

NORTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS
Norton, Massachusetts

NORTON SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEETING
Monday, January 9, 2006
6:30 P.M., NORTON MIDDLE SCHOOL LIBRARY

Minutes of Meeting

The Norton School Committee held its January 9, 2006 meeting in the Norton Middle School Library. School Committee members present were Chairman Kevin O'Neil, Vice-Chairman Donna Gradie, Mr. Jonathan O'Reilly, Mr. Andrew Mackie and Mrs. Margaret Werner. Mr. Also present was Dr. Patricia H. Ansay, Superintendent of Schools, and Student Representative Matthew Jordan. The meeting was called to order at 6:37 P.M. by Chairman O'Neil.

The first order of business was an MCAS analysis. All principals were present to provide the committee with information relative to a more in-depth item analysis of their MCAS results. Principals briefly described areas of strength and weakness in their test results. They reported on reviewing each of the items on the test and provided a dialog focusing upon rationale for the results received in terms of why many students passed a certain item and why an inordinate amount of students failed a certain item.

Mrs. Mary E. R. Brown, principal of the J. C. Solmonese School said it was a learning experience to do this. She said she is very pleased with the results. According to Mrs. Brown, the Solmonese School does still have 28% in the needs improvement area. Based on the results, she said there will be meetings with staff and workshops presented by the Reading teachers. For their sub-group in Special Education, Mrs. Brown said they will have a DOE Alternative Assessment Workshop.

Looking at the MCAS results, Mrs. Werner pointed out that each time the Solmonese students scored low on an MCAS question, the state average was also low on that very same question. Mrs. Brown said she tells parents from day one to expose children to books and newspapers. Mrs. Brown also pointed out that the Solmonese students are exposed to Reading Logs, Reading Journals, a "Book It" program and more. She said, the more they practice Reading, the better they get. Mrs. Gradie said she recalls that the Solmonese School has been encouraging parents to expose children to Reading for many years.

Mr. Mackie said that if you look closely at the scores, they are actually very good. He said the Solmonese School is a very good school. It is really remarkable, he said. Mr. Mackie said that the children are getting what they need.

Mrs. Linda Ashley, principal of the L. G. Nourse School said they are encouraging their students to "re-read". She said the Nourse School needs to boost up its collection of fairy tales, myths and fables. Mrs. Ashley said that the Nourse School can use the MCAS results as a tool to boost their collections. She said a lot of the test was quite complex for a third grader. Mrs. Ashley also mentioned that Nourse School Reading teacher Mrs. Mae Myers is a tremendous resource. She said the students will be using the 2005 MCAS tests to practice for next year.

Dr. Ansay said she thinks it is very important for teachers to model answering a question. Mrs. Ashley agreed, and said she believes asking deeper questions, such as "Why" questions, is important. Mr. O'Neil concurred and said that asking inquisitive questions is good. Mrs. Werner also concurred and said she believes asking deeper and more provocative questions is good.

Mr. Mackie commended both principals saying he believes they are both doing a great job. He asked Mrs. Brown and Mrs. Ashley if their two schools are able to share. Mrs. Brown commented that it is difficult for staff at the two schools to get together as often as they would like, because of the time difference between schedules at the two schools. Mr. Mackie said he encourages them to try to share together despite these challenges. He said he believes sharing between teachers and grade levels is a big under tapped area. Mrs. Brown described parent workshops as being very successful in the past. Mr. O'Neil mentioned that he believes Reading needs to be fun. He said there is nothing better than developing love for Reading.

Mr. Paul Alperen, Interim Principal of the Henri A. Yelle School, reported that the Yelle MCAS results were not very good. We didn't do well, he said. He reported that 29% of the Yelle students are in the high needs improvement area. Mr. Alperen said that in recent years, the Yelle School has had a downward spiral in the scores. He said there are deficiencies in what we are doing, and it needs to be addressed. In Math, Mr. Alperen said the Yelle students did well in five areas but did very poorly in eight other areas. He said they are looking into the questions. Mr. Alperen said the Math program at the Yelle School is out dated. He said the deficiencies are not being corrected, and he believes the Yelle School is not doing enough to prepare the Yelle students

for middle school. He said all of the Units have been given all of the MCAS tests back to the year 2000. Mr. Alperen said we are making an effort to expose the students to MCAS questions and MCAS vocabulary all of the time.

