

NORTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS
Norton, Massachusetts

MEETING NOTES

TO: ALL STAFF MEMBERS
FROM: Patricia H. Ansay, Ed.D., Superintendent of Schools
DATE: April 3, 2007

Date of School Committee Meeting: March 19, 2007

Location:

Library, Norton Middle School

Attending:

Committee Members: Chairperson Donna Gradie, Mr. Jonathan O'Reilly and Mrs. Margaret Werner. Vice Chairman Kevin O'Neil was present until 7:25pm, at which time he departed to attend the Finance Committee meeting. Mr. Thomas Golota was absent.

Call to Order:

Chairperson Gradie called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m.

Review and Approval of Minutes of Prior Meeting:

A motion was made by Mr. O'Reilly, seconded by Mr. O'Neil, to approve both the Regular and Executive Session Minutes of the prior meeting held on March 5, 2007. On a 4-0 vote, the committee unanimously voted to approve the Minutes.

Budget Transfers Approval:

Dr. Ansay provided the committee with a print-out of proposed budget transfers. A discussion ensued about the new policy regarding transfers. On a motion by Mr. O'Reilly, seconded by Mrs. Werner, the committee unanimously approved the budget transfers proposed by Dr. Ansay.

Standards-Based Report Card Draft-Vote to Approve:

Dr. Ansay explained that the school district has been working for over a year to implement a standards-based report card in Grades K-5 for September 2007. She said the preparation has included not only investigation, but professional development and the actual creation of the standards-based report card. Site Councils were presented with this information along the way.

Dr. Ansay said this effort has been the work of the district's Report Card Committee and most high-achieving districts have already made the transition to standards-based reporting. The new report card aims to help parents understand their child's progress in terms of how they are being instructed. Dr. Ansay said we are moving to standards-based instruction as evidenced by the use of goals, rubrics, and so forth. The Norton Public Schools has also been employing standards-based assessment practices as well, so she said it makes good sense that the actual formal report card is in line with those practices.

Mrs. Amy Berdos, Director of Curriculum and Instruction, K-12, and Mrs. Lynn Wiegel, Supervisor of Technology, were present to further expand on the new report card and give a PowerPoint presentation. Mrs. Berdos commended the Report Card Committee, emphasizing that they have done an extraordinary amount of work since the project began. She also explained that Mrs. Wiegel has been very instrumental in bringing the new report card "on line". In the fall, the new report cards will all be "on line", according to Mrs. Berdos, and will no longer be written. Also, there will be a change in the number of terms. Instead of 4 terms, the school year will be separated into 3 terms. The new report card will be issued in December, March and June.

Dr. Ansay further explained that the new report cards will no longer use letter grades; the numbers 1, 2, 3, or 4 will indicate the children's performance levels in the different subject matter areas. Regarding effort and behaviors, the letters C for *consistently*, O for *often*, S for *sometimes*, and R for *rarely* will indicate progress in those areas. Dr. Ansay explained that she has created a letter to be sent to parents in September reminding them of this change and the principals of each elementary school will be conducting informational sessions during the months of October and November.

Mrs. Werner remarked that she thinks a standards-based report card is a really great idea. She said "Rubrics" are always a better way to communicate, although they are a lot of work. Mrs. Berdos concurred, and stated that the teachers should really be commended. Dr. Ansay stated that this has been a huge initiative. She said this type of report card makes good sense, and the state has moved in this direction as well.

Mrs. Gradie thanked the Report Card Committee for their dedication and hard work. She also commended Mrs. Berdos and Mrs. Wiegel for the passion they have ignited. On a motion by Mr. O'Reilly, seconded by Mrs. Werner, the committee unanimously voted to approve the new standards-based report card.

