

NORTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS
Norton, Massachusetts

MEETING MINUTES

Date of School Committee Meeting: May 5, 2008

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 6:32 pm.

Reorganization of Norton School Committee

According to the School Committee Bylaws, a reorganization of the Norton School Committee is required at the first meeting following the Annual Town Election. Therefore, Chairman O'Neil opened the meeting and turned the election process over to the Superintendent, who acted as Chairman pro tem for the purpose of receiving nominations and conducting the election for the new Chairman of the Norton School Committee. Mr. O'Neil made a motion to nominate Mr. Golota as the new Chairman. Mr. Mackie seconded the motion. Since there was only one nominee, Dr. Ansary cast one ballot and announced Mr. Golota as the new Chairman of the Norton School Committee.

Mr. Golota switched seats with Mr. O'Neil and assumed his duty as the newly elected Chairman. His first order of business was to conduct the election for Vice-chairman. Mr. O'Neil nominated Mr. Mackie for Vice-chairman. Mrs. Werner seconded the motion. The committee unanimously approved the nomination, and Mr. Mackie assumed his duty as the newly elected Vice-chairman.

Mr. O'Neil then volunteered to act as the new Legislative Representative for the School Committee. Mr. Mackie nominated Mr. O'Neil for this position. Mrs. McManus seconded the nomination. The committee unanimously approved the nomination, and Mr. O'Neil assumed his duty as the newly elected Legislative Representative.

The committee then decided upon the new school liaison assignments. The new assignments are as follows: **NHS** – *Mr. Mackie*, **NMS** – *Mr. O'Neil*, **HAY** – *Mrs. Werner*, **JCS** – *Mr. Golota* and **LGN** – *Mrs. McManus*.

Pledge of Allegiance

Review and Approval of Minutes of Prior Meetings:

A motion was made by Mr. Mackie, seconded by Mrs. Werner, to approve the Regular Session Minutes of the prior meeting on April 7th. These Minutes were unanimously approved on a 5-0

vote. A motion was then made by Mr. Mackie, seconded by Mr. O'Neil, to approve the Executive Session Minutes of the prior meeting on April 7th. These Minutes were unanimously approved on a 5-0 vote.

Public Hearing on the School Choice Program:

The Superintendent explained that the School Choice Program requires a public hearing and then a vote by the School Committee on whether or not to participate for the following school year. A Choice School District would have to publish the number of seats that are available to children from other communities. With the financial constraints that we have, and large class sizes, Dr. Ansay suggested that, as in past years, the committee should vote not to participate in the School Choice Program for the 2008-2009 school year.

On a motion by Mr. O'Neil, seconded by Mr. Mackie, the committee unanimously voted not to participate in the School Choice Program for the 2008-2009 school year.

Approval of Homework Policy:

Dr. Ansay explained that this policy has been worked and reworked by the entire Administrative Roundtable membership who felt that consistency between teachers of a grade, as well as from one grade to another, was necessary. She further explained that the Site Councils have all reviewed this policy and accepted it. Dr. Ansay reported that she did personally receive two comments from parents concerned about a homework overload at the middle school level. She said she reinforced that the middle school has the optimum avenue for teachers to share the planning of long-term assignments and the scheduling of tests and quizzes and their due dates, so that students aren't overwhelmed in a negative fashion. She said the teams at each grade level meet regularly and long-term projects and dates for tests and quizzes are consistent agenda items. She said she urges parents to contact building principals at all levels if they feel that there are issues with homework. She said such concerns will be investigated and hopefully rectified. According to Dr. Ansay, it is the feeling of the administrative council that homework must be of value and not just busy work, and as such is a very worthwhile tool to assist in the educational process. Dr. Ansay urged the committee to support the administration in approving this policy, with a review to occur at the end of the 2008-2009 school year.

A discussion ensued. The committee had many questions about the policy. Therefore, Mr. Golota announced that a vote on this policy would be deferred to a future meeting when educators would be invited to attend and answer questions.

