

Meeting Minutes
Medford School Committee
Curriculum Sub Committee
December 8, 2011

The curriculum sub committee of the Medford School Committee was called to order by Chairperson Paulette Van der Kloot in the Superintendent's Conference Room at Medford High School. Sub committee members Sharon Guzik and William O'Keefe Jr. were in attendance. Also present were Superintendent Roy Belson, Assistant Superintendent Beverly Nelson, Director of Elementary Education Diane Caldwell, Andrews Principal Paul D'Alleva, Roberts Principal Kirk Johnson, Andrews Assistant Principal Miriam Marotta, Supervisor of PE/Health Eileen DiBattista, Parents Bonnie Wargo and Karen Roust and USN Commander Edward Hafner.

All rose to salute the Flag.

There were two items on the agenda (attached)

- Presentation of Junior Naval ROTC by Commander Edward Hafner
- Discussion of Medford Public Schools Recess Policy

The Chairperson called upon Superintendent Belson for a brief introduction to the issues.

The first topic discussed was the Junior Naval ROTC Program by Commander Hafner.

Key points presented by Commander Hafner included:

- There are 700,000 students involved in this program nationwide. It is not setup as a feeder program for the military.
- Students participate five periods and days per week. It can be a one-year elective but can also be a four-year sequential program. Open to both males and females.
- Cadets wear a uniform to school one day per week.
- There are many ways to earn merit ribbons. Many involve community service activities.
- There is no student cost for the program. School system usually pays half the cost of each teacher involved. It is generally equivalent to a starting teacher's salary. Navy picks up the remaining cost.
- There is generally a two-year waiting period to have a program approved by the Navy. States that have fewer existing programs have a better chance for quicker approval. Since Massachusetts only has five programs at this time there would be a good chance of a speedier approval. Of course, much depends upon the budget in Washington.
- Sample curricula materials and textbook were presented for sub committee review.

- The selection of teacher(s) is made by the school district from among all available Navy qualified personnel.

The Superintendent and the sub committee members then asked Commander Hafner several questions to clarify the program elements and operational rules. The following is representative of the information received:

- There may be some scheduling issues that have to be worked out given Medford's tight 6 period schedule and time and learning guidelines.
- The program includes many interdisciplinary elements but is usually given credit as a social studies course. Science and math are also strong elements of the program.
- Union issues may have to be worked out as well as a state teacher license.
- The level of student and community interest needs to be assessed.
- The program encourages college after high school

The Chairperson thanked Commander Hafner for his presentation and the committee will review all that was presented for possible program adoption going forward.

After a brief recess the subcommittee continued on the topic of recess starting at 8:10p.m.

The Superintendent explained that several years ago the Massachusetts Board of Education decided that school systems had great flexibility in how much time had to be official for physical education. The range could be anywhere from one time per year to every day.

In recent times there has been increasing concern for offering more physical exercise to deal with childhood obesity and general health. However, there has been no regulation change.

The Medford Public Schools does not have a firm policy in place regarding the uniform implementation of recess. Also, there is no policy in place about the option for teachers to use recess as a punishment.

The Superintendent further explained that in some instances the denial of recess could be a safety issue when it is determined that a student could be a safety risk to either himself/herself or other students.

Chairperson Van der Kloot read an email from Columbus Principal Joan Yaeger that explained the practice of recess denial when students repeatedly fail to complete their homework.

Mr. O'Keefe expressed concern that the denial of recess to special education students required careful monitoring. That it may be a manifestation of disability and there needed to be an IEP correlation.

Ms. Guzik commented that she is aware of a practice where an entire class is denied recess for individual student misbehavior. Using peer pressure as a tool needs to be closely examined.

She also noted that there were legitimate weather conditions that might prohibit the students from going outside.

The Superintendent pointed out that all our schools now have indoor facilities to support recess.

PE/Health Supervisor Eileen DiBattista explained that recommended guidelines called for 150 minutes per week (K-8 grades) of physical exercise and 220 minutes per week at the high school level.

The Superintendent noted that current academic scheduling made the guidelines impossible without an extended school day.

Supervisor DiBattista suggested the possibilities of looking at rewards/incentives for good behavior rather than punishment for a negative behavior. She asked “Does denying recess get results?”

The general answer was “no, but the homework gets done.”

Director of Elementary Education Diane Caldwell said that Principals are open to suggestions. Each building and teacher use different strategies. It is not uniform.

Parents Bonnie Wargo and Karen Roust spoke of problems in grade 2 at the Columbus. However, it was better this year.

Principal D’Alleva asked “What are the options?”

The general consensus was that recess punishment was counter productive. There needs to be a different way.

Mr. O’Keefe spoke about a student behavior contract as a possibility. This would help students to accept consequences and achieve rewards for appropriate behavior.

Roberts Principal Kirk Johnson spoke about working with parents to create understanding of disciplinary approaches. Homework can be a problem especially in grades 4 and 5.

Chairperson Van der Kloot asked the parents “how often is recess denial happening this year?”

Parents responded that it hasn’t been a problem this year.

Principal D’Alleva spoke of showing homework deficiency on the report cards.

Also, if a late bus could be arranged for the elementary, then homework makeup could happen after school.

The Superintendent suggested that the elementary Wednesday schedule could be used as a homework makeup period. He also stressed the need to ensure that homework was a quality assignment not just busy work.

Ms. Guzik introduced a recent Worcester Public Schools Policy on Time and Learning and Recess. (see attached).

Ms. DiBattista re-emphasized the value of exercise as established by recent brain research. Exercise increases productivity.

Assistant Superintendent Nelson suggested that effective teacher classroom management can reduce the need for using recess as a punishment.

The Superintendent commented that the Rennie Center has released a report on school discipline practices. He will study it and provide comments to the school committee at a future date.

Chairperson Van der Kloot commented that the denial of recess should not be an arbitrary process. Next steps should include:

- Gathering information from schools/teachers
- Looking at alternative ways to promote positive behavior.
- Providing options to teachers and principals around homework
- Improve communication with parents
- Develop a clear policy

On the motion of Mr. O'Keefe and seconded by Ms. Guzik the meeting was adjourned at 9:16 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Paulette Van der Kloot
Chairperson