on the Easter Seals Basketball shootout which is taking place on November 15, 2012.

She stated that the other major fundraiser for the NHS is "flocking"; when people in West Boylston pay the NHS to put pink flamingoes in someone's yard. She also stated that the NHS is preparing for the winter art show, which is in December of 2012.

Rachel also mentioned that they went to Clay Time yesterday, November 13, 2012, and painted plates, which they will auction off at the art show.

Rachel explained that Helping Paws is holding a meeting on November 15, 2012 and members will start to plan the holiday Helping Paws giving tree, where people can collect items for local animal shelters.

Rachel indicated that the middle school PBIS Student Ambassadors created a video that would be used in teaching students what is and what isn't acceptable behavior.

Tyler Arney explained the Math Team had their first meeting today, November 14, 2012.

He indicated the Student Council did their trick or treating for cans food drive on Halloween and they raised 1,585 lbs; 500 more than last year.

Tyler stated they are also working on their Thanksgiving baskets for a family in need and next week they would be holding a pep rally for winter sports.

**Public Hearing
– Policy on
Student
Activities**

Mr. Owanisian asked Dr. Schaper for an explanation of the requested vote on student activities. Dr. Schaper indicated that a public hearing is required by the town in order to change an existing policy. Dr. Schaper explained that she is seeking a change to Policy DIF. The policy change is being requested in order to ensure that we are complying with our own policies. She mentioned that currently we don't hold our money in an interest bearing checking account, because the fees attached to those accounts would be more than the interest we would earn. Dr. Schaper requested that Policy DIF be amended to remove the words "*interest bearing*" from bullet number three (3) of the policy.

Mr. Shaw made a motion to amend the Student Activities Policy - DIF and amend the words "*interest bearing*" by removing them from the policy, Ms. Breen Seconded; **Voted 4-0-0.**

**Acknowledge-
ment of Camera
Crew**

Mr. Owanisian thanked the camera crew for the evening, Mr. Eric Bokankowicz for his filming of the meeting.

**Highlight on
Schools**

Dr. Schaper welcomed Susan Cassidy, grade 1 teacher, and Dianne Holmes, speech pathologist, who led a presentation on the district's elementary literacy initiative.

Dr. Schaper stated that Ms. Cassidy and Ms. Holmes are one of the model classrooms that's been working with a consultant this year.

Ms. Cassidy and Ms. Holmes presented a Power Point presentation to the School Committee explaining how they launched the Reader's Workshop.

Ms. Cassidy explained to the committee that a consultant, Ms. Houston, comes to work with the lab teachers at Major Edward's Elementary.

Ms. Holmes stated that this program started with the kindergarten teachers last December. They launched a different way to teach kids to read independently.

Ms. Cassidy and Ms. Holmes explained that the benefits of the program included:

1. The ability for teachers to co-teach together;
2. Building a strong community of readers and writers; and
3. Fun way for the students and teachers to learn.

Ms. Cassidy indicated the Reader's Workshop involved focused lessons through independent reading and group sharing.

Ms. Cassidy explained that by working together with another teacher, it breaks the isolation that is found in teaching alone. She stated that every grade level is trying to incorporate a co-teaching model.

Ms. Holmes explained that they teach the students to recognize elements in their reading through context clues, sticky notes, sensory images, and background knowledge or "Schema".

Mr. Owanisian asked if the students took to the new approach immediately, or if there was a learning curve.

Ms. Cassidy stated that the students had started in kindergarten so they were used to some words used in the program. Both Ms. Cassidy and Ms. Holmes explained that children like books, so they took to the program easily.

Mr. Owanisian asked how the assessment process worked.

Ms. Cassidy explained the assessment is performed through a variety of ways such as running records.

Mr. Owanisian stated that he had to briefly back up the agenda, as the review of the Policy of Student Activities is public and as such, he explained it was necessary to check with those in attendance if there was any community input relative to same.

Mr. Owanisian, once again, asked for a motion to approve this change.

