

BEDFORD SCHOOL COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF

February 10, 2009

1. Call to Order

At 7:30 p.m., Ms. O'Gara called to order the meeting of the Bedford School Committee. Other members present were Mr. Pierce, Mr. Hafer, Ms. Seibert and Ms. Bickford. Stacey Hronowski, student representative, was also present.

2. Comments from Public

None

3. Personnel Report

Dr. LaCroix announced the following informational items

Return from Leave for 2009-2010 school year:

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| Jennifer Wayne-Bartlett | Reading Teacher | Davis |
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Retirement:

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| Pam Turner | Occupational Therapist | Davis |
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Resignations:

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| Courtney Marion | Grade 3 Teacher | Lane |
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| Krista Mara | Elementary Teacher (LOA) | Lane |
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| Jennifer Piccolo | Secondary School Psychologist | High School |
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Appointments:

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| Fay Burgess-Backert | Occupational Therapist | Davis |
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| Nancy Gocht | Cafeteria Worker | Lane |
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Coaching Appointments:

High School

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| Al Dougherty | Head Boys Outdoor Track Coach |
| Rich Schilder | Assistant Boys Outdoor Track Coach |
| James Greenwood | Head Girls Outdoor Track Coach |
| Cathy Pearce | Assistant Girls Outdoor Track Coach |
| Charlie Puopolo | Varsity Baseball Coach |
| Gunnar Olson | Assistant Varsity Baseball Coach |
| Harry Bohigian | JV Baseball Coach |
| Tim French | Freshman Baseball Coach |
| Dave Wilson | Varsity Softball Coach |
| Dennis Walsh | Assistant Varsity Softball Coach |
| Bill Berlino | JV Softball Coach |
| Dave Sukoff | Varsity Boys Lacrosse Coach |
| Dave Malio | JV Boys Lacrosse Coach |
| Libbey Beinert | Varsity Girls Lacrosse Coach |
| Bev Barton | JV Girls Lacrosse Coach |
| Kim Sylva | Freshman Girls Lacrosse Coach |

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| John Guilfuss | Varsity Boys Tennis Coach |
| Susan Adamik | Varsity Girls Tennis Coach |
| Marie Westerkamp | JV Boys Tennis Coach |
| Taryn Westerkamp | JV Girls Tennis Coach |

Middle School

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| Ken Norling | Outdoor Track Coach |
| Mike Sainato | Softball Coach |
| Steve Donovan | Baseball Coach |

4. JGMS Schedule Review

Jayne Viladenis, Principal of JGMS, gave the School Committee an update on the new six day/longer period middle school schedule that was implemented at the beginning of this year. Ms. Viladenis began the presentation by reviewing the goals of the 2007 JGMS Scheduling Committee.

The goals of the Committee are to:

- 1) provide longer class periods that will afford our students greater opportunity to accomplish the curriculum by allowing teachers the time needed to meet the diverse educational needs of the middle learner through a variety of “hands on” methods
- 2) maintain a commitment to a broad range of offerings within the curriculum to support the needs of the whole child
- 3) support the efficient and effective use of shared teacher resources within Bedford Public Schools

Ms. Viladenis reminded the School Committee of the goals and beliefs used to help guide the decision process. They included:

“Will the new schedule improve the quality of life for the students? Will the new schedule consider social emotional issues? Will the schedule allow student choice? Will it address a long-standing request to include a morning break? Will it address issues regarding limited passing time? Will it continue to include annual exposure to a full range of the arts?”

Ms. Viladenis noted that the new Arts and Wellness course offerings are vast and very popular. She commented that the Band and Chorus enrollment numbers did not change too much from last year and that there was only a slight drop.

Ms. Viladenis also reported that she conducted an online survey to get a feel for parent, student and faculty satisfaction with the new schedule. The numbers of responses were rather small – 477 students, 64 parents and 39 faculty. However, Ms. Viladenis concluded that students, parents and faculty overwhelmingly preferred the new schedule. Also, the majority of parents and faculty felt that the new schedule provided more hands on learning, that the new schedule maintains a broad range of offerings, and did somewhat of an effective job of sharing teacher resources.

Anecdotal information included that parents liked the fact that there are fewer classes and less homework. Also parents liked the fact that teachers spend more time on a

given subject and that students have more time to understand a given subject. However, parents found keeping track of the day number confusing.

Faculty also liked the more in depth lessons, having more hands on activities, completing a full lesson in one class period, and having the opportunity to broaden teaching styles. However, teachers do not like not seeing all the classes in the same day and keeping track of classes. They also found that there is less meeting time for teachers/collaborations.

Students commented that the day went by faster and that every day is not the same. They also liked that they did not have all majors in one day except for one day. However, students still feel that there is not enough passing time, they don't like the one day that is all majors and they don't like when teachers ask when they saw their class last.

Ms. Viladenis said next year, they will increase the passing time by four minutes. They will also change the split middle lunch time. Also, they will match the half day schedule with BHS so that the students will have all six periods on an early release. Also, if there is snow day then the next day will be the day missed. This did not happen this year.

