



OFFICIAL MINUTES OF THE SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEETING

November 16, 2016

The Boston School Committee held a meeting on November 2, 2016 at 5 p.m. at the Bruce C. Bolling Municipal Building, 2300 Washington Street, School Committee chamber, Roxbury, Massachusetts. For more information about any of the items listed below, visit www.bostonpublicschools.org, email feedback@bostonpublicschools.org or call the Boston School Committee Office at (617) 635-9014.

ATTENDANCE PRIOR TO EXECUTIVE SESSION

School Committee Members Present: Chairperson Michael D. O'Neill; Vice-Chair Dr. Hardin Coleman; Michael Loconto; Alexandra Oliver-Dávila; Jeri Robinson; and Dr. Miren Uriarte.

School Committee Member Absent: Regina Robinson.

DOCUMENTS PRESENTED

Grants for approval totaling \$1,238,847:

- CBHM Data and Research Pilot - \$200,000
- Children's Pilot Funds - \$200,000
- HiSet Test Centers - \$5,002
- Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) SPED Entitlement - \$813,854
- Quality Enhancements in After-School and Out-of-School Time (ASOST-Q) - \$19,991

International Travel Request: Boston Latin School – Germany, Poland, and Czech Republic, April 11-23, 2017

Mattahunt School Proposal Update

Overview of Mattahunt School Proposal Implications: Updated November 16, 2017

The Value of Shifting Grade Configurations

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CALL TO ORDER

Mr. O'Neill led the pledge of allegiance and called the meeting to order.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

Approved – By roll call, the Committee unanimously approved a motion to adjourn to executive session to discuss collective bargaining strategy regarding the Boston Teachers Union.

At approximately 6 p.m., the Committee returned to public session.

ATTENDANCE AT SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEETING

School Committee Members Present: Chairperson Michael D. O'Neill; Vice-Chair Dr. Hardin Coleman; Michael Loonto; Alexandra Oliver-Dávila; Jeri Robinson; Regina Robinson; Dr. Miren Uriarte; and student representative Keondre McClay.

School Committee Members Absent: None

MEETING MINUTES

The Committee approved by unanimous consent the minutes of the October 26, 2016 School Committee meeting.

SUPERINTENDENT'S REPORT

As prepared for delivery.

Good evening. I would like to begin my report tonight by reflecting on the past week as our nation saw an historic and polarizing election that revealed a divided country.

First off, I want to thank all of you who voted, for taking your civic responsibility seriously and casting your ballot for candidates who you want to lead us, whether on a local, state or national level. We owe this opportunity to vote to all those, here and abroad, who have defended our rights as citizens in this great democracy.

After last Tuesday's election, I sent out a Tweet directed to our kids. I wanted to make sure our students felt safe. But I also intended the message to serve as a reminder for adults — educators and parents, alike — that their role that morning, and in the days immediately after this election, was to be there for their kids.

There was, and still remains, a sense of anxiety and fear that came out of this election because of the rhetoric that was uttered by our president-elect. We had immigrant students who were afraid to go to school. We had Muslim students who were afraid of what would happen to their families come January. Later that Wednesday morning, we sent out a letter to every BPS employee,

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providing resources for supporting students and adults. I am proud of the way our BPS teachers, school leaders and other staff responded. We helped one another. We listened to each other. We embodied the “Culture of We” for our students and ourselves.

I want to talk about some of the negative reaction that arose on Thursday. For those who were critical of BPS staff and students, and our response, I want them to know our students are not weak. They are fearless advocates for themselves and their community. I think our opportunity here is to re-emphasize how the role of public education serves a Democratic society. When the Common School Movement took hold in America in the 1830s, it was grounded in the ideas of social mobility and America being a land of opportunity for immigrants. It was based on the principle that all children, regardless of social class, gender, religion, ethnicity, or country of origin, deserved access to a free education in a public school.

This is built into our American ethos. As an immigrant to this country, I know that immigration is not always embraced by all segments of our society, but we must be able to have these disagreements in a civil way. What this election has taught me is that as a country we are still quite fractured. There is still a lot of hurt and pain. But our path forward must be one rooted in civility and engagement, in authentic listening and civil conversation.

We must live out the “Culture of We” as we seek common ground to close opportunity and achievement gaps together, as we prepare all students for success, and as we celebrate our efforts to create stronger schools for a stronger Boston.

As President Obama stated very early in his presidency, “All of us share this world for but a brief moment in time. The question is whether we spend that time focused on what pushes us apart, or whether we commit ourselves to an effort — a sustained effort — to find common ground, to focus on the future we seek for our children, and to respect the dignity of all human beings.”