Mr. Shaw made a motion to amend the Student Activities Policy - DIF and amend the words "*interest bearing*" by removing them from the policy, Ms. Breen Seconded; **Voted 4-0-0.**

MCAS Reports

Mr. Murphy introduced the leadership team from the middle high school, Pat Tranter – Math Department, Jason DiSalle – English/Language Arts, and Leslie Garrison – Science Department, to present the MCAS results from last spring.

Ms. Tranter presented the strengths and weaknesses for the math department relative to the grade 10 test results.

Ms. Tranter stated that the Grade 10 students had specific areas where they performed better than the state, but that there was still a concern in:

- Operations and application of fractions; and
- Understanding and application of exponents and radicals.

She explained that in the area of patterns, relations and algebra the overall strength compared to the state was 73% v 61% and that in the area of geometry and measurement – the overall strength compared to the state was 76% v 68%.

Ms. Tranter stated with regard to strengths in the math department, the middle school excelled in certain areas of probability such as – grade 7, locations and spatial relationships – grade 6, computation – grade 8.

In middle school some of the weaknesses included, statistical methods – grade 8, computation – grade 6 and patterns, relations and functions – grade 8.

Ms. Tranter presented the following Action Plan:

Middle School

- 3 full time math teachers, one for each grade;
- Every teacher has one block each day to work with students who scored less than proficient the previous year; and
- Students needing help meet with their classroom teacher 1-2 times per week for extra practice and instruction

High School

- MCAS review worksheets are provided at the end of each unit for students enrolled in Algebra 1, Algebra 2, and Geometry
- Students who scored less than proficient on the 8th grade MCAS are required to take Survey and Finite Math

Mr. Owanisian asked Ms. Tranter if there was a targeted goal in terms of improvement; such as 5%, 10%, etc. He asked if so, when improvement would be expected to occur.

Ms. Tranter explained it would be difficult to pin down an exact date as to when this would occur.

Mr. Owanisian indicated his question might be better directed towards the middle school scores.

Mr. LaBreck explained that the goal with respect to student improvement relates to student growth. Student growth compares a student's score on the MCAS test from the previous two years to how they scored this year and it compares them to every student in the state, that scores similar to that.

Mr. Owanisian asked if the goal for grades 6-8 next year (scores) would be at least 5% better.

Mr. LaBreck stated that he hoped the growth scores would be.

Ms. Palumbo expressed her concern for grade 8 students, with more than 50% of the children scoring in the needs improvement/warning category. She asked if adding another teacher would really make a difference in this area.

Mr. LaBreck explained that by adding another teacher, it would make the math classes smaller and it would provide a free period during which students who are struggling are provided with additional instruction in order to master the mathematics they need to learn.

Ms. Breen asked Mr. LaBreck if they were no longer requiring every student to take the Survey and Finite Math and why that was no longer part of the built in curriculum.

Mr. Murphy stated that we did not eliminate that class; about 35% of the sophomores take that class.

Dr. Schaper explained that the purpose of the Survey and Finite Mathematics was to ensure that every student was passing the MCAS.

Ms. Garrison presented information to the committee with regard to the testing in 8th grade, biology test – which is taken by freshmen and sophomores and Introductory Physics which is taken by freshmen and some sophomore students.

Ms. Garrison explained that the 8th grade students excelled in material covering the solar system, properties of matter and communication technology.

In Biology, the students' strengths were in ecology and the chemistry of life, and in physics the students did well in electricity and magnetism.

Ms. Garrison indicated to the committee that the weaknesses for the students taking the science tests included the following:

8th Grade

- Mapping Earth;
- Energy topics;
- Technology/Engineering

Biology

- Genetics
- Cells

Introductory Physics

- Heat transfer
- Open response questions

Ms. Garrison presented the science action plan and stated that the science department would continue to incorporate increased writing across all grade levels.

Ms. Garrison also stated that specific science action plans would be implemented with regard to each grade taking the science MCAS tests.

Mr. Owanisian asked if open response questions were available from previous tests.

