

Medford Public Schools  
Medford, MA 02155

Medford School Committee  
Committee of the Whole

January 25, 2017

The meeting was called to order at 6:30 p.m. by Mayor Burke in the library of Medford High School. The following members were present at the meeting: Vice-Chair Ann Marie Cugno, Secretary Paulette Van der Kloot, Erin DiBenedetto, Kathy Kreatz, Mea Mustone, and Robert Skerry Jr. Also present were Superintendent Roy Belson, , Deputy Superintendent Beverly Nelson, Assistant Superintendent Diane Caldwell, Director of Pupil Services Kathleen Medaglio, Director of Curriculum Bernadette Ricciardelli, and members of the special education administrative team Christine Conway, Lisa Ianelli, Joan Bowen and Anthony Volpe. Also in attendance were Jameel Webb-Davis, Anne Herzog-Rousseau, Tonya Sullivan, Alex Lauric, Melanie McLaughlin, Amy Stewart, Alicia Caron, Meryl Perlson and Annemarie Rigas.

All rose to salute the Flag.

Mayor Burke stated that the purpose of the meeting is to review our school system's approach to special education inclusion. Our goal is to better understand the status of inclusion in our schools and to make recommendations to ensure that all students receive their education in the least restrictive appropriate setting consistent with the law and best practices. Tonight we will hear both ideas and data from our administration. We will then provide our SEPAC with an opportunity to comment and suggest ideas. This process will allow us to get a full picture and then advise our administration on what we feel should be the next steps for our schools.

Mayor Burke introduced Superintendent Belson for a brief overview.

Superintendent Belson reported that all Medford regular classrooms are inclusive. Some classrooms require more specialized assistance with extra help. He highlighted the program tenets of IDEA. Superintendent Belson said that professional development is ongoing and not a one shot item. He continued with an explanation IEP's and FAPE. Superintendent Belson commented that special education is a continuum of placements, a business of improvement and always has new challenges to face.

He said that the Medford Public Schools welcomes parent involvement but the school reserve the right and obligation to differ. He continued by saying that we value students with disabilities, and we value inclusion. Superintendent Belson said that we train teachers in a wide range of sped areas. Our teachers

need to work together. Sped students are assigned to experienced teacher if possible. There is always a learning curve. It needs to be ownership by all not just the specialists.

The Superintendent then asked Director of Pupil Services Kathleen Medaglio to provide information regarding the current status of special needs inclusion.

Director Medaglio provided the committee with several charts containing relevant comparative statistics (see attached). She then went through the various charts to highlight key data and to demonstrate progress over the last three years regarding inclusion.

The following relevant facts were provided by Ms. Medaglio:

- Medford has 777 students in sped. In FY 2010 we had 921.
- 18.19% of our students receive special education services. The state average is 17.2%
- Full inclusion is defined as 80% of the time in regular education. The state target is 60.5% and Medford is at 61%. In 2014 Medford was at 50.8%.
- Medford students in sub separate learning environments have dropped from 14.1% to 8.8%. The state target is 12.5%
- Our out of district placement is 7.2%. The state target is 5.5%. Medford's number is higher because we have students at the Curtis-Tufts and they count in out of district even though it is a in district program.
- The suspension rate of sped students is down.
- We do not disproportionately identify students as sped
- Our post grad placement rate is very good compared to the state.

There was good discussion regarding professional development of teachers. Deputy Superintendent Nelson explained that the new teachers' contract enables us to mandate more specific training. Assistant Superintendent Diane Caldwell cited the new state relicensure requirement for 15 hours of sped per teacher. We are offering a state course online on the fundamentals of inclusion. Paraprofessionals are now mandated to take professional development as well.

Director Medaglio emphasized that we can't operate in "silos". Regular ed and sped must interact as a team to get good results.

Ms. Medaglio then introduced two additional documents that identified how inclusive practices factor into the teacher and administrator evaluation system (see attached).

The Superintendent then introduced ten preliminary recommendations based upon both external and internal feedback around inclusion (see attached document).

Mayor Burke then recognized SEPAC chair Melanie McLaughlin for her input and response.

Ms. McLaughlin made the following points. She cited her current involvement with Harvard and DESE.

- There is a disconnect between regular educators and sped

- There are many individual stories that need to be heard
- There needs to be a longer conversation on this topic. Everybody needs to be in the room.. We should have an ongoing subcommittee for this topic
- Some 504's are not working
- We need more and better professional development
- We need more inclusion in non-regular day school programs
- We need to stress engagement not just involvement
- She talked about a friendship between her daughter and a regular education student

As the meeting progressed other parents spoke on the topic.

- Ms. Davis was concerned that the evaluation team had diverse opinions. Also that some teachers told her that they were not allowed to discuss the issues with her.
- Ms. Tonya Sullivan has had a pretty good experience overall. Wants to see more programs after grade 6. She can see a difference in behavior when structured programs are provided.

Mayor Burke commented that an enhanced recreation program was being studied.

Vice Chairperson Cugno spoke about the summer fun program which she co-founded.

- Alex Lauria advocated for more in classroom support for regular ed teachers. She suggested an inclusion specialist. She also spoke in favor of the Understanding Differences Program
- Meryl Perlson called for more after school programs. The current one didn't work for her and her daughter. She wanted transportation to facilitate involvement. She felt that high school students could be more involved.

Member Mea Mustone asked if we should be hiring an inclusion specialist. Also we should have a special subcommittee to work on these issues. We should also adopt a disability awareness curriculum for our students.

Superintendent Belson responded as follows:

- All our Sped teachers are trained in inclusion. We also have program administrators at each level and ETLs to assist teachers. We want our existing teacher to own each student. We don't want inclusion issues to belong to a specialist.
- We currently have subcommittees. We should use them more to focus on an issue like this. If we don't use our current subcommittees often, would we sustain a special committee. He suggested the curriculum subcommittee.

Member Van der Koot offered to convene the curriculum subcommittee to focus on this issue. She is the Chairperson.

Superintendent Belson pointed out that there are several disability awareness programs. The administration is studying them and will make a decision.

There was a very good discussion at the meeting and there were multiple takeaways to be developed over time. All agreed that our schools should be inclusive.

On the motion of Ms. Cugno seconded by Mr. Skerry the meeting was adjourned at 8:45 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Paulette Van der Kloot  
Secretary