

NORTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS  
Norton, Massachusetts

**MEETING MINUTES**

**Date of School Committee Meeting:** November 5, 2007

**Location:** Library, Norton Middle School

**Attending: Committee Members:** Chairman Kevin O'Neil, Vice-Chairman Thomas Golota, Mr. Andrew Mackie, Mrs. Beth McManus, Mrs. Margaret Werner and Student Representative Emily Carmichael.

**Call to Order:**

Chairman O'Neil called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m.

**Pledge of Allegiance**

**Review and Approval of Minutes of Prior Meetings:**

On a motion by Mr. Golota, seconded by Mrs. Werner, the committee unanimously voted to approve the Minutes of the prior meeting held on October 22, 2007 at the Henry A. Yelle Elementary School.

**M.A.S.S. Certificate of Academic Excellence Presentation:**

Dr. Ansay presented the Massachusetts Association of School Superintendents (MASS) Award for Academic Excellence to high school senior Miss Emily Eckart. Miss Eckart was in attendance with her parents, and came forward to accept the award. Dr. Ansay explained that this award is given to high school students who have distinguished themselves in the pursuit of excellence during their high school careers. The criteria are: three year cumulative average, rank in class, and personal selection by the Superintendent. This award has been intentionally designed to be given at the beginning of the senior year for the student selected. This allows for the inclusion of this unique citation in his/her credential package and counselor recommendation. Dr. Ansay further explained that the numbers are quite restrictive, and only one certificate is allowed for up to 250 graduates.

While enrolled at Norton High School, Miss Eckart has also taken courses at Wheaton College. She is an accomplished French Horn player, and aspires to study music in college. Miss Eckart also hopes to pursue a career in music. Mr. O'Neil commended Miss Eckart on receiving such a distinguished honor, and pointed out that she was personally selected by the Superintendent to receive this award. He wished her all the very best, and congratulated her parents as well.

**High School Adjustment and Guidance Counselor Presentation:**

Mr. Donald Rita, Mrs. Elaine McLaughlin, Mrs. Lynn Ito, Ms. Ellen Dufour and Ms. Michelle Amaral gave a PowerPoint presentation on the Guidance and Counseling Department at Norton High School. Dr. Ansay explained that she requested this presentation. She thought it would be useful for the committee and the viewing audience at home to know about the many varied responsibilities of the high school adjustment and guidance counselors. With their presentation, the counselors outlined their responsibilities from a day-to-day perspective, and gave a monthly “tickler” of college preparedness for juniors and seniors and their parents.

Mr. Mackie asked about the “drop out” program at the high school. Mrs. Ito explained that the Guidance Department is continually working to identify potential “drop outs”. Once doing so, the counselors aim to help these students become more successful. She said failing grades, poor attendance, and discipline issues can all point to a “drop out” risk. Dr. Ansay suggested that more Wheaton students could be mentoring at the high school. She instructed the counselors to contact Wheaton. She explained that she has had conversations with Mrs. Betty Crutcher, wife of Wheaton President Ronald Crutcher. According to Dr. Ansay, Wheaton is ready and willing to help us augment our mentoring program at the high school.

Mr. Raymond Dewar, Principal of Norton High School, was also in attendance. Mr. Dewar explained that the “drop out” percentage is coming down. He commended the *School to Career* program at the high school which gives kids a chance to explore working while staying in school. He said the high school has worked hard to change kids’ minds when they have already decided to “drop out”. He also mentioned that counselors have been reaching down to the middle school to help kids at risk of “dropping out”. Mr. Dewar said this has made a big difference in unifying the community. He commented that the “drop out” problem is not a high school problem, but instead, is a Norton problem.

Mr. O’Neil thanked Mr. Rita, Mrs. McLaughlin, Mrs. Ito, Ms. Dufour and Ms. Amaral for their outstanding presentation.

**MCAS Presentations by Principals:**

Mrs. Mary E.R. Brown, Principal of the J.C. Solmonese Elementary School, was present to give a brief overview of the MCAS results for her school. Her report addressed the major concerns/accomplishments of her students by grade level and subject. Mrs. Brown pointed out the areas of success, and commented that students are really making progress at their level. She also said she is very impressed with the manner in which math is being taught now. According to Mrs. Brown, the new math program, *Math Expressions*, has addressed weaknesses, and has helped bring about continued growth for the students.

Mrs. Brown also mentioned that the students have been affected by budget reductions, particularly by the closing of the library and the reduction of classroom teachers. Yet despite these reductions, she pointed out that her students have continued to make adequate yearly progress on the MCAS tests. She said this success is due to the dedication of the teachers at the J.C. Solmonese School. She explained that her only concerns are updating the curriculum and providing professional development.