We must find common ground with each other, and strength in unity. And, as Mayor Walsh shared recently, we must also stand our ground as a city. In a column he wrote this week, he said, “We will defend our friends, neighbors, and family members from any and all efforts to exclude them, harm them, or strip them of their rights. Boston is a city of inclusion, a city of compassion, a welcoming, diverse, global city. We’ll stay that way.”

Yes, we will stay that way.

Another important vote took place last week and that was ballot Question 2. Massachusetts voters by a wide margin came out against the measure, which failed to provide a funding mechanism for lifting the charter school cap. I see this outcome not as a statement that we do not support charter schools but as an opportunity for public, charter and parochial schools to work together in the interest of serving all of our students. Regardless of the outcome of Question 2, it remains as important as ever for the state to honor its obligation to fully fund charter reimbursements and to reform school funding formulas that are now 23-years old.

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This week we lost an important voice with the passing of Gwen Ifill, who knocked down racial and gender barriers to become a towering figure in journalism and an inspiration for generations of journalists — particularly young black women.

Gwen was a remarkable journalist. She graduated from Simmons College and covered Boston Public Schools when the new busing policy went into effect. She was a beacon of journalistic integrity in an age where information comes at us from every direction. She broke through the noise to engage us as viewers to think for ourselves. Her voice will be missed by many. Our condolences go out to her friends and family.

I want to recognize three of our high school sports teams that will be competing this week in the Massachusetts Interscholastic Athletic Association (MIAA) state semifinal championships: Boston International's boys' soccer team is playing tonight as we speak; Boston Latin Academy football will compete on Friday and Brighton football takes the field on Saturday. We wish them all good luck.

I am constantly amazed and humbled by the work of our school leaders. I want to highlight, in particular, Phineas Bates Elementary School Principal Andrew Vega for the very moving and inspirational letter he wrote for his school community last week to help families and staff come together after the election. It was picked up by the website Upworthy, where you can read it if you haven't already.

This week is National School Psychologists Awareness Week. I would like to take a moment to thank all of our dedicated BPS School Psychologists for everything they do to support our schools and students. Small steps can really change lives.

After consulting with the School Quality Working Group, chaired by Dean Hardin Coleman, I believe it is best to continue using the current BPS MCAS tiers for enrollment purposes this year and postpone the use of the School Quality Framework (SQF) tiers until next year. Given the ongoing changes in state testing and accountability, and the difficulty of doing an “apples to apples” comparison between MCAS and PARCC, we feel that this is the right decision. At the same time, one of the strongest components of the SQF work has been the compilation of additional information about the culture and climate of each of our schools. We are committed to making sure that these data are made available to our parents so they will have additional resources to draw upon as they make school choices in the coming months. The school's DESE accountability level will also be noted as well.

As we gear up for the start of the school choice season, I will continue to make periodic updates as to how we will share that data with our school communities. My team and I believe that taking on the work of developing a new system to measure the quality of a school — beyond just using standardized test scores — is one of the most important and admirable things a school community can do. We respect and honor that work.

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Tonight the School Committee has a difficult decision to make and I want to share with you that my recommendation to you did not come easily and only after much consideration. The Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) in September placed the Mattahunt in “Level 4-under review” status based on its determination that the school’s progress would not lead to a successful school turnaround. The Mattahunt initially entered Level 4 status in the fall of 2012. It was granted a School Reform Grant and a number of supports for improved outcomes for students. Unfortunately, the school’s student achievement continued to lag. It is currently in the first percentile of elementary schools across the state, which means that 99 percent of similar schools rank higher academically than the Mattahunt. Mattahunt has seen some promise from the early grades’ DIBELS data, and the school has been engaged in our Pre-K initiative, which is nationally recognized.

Despite continued efforts to turn the Mattahunt around, it is clear that many of our students are not getting the education they deserve. The Commissioner has asked that BPS “commits to a decisive plan for significant and dramatic change” to bring about better outcomes for students. He added that if the plan we present is not satisfactory, then he is committed to using other measures available under state law – including state receivership for this school. That would mean that a third-party external provider would likely govern and operate the school.

I agree that it is all our responsibilities to secure a better educational future for the students at the Mattahunt. The school has also been challenged by high teacher turnover and changes to our assignment system. These are barriers to success that we as a district must resolve, but there is a clear difference in opinion of how to accomplish that goal at the Mattahunt. I made a recommendation to you two weeks ago to close the Mattahunt on June 30th and open a new school on July 1st that will be a:

- Full-service center for excellence in early childhood education with an emphasis on trauma-sensitive practices;
- Integrates the principles of the Opportunity and Achievement Gap Policy;
- Ensures culturally and linguistically proficient programming and curriculum;
- Provides an extended school day and school year; and
- Deeply engages families as partners in student learning

I have participated in several community meetings since November 2nd and wish to acknowledge the passion, problem solving, and collaboration of parents and community members. More importantly, I recognize the frustration of parents and community to the limited quality school choices for students in the Mattapan community. In addition, school closures have been over-represented in communities of color and communities that have large immigrant populations, including in Boston Public Schools. Also, the process of engaging parents and the Mattapan community should have started earlier. We should be regularly briefing parents and community in all our level-3 schools at-risk of becoming level 4 and all level-4 schools on an annual basis and that will happen moving forward.