All in all, Ms. Viladenis feels that students have more time in class to help them learn more effectively.

Dr. LaCroix reminded the School Committee that this change was the first change made to the JGMS schedule in many, many years. She felt that all in all, the transition went smoothly. Dr. LaCroix said that she recommends doing more work to understand faculty responses and nonresponses on the survey.

Ms. Viladenis agrees and has already started discussing this issue with the leadership team.

Ms. Bickford inquired about the teacher training for longer classes. Ms. Viladenis said that Program Administrators from each department focused on this and encompassed it during their curriculum mapping initiative. Also, there has been a focus on executive functioning issues.

Ms. Bickford asked if teachers were concerned about preparation time for the choice classes. Ms. Viladenis said no.

Ms. Bickford thanked Ms. Viladenis for providing music enrollment numbers. She asked why the numbers decreased in seventh grade music classes. Ms. Viladenis said she did follow up on this event but could not come up with one overriding reason.

Ms. Bickford asked if there was any feedback on moving Advisory to later in the morning. Ms. Viladenis said that the snack is proving to be very beneficial and that the class is meeting its goal of connecting with students and it is not being treated as a home room.

Ms. Seibert asked if the Middle School was achieving its goal of better sharing High School resources. Ms. Viladenis said that there are still bumps in the process but overall it is better this year.

Ms. Seibert asked how the change in the schedule affected the space in the building. Ms. Viladenis said that the Multipurpose Room has been split into classrooms but she noted that 50 new students enrolled over the summer and that this is what has really affected the space in the school.

Ms. Seibert commented that the new choice classes seem more formal and was curious if these classes also required more space. Ms. Viladenis answered that the new classes do affect the space requirements a little bit but it is really the additional fifty students that is the real cause.

Mr. Hafer asked if many students were unhappy because they did not get their first choice elective. Ms. Viladenis said that the schedule did limit flexibility but students who did not get what they selected were asked to come in and talk about it. Some students did but overall, many accepted the alternatives.

Mr. Hafer asked if the teachers who answered the survey as being not happy with the change in schedule were Core teachers or Arts & Wellness teachers. Ms. Viladenis said she thought about asking faculty to identify as a Core teacher or an Arts & Wellness teacher, but decided that this may limit the survey responses.

Mr. Hafer asked if she thought the Student Owned Strategies class (SOS) was successful. Ms. Viladenis said that the 6th grade teachers are really pleased with the preparedness of the students (in both writing ability and reading sense).

Ms. Viladenis said overall, she thought the 6th graders adjusted well to the schedule. The 7th and 8th graders were the ones most affected by the change but they have also adjusted well.

Mr. Pierce asked if there is any feeling or realization that bullying has decreased as a result of having fewer transitions due to the new schedule. Ms. Viladenis said that the Antibullying Taskforce has been very busy and will soon report on a recent survey. Mr. Chapman, Assistant Principal, interjected that the initial reading of the report is encouraging but he is not sure if it the antibullying efforts or the change in schedule or both.

Mr. Pierce asked if any surprises appeared with the implementation of the new schedule. Ms. Viladenis said that it is nice to see positive changes in teaching and learning in the classrooms. She said that this was not a surprise but it is terrific outcome.

Ms. O'Gara asked Ms. Viladenis if she thought that the demise of the Marching Band affected the slight drop in band enrollment at the middle school? Ms. Viladenis said she has not heard that this was a reason and she does not have any data to support this theory.

Ms. O'Gara said that Bedford talked about changing the Middle School schedule for many years and that she is very pleased with the outcome.

Ms. Bickford asked for Ms. Viladenis to report (at a later date) on the number of learning hours the school is now given the change in passing time. Ms. Viladenis agreed.

5. Presentation: English Department

Mary Lou Sallee, Program Administrator for English grades 6-12, updated the School Committee on the English Department and where it is heading.

Ms. Sallee explained that the department goal is to develop “readers for life”. Its hope is for every student to read actively, widely and independently.

She explained that the English department really brings literature to life. The teachers try to connect literature with today’s culture. They always try to make literature relevant for students.

Ms. Sallee explained that the study of literature helps make “the strange familiar and the familiar strange.”

Ms. Sallee showed several video clips to demonstrate how classes are doing this and how the teachers really focus on getting students to “read for themselves”. These projects showed how reading is an active pursuit and that students have to use their minds and imagination and that it is not a passive activity.

She said choice reading runs throughout the curriculum. Teachers try to teach the discipline of reading so students can enjoy the “habit” of reading.

Ms. Sallee also pointed out that a lot of writing goes on in grades 6-12. Teachers try to prepare students to write for college and beyond. (She said it is much more than MCAS preparation.)

Ms. Sallee outlined how the department will move forward:

- Recognizing that it takes a whole department to turn out a strong English student
- Incorporate research-based teaching practices
- Emphasize the writing program
- Use and develop common assessments

Ms. Bickford said that she is pleased to hear that the grades 6-12 have met and will continue to do soon a regular basis. She also reiterated her belief that it is very important for teachers to offer feedback on student’s writing.