Mr. Mackie said he believes that the students feel pressured. Mr. Alperen concurred saying that these students take this test because they are asked to take the test. He said we need to impress upon the students that it is important to do well. The students need to realize that MCAS scores are important for the school and important for the town. Mr. Alperen said he believes we need better articulation between the feeder schools and the schools we are feeding into. He said some teachers are just good at a particular subject and he would recommend using the strongest teachers to teach the subjects they are best at. Elementary teachers are basically generalists, he said. But within a Unit, if one or two teachers really like a particular subject, then they are the teachers who should be assigned to teach that subject.

Dr. Ansay said she is in support of Mr. Alperen's suggestion. She said she believes this would be a win-win situation for the teachers and the students. Mrs. Brown said Mrs. Deborah Soares has been doing this very same thing for many years. Mrs. Soares loves Science, so she teaches the Science and her partner teachers the Social Studies. Mrs. Gradie noted that the Solmonese School still conducts a tremendous Science Fair every year; however, we do not have a Science Fair at the middle school or high school level. She said this should be a consideration.

Mr. Alperen said the Yelle teachers have been working hard. He said he believes they are a bit psychologically battered because of all the changes in the administration at this school. He also said he believes In-Service is important. People need to be refreshed, he said. He also said he believes In-Service needs to be repeated for new staff. Mr. Mackie commended the Yelle School staff. Mr. Alperen concurred, saying this staff has had a bumpy existence for the past couple of years.

Mr. Roger Parent, principal of Norton Middle School, reported on the MCAS results at that level. He said, although he was disappointed with the results, he is confident they can get those scores up to where they need to be. He said there is some improvement, especially overall. Mr. Parent mentioned that the textbooks at the middle school are outdated. Mrs. Amy Berdos, Director of Curriculum, explained that we use our textbooks as a resource and add supplemental materials in order to meet the criteria of the state frameworks. Mrs. Werner believes we need to look at the rocky foundation of the Fourth and Fifth Grade instruction which is poorly preparing Sixth Graders.

Mrs. Berdos said the students do seem to catch up along the way while they are in middle school, so that by Eighth Grade they are doing very well. Mr. O'Neil urged the school district to do whatever it can to update textbooks at the middle school level, and suggested this should be done as soon as possible. Mr. Mackie said he believes Algebra is a fixed body of knowledge, and updated textbooks may not help. Mrs. Ashley said that there is more communication involved in Math now. The students are asked to explain "how" they solved a problem. Mr. Mackie believes there needs to be articulation between the various schools. He questioned whether our grade configuration is really the best it could be.

Mr. Parent said there are things we have started doing at the middle school level which will hopefully change the situation. Mrs. Berdos has started having department meetings for articulation that was not available before. He said a list of "consistent Math terms" has also been circulated. The Site Council at Norton Middle School also has an addendum to the school improvement plan. He said that a dialog between the teachers is being brought to the forefront now, and they are doing their best to change things, especially in Math. Mr. Parent said the strong point at Norton Middle School continues to be English Language Arts in Seventh Grade.

Mrs. Werner pointed out that we are basing our instruction on the frameworks, and therefore perhaps these frameworks are not really aligned with the MCAS test itself as they should be. Mr. O'Neil thanked Mr. Parent for his very good presentation.

Mr. Dewar, principal of Norton High School, said the high school staff is working to ask more open ended response questions. He said the "Test Wiz" software does help them a lot. Mr. Dewar also reported that the high school English Department is very good at sharing. He said the Math Department is also working on asking more open ended questions as well. He said we should be very interested in how we set the standard for our district, rather than worrying about state averages. Mr. Dewar said the real key is going to be articulation between the high school and the middle school. Mr. O'Neil thanked all of the principals for coming and for their helpful presentations.

The next item of business was the change in the Program of Studies booklet at Norton High School. Mr. Dewar explained that the high school would like to add a "Construction of Technology" course for one half year, and change the existing "Problem Solving and Design" course from a full year to a half year. On a motion by Mrs. Werner, seconded by Mrs. Gradie, the committee unanimously voted to approve the new course and change the existing course.

As Mr. Dewar discussed at the last meeting, the high school was looking for a formal vote from the committee for a change in policy regarding class rank as outlined in the Program of Studies booklet. As it stands now, at the beginning of each year, students are asked to choose one class which will not be used in calculating their rank in class. However, the class that they choose is counted in the overall grade point average (GPA) even though it is not counted toward the students' class rank. The high school Site Council reviewed this policy and they recommended that it be changed. They did supply some reasons: most of the students don't understand this option and guidance relates that it is a very time consuming process to go through this with all of the students. The guidance secretary has been gathering data over the last five years, and not a single class rank has been affected by the fact that a course could be omitted from the calculation for the top ten seniors. It seems unreasonable to require so much work that doesn't really have any affect anywhere.