Lastly, I want to recognize the options that have been generated by the Mattapan community- including (1) making the school an innovation school, (2) creating a new or modified turnaround plan, or (3) requesting a level 4 extension with a receiver.

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Last night, I listened to parent and community voices and parents even voted on the various options, including the one I put forth on November 2nd to this Committee. It is clear that parents and community members want the school to remain a preK-5 school and are concerned about the impact to children that will need to transition out of the Mattahunt if it becomes a preK-1 school. I join with parents and the community in the desire to have a high quality elementary school in the Mattapan community.

So, after much consideration, I have decided to put forth the current plan to close the Mattahunt on June 30th and open a new school on July 1st that will begin as a pre-school for these main reasons:

- I believe that BPS, the community and parents can partner together to create a full-service center for excellence in early childhood education.
- We are leveraging a bright spot at the Mattahunt and we want to build on that success and that this new school will immediately work towards its accreditation by the National Association for the Education of Young Children.
- We will have the opportunity to expand the new school to be a full elementary school in upcoming years as long as it remains a community school, a BPS school.
- I believe we can create a better school than another receiver.

As superintendent of BPS, I cannot put forward any proposal that would place the school in jeopardy of going into state receivership. State receivership has not demonstrated accelerated progress in our current level 5 schools. And I assure you that every student and every family will receive 1:1 guidance as they make their school choices for next year and any current K0, K1, K2 student will have the option of attending the new school while every current 1-4th grader will be going into a Level 1, 2, 3 schools next year. And they will be given priority.

This is my professional judgment. I believe in the Mattapan community and I believe in Principal Walter Henderson, his leadership team, and the central office team supporting their work. This new school will be a beacon for the Mattapan community and Boston Public Schools.

Tonight I would like you to hear more from Principal Walter Henderson, Instructional Superintendent Mary Driscoll, and Assistant Superintendent of Engagement Monica Roberts before you deliberate.

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Dean Coleman said that the decision to delay the implementation of the School Quality Framework, while difficult, is appropriate, given that the data available is outdated.

Dr. Uriarte encouraged the district to provide parents with data in a user-friendly format to help them in the school choice process. Ms. Regina Robinson echoed the importance of parental understanding and engagement. Mr. O'Neill asked Ms. Robinson to work with district leaders on the issue. Ms. Robinson also thanked Bates principal Andrew Vega for his bold letter.

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Ms. Oliver-Dávila thanked the Superintendent for providing students with support following the presidential election.

Mr. Loconto said that in his view, the vote against lifting charter cap was not a vote against charters, but against the current funding structure. He added that citizens now need to push the state legislature for education funding reform. He also encouraged people to watch an interview with Gwen Iffil on the Charlie Rose show.

The School Committee approved the Superintendent's Report by unanimous consent.

GENERAL PUBLIC COMMENT

The following people testified regarding the Superintendent's proposal for the Mattahunt School:

- Boston City Councilor Andrea Campbell
- Boston City Councilor Annissa Essaibi-George
- Aveann Bridgemohan, parent, Mattahunt
- Tonya Todesco, parent, Boston Arts Academy
- Rev. Dieufort Fleurissant, chair, Haitian Parent Council
- Jovan Lacet, Mattapan resident
- Grace Richardson, parent, Mattahunt
- Peggy Wiesenber, Access to Justice Fellow
- Mary Battenfeld, Quality Education for Every Student (QUEST)
- Lincoln Lamond, member, Mattapan United

Tatiana Hawkes, former Boston Latin School student, presented concerns about student safety at the school.

Maria Roges, parent, questioned the district's decision to offer support for students following the presidential election.

Patrick Pochette, parent, testified regarding transportation safety concerns.

Carolyn Kain, chair, Boston Special Education Parents Advisory Council (SpedPAC) announced that SpedPAC is hosting a resource fair tomorrow at 6:30 p.m. at the Murphy K-8 School in Dorchester.

ACTION ITEMS

Ms. Jeri Robinson requested list of upcoming international travel requests for the Committee to review for equity. The Superintendent agreed to follow up.

Approved – As part of the consent calendar, the Committee unanimously approved grants totaling \$1,238,847.