Ms. Garrison stated that if you go to the website for the released open response questions (not all of them), you may see some students answers available to the public.

Ms. Palumbo wanted to know what West Boylston is doing to bring up the scores of particularly the 8th grades students, because when you look at other schools in comparison, they don't seem to be doing as well.

Mr. LaBreck stated that we are looking at trends and that two of the weaknesses on that 8th grade test are going to be strengths in 2011. He stated that technology and engineering have been strengths for several years in a row. Mr. LaBreck stated that the current state frameworks have not been re-written since the last 90's.

Ms. Palumbo wondered what other schools are doing that they are able to score so well each year, consistently.

Dr. Schaper stated that every year we make decisions about how to allocate the resource of how time in our schools is used. She stated that in one district that has higher scores, they opted to eliminate art and foreign language for middle school students in order to allow them to take an extra English or Mathematics class in order to bolster English Language Arts scores. Those kinds of decisions have not been made in this district.

Dr. Schaper explained it's important to keep a wholesome balance to provide the children with a very well rounded education that includes a robust arts program. Dr. Schaper indicated the administrators hold all of these things in balance when making curriculum decisions. She stated we can make other kinds of choices, but we would rely on signals from the community about what is valued.

Mr. Owanisian stated it sounded as if we would not know how these plans will turn out until the next cycle.

Dr. Schaper noted that the standards on which we are now being evaluated has changed which makes predicting outcomes more difficult. She stated that we try to address the gaps that we see with students day-to-day in addition to looking at the aggregate data.

Dr. Schaper explained that the most important thing to us is what's happening with an individual student on a day-to-day basis in the presence of a teacher. She stated principals are out every single day, in the classrooms. They are watching what's going on to make sure that the kind of instruction they see is instruction that will help students make progress in learning.

Ms. Palumbo added that she thinks that parents in the town are going to want both, good test scores and extracurricular things like art. Ms. Palumbo stated that she understands that it must be a

challenge to do both, but she feels that keeping that as a goal for West Boylston schools is a good thing to achieve because that's what parents want for their kids.

Mr. Jason DiSalle presented information regarding the MCAS English/Language Arts scores.

Mr. DiSalle explained that the 10th graders scored above the state on all but three multiple choice questions and all open response questions.

Mr. DiSalle indicated several of the 8th grade students left some of the open response questions at the end of the exam blank, which had a significant impact on the overall average score.

He also stated that the middle school, post-test questions/responses indicated that the students spent less time on the exam and students were not using specific enough text evidence/working too generally.

Mr. DiSalle presented the English Action Plan in which teachers would be asking for more self-assessment of student writing, offering students more personalized instruction on reading and writing, continue freshman composition course targeting students in need and continued with Keith Wiley's MCAS Review for 10th graders.

Mr. Shaw indicated that he felt fatigue could be a reason for some of the test answers being left blank.

Ms. Breen commented on the fact that if the children who left the answers blank; had they chosen to answer those questions, would have offered us some very different results for that one part, of one day, of one test.

Ms. Breen stated it's very good to look at scores and try and understand them, but it's also good to remember that there are very subtle things that can change numbers. She indicated that for some kids, sitting and taking the test is a very stressful experience.

Ms. Breen reminded all in attendance that this test is one size fits all; one test for every child regardless of what their ability is, and for a child that struggles and who knows that this test is the difference between graduating and not graduating, it can be very stressful. She mentioned that numbers are fine, but we need to take them for what they are.

Mr. Murphy stated that he felt the MCAS results can be used as a means for improvement.

Mr. Owanisian noted there was any community input to be heard, and there was none at that time.

Mr. Owanisian called for the report from the Middle School. Mr. LaBreck discussed the status of the STEAM Academy, organized by a group of teachers and community members. He stated that they have been meeting regularly developing a mission statement. He stated that hopefully by the end of the year entrance criteria would be established.

Mr. LaBreck stated the focus at the faculty meeting last week was the open response questions on the MCAS tests.