Mr. O'Neil commended Mrs. Brown and thanked her for an excellent presentation. He said the trend is obviously heading in the right direction. Mr. Mackie commented that he thinks the MCAS results are incredibly bad scores. He said he believes our approach is not working. He said he remains skeptical about the *Math Expressions* program. Mr. Mackie said he believes Mrs. Brown has put forth an aggressive effort as a principal, and has extremely good intent. He said he cannot understand why such good effort and good intent does not produce better MCAS test results. He said we have good people working very hard, but it is just not transferring into good results.

Mrs. Brown disputed these comments by Mr. Mackie. She said the teachers at the J.C. Solmonese School have worked very hard to help kids be successful. She said each year they are working with a different group of children, and are continually doing more with less. She said the teachers have been working very hard, and the students are now catching up with their MCAS scores. According to Mrs. Brown, the success at the J.C. Solmonese School has not been minor. She said the success has been major. She said that a child's attitude toward learning is the number one objective of the teachers at the J.C. Solmonese School.

Mrs. Werner explained that when you analyze MCAS test results, you are looking at a "bell curve". She said you must have an understanding of a "bell curve" and what it looks like, before you try to interpret these results. According to Mrs. Werner, schools do not produce cookies with the same number of chocolate chips in each one that comes down the line. Mrs. Werner said we are wrong to assume that all children in the third grade will be reading at the third grade level in the third grade. It just statistically cannot happen, she said. Mr. Mackie disputed Mrs. Werner's explanation, and insisted the J. C. Solmonese School MCAS scores are unacceptable. Mrs. Werner stated that a "bell curve" always contains a certain percentage of results at the top of the scale, a larger percentage of results at the middle of the scale, and a certain percentage of results at the bottom of the scale.

Mr. Golota pointed out that the MCAS tests are not only being used for assessment. He said the tests are also being used to drive instruction, and to help our children become better equipped. Mrs. Brown concurred, and pointed out that teachers are encouraging those children at the top to do even better. Mr. O'Neil said he thinks the new reading program will be very helpful. Mrs. Brown pointed out that one of the most important ingredients to a child's success is the teacher-child ratio in the classroom.

Mr. Raymond Dewar, Principal of Norton High School, was also present to give a brief overview of the MCAS results for his school. His report also addressed the major concerns/accomplishments of his students by grade level and subject. According to Mr. Dewar, math scores have gone up steadily. He agreed that class size has a big impact on the success of the students. Mr. Dewar said he hopes more students will go into all levels of bio-technology, so that this becomes something Norton is noted for. He said we are making big strides in Norton. Mr. Dewar commented that we need to give our students the best we can give them because that's what they deserve.

Mr. O'Neil commended Mr. Dewar on being pro-active and planning ahead. Mr. Dewar said we teach our kids with what we have. He said he just thinks our kids deserve better.

**Discussion of Town Joint Budget Meeting:**

Mrs. Werner and Mrs. McManus, School Committee representatives to this committee, announced that they would present a report at the next meeting.

**Superintendent's Evaluation:**

Mr. O'Neil announced that the Superintendent's Evaluation would be postponed until the School Committee meeting on December 3, 2007. He instructed the committee members to prepare their evaluations in time for this formal review.

**Other Business:**

Dr. Ansay read a letter from the Norton Fire Department, requesting to hold their annual Thanksgiving Eve Bonfire. On a motion by Mr. Mackie, seconded by Mrs. McManus, the committee unanimously approved this request.

**PERSONNEL:**

**Leave of Absence:**

Mrs. Lisa Gardner, JCS Grade 1 Teacher, April to June, 2008.

**Resignations:**

Mrs. Donna Lear, NHS .6 Nurse, effective November 9, 2007.

Mrs. Roberta Sanphy, LGN Educational Assistant, effective October 26, 2007.

Mrs. Giovanna Sharpe, NHS Educational Assistant, effective November 1, 2007.

**Appointments:**

Ms. Christina Paone, NMS Girls' Basketball Coach for the 2007-2008 season.

Mr. Michael Girgente-Brito, NMS Boys' Basketball Coach for the 2007-2008 season.

Mrs. Deborah Burke, Project Early Educational Assistant, effective October 22, 2007.

Mrs. Karen Shanley, JCS SPED Educational Assistant, effective October 22, 2007.

Mrs. Lee Neary, LGN Project Early Educational Assistant, effective October 29, 2007.

**Adjournment to Executive Session:**

On a motion by Mr. Golota, seconded by Mr. Mackie, on a roll call vote, the committee unanimously voted to adjourn to Executive Session at 8:17 pm.

**NEXT MEETING DATE:**

**Monday, November 19, 2007, 6:30 P.M., Norton Middle School.**