Approval of 2008-2009 School Calendar:

Dr. Ansay presented the 2008-2009 School Calendar to the committee for their approval. Mr. Golota asked if the committee had any questions or comments. The committee pointed out that the Holiday Break would begin December 24, 2008, not December 21, 2008. They also pointed out that it would be necessary to add "XX" to the day after Labor Day to indicate a Professional Day. Mr. Golota asked for a motion to accept the 2008-2009 School Calendar with the two changes suggested. On a motion by Mr. O'Neil, seconded by Mr. Mackie, the committee unanimously approved the 2008-2009 School Calendar with these changes.

Approval of Safe Schools Policy:

Dr. Ansay explained that this policy is being brought forth to the School Committee a second time. She said this version has made the reporting procedures for harassment, hate crimes, bullying, retaliation, etc. more student friendly. She said the forms have been adjusted. A discussion ensued. Mr. Mackie pointed out that he would like to hear from the Vice Principals before voting on this policy. Mrs. Werner mentioned the book "Odd Girl Out" which addresses the very important topic of bullying. She suggested that we now live in culture which is more revenge giving. According to Mrs. Werner, 20 years ago, bullying might be responsible for suicides, whereas today, revenge killings can result from bullying. Mr. Golota concurred, stating that the problem of bullying is not a black and white issue. He asked if a vote on this policy should be postponed. Dr. Ansay agreed and the vote on the Safe Schools Policy was postponed to future meeting.

Athletic League Change Investigation:

Dr. Ansay explained that she has drafted a letter of intent to the Hockomock League about Norton High School's desire to become a member of this league. She said she is waiting until after the Athletic Director's meeting with the M.I.A.A. to send it out, in case there are any supporting documents that need to be attached to the letter. Dr. Ansay explained that the Hockomock League is looking to create a smaller schools division, which would make more sense for Norton High School. She said the teams in that league are comprised of surrounding communities and will make for much shorter bus trips and ultimately shorter evenings for our high school students. She said this would allow students to reach home in a timely manner to carry out the rest of their school responsibilities.

Dr. Ansay said it is her understanding that Norton High School would be more competitive with these surrounding communities in preparation, assets, and so forth. She said we will await word from the Athletic League about whether or not they are accepting new high schools to their ranks and what the timeframe for that is. Upon receiving that information, she said more investigation and appropriate steps in terms of approvals and open comment will be conducted.

Dr. Ansay pointed out that if Norton High School is accepted into the Hockomock League, participation would not occur until the 2010-2011 school year. She explained that Norton's Athletic Director, Miss Terri Pillsbury, is compiling data that would be included in our application, and she said she is also working on this along with Mr. Dewar. Dr. Ansay suggested Miss Pillsbury and Mr. Dewar should be invited to the next School Committee meeting to provide information about their research.

Personnel:**Retirements:**

Ms. Tina Berlad, MS Speech Therapist, effective June 30, 2008, after 5 years of service.

Mrs. Patricia Olken, MS Guidance Counselor and MS Newspaper Club Advisor, effective June 30, 2008, after 28 years of service.

Mr. Robert Rukstalis, HS Physical Education Teacher and Cross Country Coach, effective July 2, 2008, after 34 years of service.

Leave of Absence:

Mrs. Kristen Howard, JCS School Nurse, effective September 1 – November 17, 2008.

Other:

Mrs. McManus said she hopes to see a lot of parental support at Town Meeting on May 12th. Mr. Mackie spoke about what he referred to as the “bottom line”. He said cities and towns in this state are in a desperate state and Beacon Hill definitely doesn’t understand what a hard time cities and towns are having. He also pointed out that there are no plans in place to address this. Mr. Mackie said the solution has to do with increasing revenue, and currently the State House has no plans to do that. They have voted against the casino and have no plans to increase taxes. He said there are major problems in cities and towns and it is now spreading everywhere. Mr. Golota also pointed out that there are some people in Norton who believe that we are the only town experiencing financial difficulty, and these same people believe the issue is mismanagement. According to Mr. Golota, mismanagement is not the issue in Norton.

Adjournment:

On a motion by Mr. Mackie, seconded by Mr. O’Neil, on a roll call vote, the committee unanimously voted to enter into Executive Session at 7:35pm.

NEXT MEETING DATE:

Monday, May 19, 2008, 6:30 P.M., Norton Middle School Library.

Respectfully Submitted,
Patricia H. Ansay, Ed.D.
Secretary pro tem