Select Board, Town Manager, Welcome, FY '08 Budget Discussion:

Dr. Ansay explained that she had extended an invitation to all members of the Select Board, and Mr. James Purcell, Town Manager, to attend the School Committee meeting to discuss the FY '08 budget. A discussion was planned regarding a level-funded budget, a level-service budget, and FY '07 cuts that were made and are still in place. Dr. Ansay

announced that the discussion of the budget would be postponed. Mr. Purcell would be attending the Finance Committee meeting tonight, instead of the School Committee meeting. She also explained that Mr. Robert Kimball had a prior commitment and would be unable to attend.

Mr. O'Reilly commented that a level-service FY '08 budget would bring the school department back to where it was in FY '07. However, he said that this budget still wouldn't bring us back to where the school department was in FY '06. According to Mr. O'Reilly, in Norton 6 or 7 years ago, we provided more services to our students than we are providing now. Dr. Ansay concurred and said that if we need to go to level-funding this year, it will take 10 years to recover. She said we are just digging a deeper hole.

Mr. O'Reilly suggested that the committee should find out if the Board of Selectmen are planning to put an override on the ballot. He said we will need to plan ahead so that the staff can be notified whether they are returning next year. According to Mr. O'Reilly, we currently have a staff that is well trained and meets our expectations. He said, it would be very unfortunate to let them go. Mr. O'Reilly described a level-service budget as the wrong direction for the school department. He believes the Selectmen need to give the people a choice of what they want to spend their money on. According to Mr. O'Reilly, if this current trend continues, the school department will be unable to live by its 5 year plan. He said if the town does not contribute more money to the school budget, we are facing very hard times ahead.

Dr. Ansay commended all those who have tried to think out of the box, and think creatively during these hard fiscal times. Mrs. Werner mentioned that the tax levy hasn't been raised in Norton for many years, and therefore that is one of the reasons we are so far behind. She mentioned that we also have a very small tax base because we have very little business. Mrs. Gradie concurred, saying that Norton has not raised the tax levy in 25 years, and that is why we are in this predicament today. Several members of the audience concurred, saying that obviously Norton has fallen short over the years in its willingness to contribute town aid. Several audience members commented the town has not given enough through local property taxes.

Mrs. Gradie reminded the audience that Norton has never passed an override. A discussion ensued about sports fees and bus fees. Mrs. Gradie said the Committee would take everything into consideration. Most audience members present spoke out in favor of an override, saying that at some point you have to do things that are unpleasant and unpopular.

Vote to Eliminate Kindergarten Session Switch:

Dr. Ansay explained that the committee is being asked to vote in favor of eliminating the Kindergarten session switch at mid-year. She said many parents and guardians feel the switch makes day care situations difficult for them. Many districts have since eliminated

the mid-year switch in the A.M. and P.M. sessions. She said teachers report that it takes students quite a significant amount of time to adjust to the change, and that this has somewhat of an impact on their education.

Dr. Ansay explained that an early childhood team has been formed in the school district. She said this team has recommended eliminating the Kindergarten session switch at mid-year. Mrs. Linda Ashley, principal of the L.G. Nourse School, commented that the Kindergarten session switch is a logistical problem. Mr. Mary Brown, principal of the J.C. Solmonese School, expressed concern about the late start time for the afternoon Kindergarten session at her particular school. She said her teachers are concerned about students remaining in the afternoon session for the entire year with a late start time.

On a motion by Mrs. Werner, seconded by Mr. O'Reilly, the committee unanimously voted to eliminate the Kindergarten session switch at mid-year.

Vote on Community Use of Facilities Policy:

Dr. Ansay resubmitted the new Community Use of Facilities Policy to the committee. She explained that the committee's suggestions have been incorporated into the new policy. On a motion by Mr. O'Reilly, seconded by Mrs. Werner, the committee unanimously approved the new policy with the modifications mentioned by Dr. Ansay.

Update on Elementary World Language Program:

Dr. Ansay explained that the principals have worked with Mrs. Patricia Penza, World Language Department Chair, to plan the new world language program for the elementary level. Spanish will be taught to grade 2 and grade 4. French will be taught to grade 3 and grade 5. The instruction will be ½ hour per week. Mrs. Brown, principal of the J.C. Solmonese School, said her school is really excited about the program. She explained that they will be piloting the program now, and will make an assessment at the end of the year. She looks forward to seeing how it goes.