More specifically, the current policy reads, "Yearly, each student will select five of his/her six majors to be used in the calculation of his/her rank in class." The student must include in rank determination the core course requirements for graduation. The Site Council's request, along with Mr. Dewar, is to remove that language from the Program of Studies. Mr. O'Neil felt the committee should wait before voting to change the Class Rank policy. Mr. O'Neil said that if anyone had a concern about changing the Class Rank policy, they might want a chance to comment on it, and we would need to give them this opportunity. Therefore, the committee decided to wait and will vote upon changing the Class Rank policy in the near future after it is clearly included on the Agenda.

Mr. Dewar also congratulated high school student Miss Rachel Phillips for her very well written article that appeared in "The Sun Chronicle". He said he would also like to congratulate those 38 Norton High School students who received the "John and Abigail Adams Scholarship" this year for their exceptional performance on the MCAS test. This scholarship provides four years of free tuition at a Massachusetts institution of higher learning.

The next order of business was the presentation of a new policy for Homeless Students by the Superintendent. Dr. Ansay explained that we need to be in full compliance with these issues. She said the school district has posted a flyer in every school outlining exactly what the rights of the Homeless are. Mrs. Werner noted that she believes the policy is definitely needed. She mentioned that a natural disaster like Hurricane Katrina, many people could become suddenly homeless, and we need to have a policy in place.

The Superintendent also presented a second new policy on Pregnant Students. She urged the School Committee to adopt both new policies. She said the policy for Pregnant Students is really just a revision of the current policy. The policy which is currently in place has a line, which is unacceptable to the state law, in which pregnant students cannot be asked to obtain a doctor's note to attend school if we do not require other students to acquire such a note. The policy is really protection against discrimination for pregnant students. Dr. Ansay said that it is certainly the intent of the school district to have all students graduate and have a bright future. She said we should support all students in any way so they can obtain a high school diploma.

Mr. Mackie said he would rather not vote on the Pregnant Student Policy at the present time, because he is not sure he likes some of the language in the old policy. He would like to see this policy expanded. Mrs. Werner noted that the Attleboro Public Schools has an entire "Teen Parenting" department. She said we may want to review it. She also asked about our track record for keeping students in school after they deliver their baby. If these students cannot stay in school, she asked what we are doing to support them.

On a motion by Mr. O'Reilly, seconded by Mrs. Gradie, the committee unanimously voted to accept the new policy for Homeless Students. The committee decided to wait before voting on the Pregnant Student Policy. He said the committee does not object to taking out language from the current policy which is not in compliance. However, the policy may need to be expanded, so the committee will wait and vote on this matter at another time.

PERSONNEL

Retirement:

Mrs. Theresa Nason, MS Guidance Secretary, effective April 24, 2006, after 27 years in the Norton Public Schools.

Resignation:

Miss Andrea Saudade, Elementary Speech-Language Pathologist, effective January 14, 2006.

Miss Jayme Donndelinger, MS SPED Educational Assistant, effective December 22, 2005

Leave of Absence:

Mrs. Erin Haglund, LGN Grade 3 Teacher, effective June 16, 2006 to January, 2007.

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Appointments:

Miss Maureen Malloy, SPED Assistant Secretary, effective December 20, 2005.

Mrs. Theresa Rand, JCS Assistant Secretary, effective January 3, 2006.

Mr. O'Reilly suggested that the school district should send a letter to Mrs. Theresa Nason wishing her well in her retirement, and thanking her for her 27 years of service to the Norton Public Schools.

Under Other Business, Mr. O'Reilly asked if the enrollment figures for the school district are correct. He noted that the enrollment figures for Grade 3 at the Solmonese School seem to be inaccurate. He also questioned whether the enrollment figures for Norton Middle School are accurate.

Under Other Business, the Superintendent encouraged parents to sign up for an Edline account if they have not already done so. The Superintendent also announced that Wheaton College has agreed to come over and present a "Grant Writing" workshop.

On a motion by Mr. O'Reilly, seconded by Mrs. Gradie, on a roll call vote, the committee unanimously voted to enter into Executive Session at 8:55 P.M.

The next meeting of the Norton School Committee will take place on January 23, 2006 at the Library of the Norton Middle School.

Respectfully submitted,

Patricia H. Ansay, Ed.D.

Secretary pro tem