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Approved – As part of consent calendar, international field trip the Committee unanimously approved an international travel request for students and chaperones from Boston Latin School to travel to Germany, Poland, and Czech Republic from April 11-23, 2017.

REPORT AND ACTION ITEM

The Superintendent announced that going forward, the district will provide the Committee with an annual update on all Level 4 schools and Level 3 schools that are risk of moving to Level 4.

The Superintendent thanked the Mattahunt community for presenting thoughtful alternatives to his recommendation and explained why he is going forward with this original proposal. He added that the district will provide Mattahunt students with one-on-one supports and give displaced students priority in the school transfer process.

Instructional Superintendent Mary Driscoll provided an overview of the Superintendent's recommendation to close the Mattahunt Elementary School in June and re-open it in July as an early education center. She also reviewed the implications of yes or no vote by the Committee. Assistant Superintendent of Engagement Monica Roberts reviewed the supports that will be offered to Mattahunt students if the Superintendent's proposal is approved by the Committee. The long-term goal is to rebuild the Mattahunt School back up to a grade 5 or grade 8 model.

Ms. Jeri Robinson asked if DESE would consider multiple proposals for Mattahunt. The Superintendent explained why that's not possible.

Mr. McClay expressed concern about Mattahunt families with challenges receiving transition services. The District agreed to track that information and provide outreach to families.

Ms. Oliver-Dávila called for the creation of a district policy outlining the resources that the BPS provides for Level 3 and 4 schools. She added that the City needs to provide support for the Mattapan community, particularly the Mattahunt Community Center.

Mr. Loconto asked about the budget implications of the Superintendent's proposal. The Superintendent said that an additional weight will be added for students attending the Mattahunt Early Education Center through the district's Weighted Student Funding (WSF) formula, bringing the school's budget to \$3.4 million, plus \$600,000 in supplemental funds. The district will also work closely with community partners to provide students care before and after school.

Dr. Uriarte asked the Superintendent to discuss why the alternative proposals put forth by the Mattahunt community are not viable and asked if there is a need for an early childhood center in Mattapan. The Superintendent explained that DESE does not permit schools to exit turnaround status by converting to innovation schools, adding that innovation changes to a school's governance structure and does not remove a school's Level 4 status. He added that innovation planning takes 15-18 months. Why no internal receivership? The Superintendent also explained that other schools in the Mattapan area have waiting lists for pre-k and kindergarten seats. DIBELS data for the Mattahunt Elementary School is on par with the rest of the district.

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Committee members expressed frustration with the decision before them and urged the district to take the steps necessary to ensure that the process is not repeated. The Superintendent pledged his commitment moving forward to better identify and support Level 3 schools that are at risk of moving to Level 4. Also, the district will hold meetings for families at Level 4 schools at the beginning of each year.

Ms. Regina Robinson encouraged the district to work with DESE to find a better way to hold schools accountable. She also asked how BPS staff will be prepared to support families with the transition. Staff in the Office of Engagement will be trained, and partner with the Office of Special Education and Office of English Language Learners to provide support. She asked the district to track students who are displaced to study the impact. She also asked for the Mattahunt Steering Committee to include strong parent representation, including parents of students with special needs.

Ms. Jeri Robinson said this can't be a "throw away" year for students currently attending the Mattahunt. Principal Henderson assured the Committee that it will be a productive year for students.

Mr. O'Neill highlighted slides 10- 11 of the presentation which demonstrates how the district responded to the concerns raised by the Committee at its November 2nd meeting.

Dr. Uriarte requested a follow up report from the district on outcomes for displaced students.

Mr. O'Neill thanked the Mattapan community for their advocacy. He said he does not feel comfortable that DESE would appoint an operator who would do a better job than the district, saying it is critical that BPS is successful on behalf of the Mattapan community who feels disenfranchised.

Approved – By roll call, the Committee approved the Superintendent's proposal to close the Mattahunt Elementary School on June 30, 2017 and reopen the site on July 1, 2017 as an early education center serving grades K0-1. Ms. Regina Robinson abstained; the other six members voted yes.

REPORT

Mr. O'Neill announced that, due to the lateness of the hour, the Committee would postpone the report on The Value of Shifting Grade Configurations until the December 7th School Committee meeting.

PUBLIC COMMENT ON REPORTS

The following people testified regarding the Mattahunt School:

- Robert Jenkins, Mattapan resident

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- Megan Wolf, QUEST
- Barbara Fields, Black Educators Alliance of Massachusetts (BEAM)

NEW BUSINESS

None.

ADJOURN

At approximately 10:11 p.m., the Committee voted by unanimous consent to adjourn the meeting.

Attest:



Elizabeth Sullivan
Executive Secretary