Mrs. Gradie said the education of citizens to participate in a globally interconnected world must start in all of our schools. Mrs. Brown said that when you expose children to another language, you give them the ability to travel safer in another country. She said the program is very exciting. Mrs. Werner concurred. According to Mrs. Werner, if you don't teach a child a foreign language early, their brains will never be wired to learn it.

Vote to Appoint School Committee Member to Health Insurance Impact Bargaining:

Dr. Ansay asked the Committee to appoint one member to the health insurance impact bargaining. Mrs. Werner nominated Mr. Golota for this role. Mr. O'Reilly seconded the nomination. On a 3-0 vote, the committee unanimously approved the nomination of Mr. Golota to the health insurance impact bargaining.

Daniel Dwyer, JCS Site Council:

Mr. Daniel Dwyer, a parent on the J.C. Solmonese School Site Council, was present to discuss the important issues surrounding the late starting time at the Solmonese School. Mr. Dwyer explained that a survey was recently distributed to the staff at the Solmonese School. Mr. Dwyer addressed the results of this survey, and also addressed other concerns stemming from the school time changes.

Mrs. Gradie mentioned that the change in the school start times has been a very beneficial thing for Norton High School. Mr. O'Reilly reflected back on why the school start times were changed. He recalled that the change was originally made because of the high school. The research stated that high school students should start school later. However, according to Mr. Dwyer, this same research stated that elementary children should start school earlier.

Solmonese School parents in the audience commented on their discontent with the new late start time at their school. Dr. Ansay explained that the school department will soon be negotiating a new contract with the bus company. She said this will provide an opportunity to examine ridership, number of buses, and so forth. Audience members remarked that many buses are not full. They suggested combining routes to reduce the number of buses. Dr. Ansay explained that buses are classified as either "two tier" or "four tier" in the bus contract. She said that in the past there were no provisions in the contract to reduce the number of buses. She emphasized that when the new bus contract is negotiated, routes might be able to be consolidated. The parents from the Solmonese school explained that they are just asking for someone to take a look at this.

Former School Committee member, Mr. Andrew Mackie, was present in the audience. He said he well remembers the issue of changing the school times when it was first discussed by the committee. He said the Solmonese School got the "short end of the stick" because there was no way to do the best for everyone. He emphasized that a solution must exist, and when the new bus contract is negotiated, the school department can solve this issue. He said the problem should be looked at, should be fixed, and can be fixed.

Mr. O'Reilly thanked Mr. Dwyer for coming forward with these points. He said the Committee knows this issue has existed for a while. He said they can make no promises about changing the school times at the Solmonese School. However, he said the committee will look at the issue. Mrs. Gradie concurred. She thanked all of the Solmonese School parents for coming and for bringing this issue to the attention of the committee. She said the committee will work diligently on this. The Solmonese School parents thanked the committee.

Personnel:

Retirement:

Mrs. Carolyn Smith, NHS English Teacher, effective June, 2007, after 25 years of service.

Leave of Absence:

Mrs. Linda Kabat, JCS Grade 1 Teacher, maternity leave of absence for the 2007-2008 school year.

Appointments:

High School Coaches

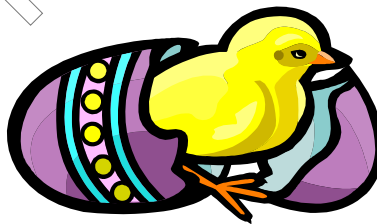
Adjournment:

The committee unanimously voted to adjourn at 8:42 p.m.

NEXT MEETING DATE:

Monday, April 9, 2007, 6:30 P.M., Norton Middle School

Enjoy the season!



These Meeting Notes are intended to keep the school district and the community informed in a timely fashion following a meeting of the Norton School Committee. They have not been officially approved by the committee.

The Norton Public School System does not discriminate on the basis of age, race, color, national origin, sex, disability, religion or sexual orientation.