Community Input

Communication & Reports

Mr. LaBreck stated that on November 13, 2012 the middle school held parent-teacher conferences for students A-L and on November 15, 2012 students with the last names M-Z would be held.

Mr. LaBreck stated that the parent portal for the 6th graders has been opened and running for a couple of weeks.

Mr. LaBreck also indicated that photos of students could be viewed online on the West Boylston Middle/High School website for Nature's Classroom.

Mr. Owanisian called for the report from the high school. Mr. Murphy explained they are looking at the new teacher evaluation process that the state is coming out with in 2014. He stated that some schools have already been involved with that process.

Mr. Murphy indicated that the school nurse, Nancy Librandi, gave a presentation on concussions, and how do we transition those children who have received a concussion, back into school after they've had one, because the effects can be lingering.

Mr. Murphy mentioned the high school had a Career Day with 36 presenters. Ms. Pelto's class offered to help the presenters put together a power point presentation for the day.

Mr. Murphy talked about doing the West Boylston "In It To Win It" program which was started last year with the senior class of 2012 and the class of 2013 would be continuing the program.

Mr. Murphy stated that today, November 14, 2012, he went with Mr. Mike Carter's class and Mr. Rocky Blunt, on a historical tour of West Boylston.

Mr. Murphy indicated that the Math Club took 1st place out of 17 in their first meet.

Mr. Owanisian called for the report from the Elementary School. Ms. McCarthy reminded all that parent conference would occur on Monday, November 19th and Tuesday, November 20th.

Ms. McCarthy indicated that in grades 1-3, they are working on making connections and teaching the students how to pay attention to their thinking. She explained it has been a help to the children's reading progress and to their writing.

Mr. Owanisian called for the report from the Special Education Director. Ms. Traina indicated that they were now taking applications for the pre-school program; 2013-2014 school year. She stated that an open house was held on Wednesday, November 7, 2012 for new students and parents to come in and meet with the teachers of the program.

Mr. Owanisian called for Communications from the Superintendent. Dr. Schaper reported that the English/Language Arts curriculum revision is underway. The curriculum team met on October 31, 2012 to begin the process of mapping the new curriculum based on the newest version of the Massachusetts ELA curriculum standards.

Dr. Schaper reported that the administrative team attended the Curriculum Summit sponsored by the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. Principals attended sessions

on supporting instruction for students with disabilities and brought back several model curriculum units in literacy, humanities, and math and science.

School Committee Updates

Mr. Owanisian informed all in attendance that the Technology Subcommittee met a few weeks ago with the school's technology committee and Mr. LaBreck to discuss School Brains, in particular the parent portal.

Mr. Owanisian thanked Ms. Palumbo for her efforts in the Marketing Subcommittee. Mr. Owanisian stated that they would like to market the schools by submitting information in the form of Banner articles, as some members of the community rely on the Banner to provide them with information.

Ms. Breen updated the community as to the naming of the library at Major Edwards Elementary. Through discussions, the parents felt that they would really like to name the library the "Ann Marie Richardson Library". It was decided by the committee that the best place to place the plaque will be outside of the library on the left hand side.

The committee also decided that it would be nice to paint some of the quotes from the letter writing campaign on an open space on a mural inside the library.

Ms. Breen mentioned WestBEST would meet on November 15, 2012 to complete their annual mailer/fundraiser. Ms. Breen reminded everyone that WestBEST raises money, which 100% goes towards teacher grants.

Mr. Shaw explained that the information update from the School Building Subcommittee would be discussed next month.

Mr. Owanisian stated that follow up negotiations are underway with regard to the Negotiations Subcommittee and information would be provided at the next School Committee meeting in December of 2012.

Mr. Owanisian mentioned that he had attended the Mass Association of School Committees conference.

Adjournment

At 9:27 p.m. a motion was made by Mr. Shaw to adjourn, seconded by Ms. Breen; **Voted 4-0-0.**

Respectfully submitted,

Marie Johnson
Recording Secretary