

Medford Public Schools
Medford, Massachusetts

Curriculum Sub-Committee

April 27, 2016

Minutes

Meeting was called to order by Chairperson Paulette Van der Kloot at 7:05 p.m. in the Superintendent's Conference Room at Medford High School.

All rose to salute the Flag.

Sub-committee members present included Chairperson Van der Kloot and Mr. Robert Skerry. Sub-committee member Mea Mustone joined the meeting at 7:35 p.m. School committee member Erin DiBenedetto joined the meeting at 7:25 p.m.

Also in attendance were Superintendent Belson, Deputy Superintendent Beverly Nelson, Assistant Superintendent Diane Caldwell and Director of Curriculum Bernadette Ricciardelli.

There were five parents in attendance as follows:

- Kate Carson
- Michelle Ciccolo
- Jennifer Lewis
- Cheryl Rodriguez
- Ellery Klein

The Superintendent identified three agenda items:

- PARCC "opt out" situation
- Parent concerns regarding homework polity and practice
- State Accountability System and Medford Performance

Superintendent explained the role and rules governing sub-committee meetings.

Superintendent asked Deputy Superintendent to explain the State/DESE guidance on "opt-Out" of the state tests.

Deputy Superintendent Nelson provided a handout that identified the state's position (see attached)

State Law MGL C69 requires that “all students who are educated with Massachusetts public funds participate in a statewide student assessment program.”

It was explained that the state urged us to encourage participation but there would be no penalty for any student/parent who declined.

However, it is unclear what the impact would be on the school/school district’s rating if students were not counted as test takers. DESE has been very strict about participation over the years.

While the committee voiced several concerns about the testing system it was acknowledged that this is a difficult predicament.

The number of students opting out at this time is very small.

The meeting then moved on to hear parental concerns about the homework policy and practice.

Jen Lewis made an initial presentation (see attached). She raised issues of quantity, quality and variations among teachers. There was particular concern regarding homework in the early grades. Also there was concern about some teachers using homework as a punishment. This might include the loss of recess time.

Parent Kate Carson (a teacher herself) talked about the stress that homework places on young children and families. She cited the thinking of Tufts Professor Martha Potts.

Parent Michelle Ciccolo felt the nightly homework was too much.

Parent Ellery Klein said that studies show that homework for early learners is not effective.

Parent Cheryl Rodriguez was pro homework and felt it played a valuable role.

Assistant Superintendent Diane Caldwell talked about the new k-2 program initiative.

Superintendent Belson spoke on the need to be developmentally appropriate and that using homework as a punishment is not acceptable. He emphasized that homework well done can be important but that it is not to be a ‘make work’ activity.

Chairperson Van der Kloot commented that she experienced good homework with her children years ago which engaged the family and the student.

The Committee will study the parent proposal and report back. Meanwhile the administrators will reinforce best practices with our teaching faculty.

The meeting then moved to the topic of the State Accountability System and the Medford performance 2015. There was particular emphasis on the Roberts School.

Superintendent Belson made the following introductory statement:

As we begin our review of the accountability status we should initially focus on the big picture.

The Medford Public Schools has eight schools that are eligible for accountability ratings by DESE. Only one school has been designated as a Level 3 school. That designation was one point below the Level 2 threshold.

Medford High School and Medford Vocation are designated as Level 1 schools. Additionally, both are fully accredited by NEASC. The ratings for our two high school programs are better than many other schools across the Commonwealth.

Please note a few examples:

Waltham High – Level 3
Woburn High – Level 3
Quincy High – Level 2
Peabody High – Level 3
Malden High – Level 3

Our two middle schools and three elementary schools are rated as Level 2 which is good when matched with demographically comparable schools in the Commonwealth.

Please note a few examples:

Reading Elementary – Level 3
Somerville Elementary – Level 3
Waltham Elementary – Level 3
Quincy Elementary – Level 3
Framingham Elementary – Level 3

As you will see the State does not meet its own accountability targets.

The State Accountability System is scheduled for a full review in light of the new Federal ESSA law that de-emphasizes test scores as monolithic determinants of school quality.

Every school system and each individual school can improve. We are in the business of improvement. Tonight you will not only learn about the issues of the rating system, but you will also learn about the interventions that we have put in place and the additional steps we will take to improve.

Deputy Superintendent Beverly Nelson made several points about the accountability system and Medford's performance (see attached documents)

- She referenced an earlier report on the District and School 2015 Accountability Report. (see attached)
- The statewide results showed that the state did not meet any of its own targets
- The Roberts report showed improvement in several categories
- Math was more problematic than ELA
- The state changed the threshold for group reporting to 25 which was lower than the past.
- The state's method of grouping schools by school configuration means that the k-5 organization represented 20% of the states elementary schools and left out many urban areas that scored lower than Medford.
- Director of Curriculum Bernadette Ricciardelli joined Deputy Superintendent Nelson to discuss the application of the equivipercentile method for correlating MCAS and PARCC scores (see attached). The state clearly "cautioned against making consequential decisions based upon a single test score, a single two year comparison or a single analysis particularly when estimated scores are being used"

There was discussion on the population distribution among the schools. The Superintendent pointed out that the Roberts had a substantial population of ELL newcomers. However, it would be difficult to move them to other schools because of staffing concentrations.

Mr. Skerry asked the Superintendent to look into increased space possibilities if it would help the situation.

Assistant Superintendent Caldwell spoke on our current and planned interventions.

Current and Past Activities:

- Math support grades 3, 4 and 5
- Directors working with teachers to disaggregate data

ELL

- Addition of two staff members for growing ELL populations
- Addition of two paraprofessionals, one who is a retired sped teacher and specializes in math
- As you know, we have a transient population. Just this week many families are registering for school. Many of these children are non-English speakers who will be required to take PARCC.

Moving Forward

- Hiring of two math coaches for all elementary schools for grade levels 2,3 and 4
- Continue to work with DSAC, ask for professional development opportunities
- Envision going into year 3, hoped to see more positive results

- Intensify classroom review
- Grade level meetings
- Math nights

The discussion turned to the value of coaching. Ms. DiBenedetto had concerns about whether the coaches would be considered teacher evaluators. The answer was no.

Ms. Mustone commented that coaching was not evaluative. Ms. Van der Kloot referred to coaches as modeling best practices.

The general finding was that the state DSAC was not providing real assistance. DSAC was short on answers. We will continue to work with them.

The subcommittee concluded that we have challenges ahead but there are several concrete measures in place.

On the motion of Mr. Skerry the meeting was adjourned at 9:12 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Paulette Van der Kloot
Chairperson