Ms. Sallee agreed and said that it is important for the student to do something with the feedback. Ms. Bickford agreed saying that opportunities for re-editing/re-writes are very important.

Ms. Bickford asked Ms. Sallee for her perspective on the Global Voices class.

Ms. Sallee said that it is a very exciting and relevant course and that it is very popular with the students. However, there is a lot of professional development required and two teachers have taken a lot of courses in preparation.

Ms. Bickford asked Ms. Sallee about her feelings on a summer reading requirement. Ms. Sallee said that there have been lots of discussions on this but no consensus has been reached. She noted that currently, only Level 5 classes have a reading requirement.

Ms. Bickford asked Ms. Sallee about her feeling on AP English v. English Level 5. Ms. Sallee said that she sees two sides of the argument. "Students are tested so much. When the MCAS ends in 10th grade, it is great to open up the courses". She has taught AP English yet she feels that it is a great opportunity to teach to high level students without a strict curriculum. Again she sees pros and cons on both but feels that Level 5 is the better way to go in Bedford.

Ms. Seibert asked Ms. Sallee for her hopes for the future. Ms. Sallee said she would like more resources to build up the drama opportunities.

Mr. Hafer asked for more thoughts on the summer reading requirements. Ms. Sallee said ideally, she would like to have each student build his or her own reading portfolio.

Mr. Pierce asked if there should be more focus on grammar. Ms. Sallee said that she was somewhere in the middle on this argument too. Teachers do need to bring awareness to grammar and point out how punctuation can making writing more effective but she is not sure we need to follow a strict curriculum mapping on grammar.

Ms. O'Gara said she thinks it is great that articulation is a focus too. She is also pleased that Global Voices is so popular since our community is becoming more and more diverse.

Ms. Stacey Hronowski said that she has been very pleased with the English Program. She also noted that she took the English AP exam and did well and encourages other students to take the test.

Ms. Hronowski asked if there was anything we could do to stop the Spark Notes epidemic. Ms. Sallee said that the teachers try to discourage use but the department focuses on developing the desire to read. She did note that teachers try to develop assessments that are "Spark Note" proof.

Ms. Hronowski suggested teaching the value of reading earlier and to let students select more of their own books.

6. FY'10 Budget

Dr. LaCroix reviewed the status of the FY'10 budget request and asked the School Committee to consider a revote.

- In December 2009, the School Committee voted on a budget request of \$31,623,398
- On January 13, 2009, the School Committee learned about reductions in utility projections and Special Education Out-of-district. Therefore, the budget request was refined to \$31,337,761
- On February 6th, the School Committee recommended reducing the budget further by approximately \$170,000 in order to meet revised Finance Committee

guidelines. The reductions were the result of some modest changes to the staff retirements and position backfill cost projections. (This was also possible because Bedford has received \$250,000 in state "pothole" funds.)

Dr. LaCroix recommended that the School Committee revote the FY'10 budget request to \$31,167,761. She said that this was a tight budget but manageable and is comfortable with the recommendation.

Ms. Bickford asked about the Circuit Breaker reimbursement. Mr. Coelho said we used 60% as an estimate for FY'10 and he expects this to be an accurate estimate.

Ms. Bickford said she was pleased that the School Department's budget is below the Finance Committee guideline. She said it was "historic" that the schools were able to have a 3.74% increase.

Ms. Bickford said that she too is comfortable that \$31,167,761 is a workable budget.

Mr. Hafer said he is pleased that the school budget is reasonable. He said, however, the only thing left to squeeze is the salaries. He feels that as a Town, we need to figure out how to deal with this continual squeeze in budgets. "It is nice to know we made it under the line this year, but what will we do next year?"

Mr. Pierce agreed with Mr. Hafer. The new budget means we are very tight and have to deal with a lot of unknowns like Kindergarten enrollment and special education.

Dr. LaCroix said that the Finance Committee understands that if we have an unusual jump in enrollment or an unusual situation in special education, then schools will be back asking for a reserve fund transfer. She is pleased that the Finance Committee understands this situation. She believes that this type of good relations between town departments sets Bedford apart from other towns.

Mr. Pierce made the following motion:

MOVED: That the School Committee approve the final budget request of \$31,167,761 for FY'10.

MOTION SECONDED by Ms. Seibert

MOTION APPROVED: 5-0

7. Liaison Updates

Ms. Bickford reported that the Finance Committee saw an Actuarial study on accounting for retirements and a presentation on the Town debt ratio. She noted that the draft warrant was not discussed at the last meeting but it will be on next week's agenda and the Finance Committee will take a position on the School's desire for an enrollment and space needs study.

Ms. Seibert said at the Youth Task Force, discussions are underway on Youth Center programming.

Mr. Hafer said the CEC is meeting tomorrow and will likely discuss the enrollment study and why it is not on the capital projects.

Dr. LaCroix noted that the last Change Order on the High School project has been approved.

Ms. Bickford asked Dr. LaCroix and Mr. Coelho to contact the MSBA to understand the process for reimbursement as well as the process for auditing. Also, she asked them to try to determine when the state will actually pay us.

Dr. LaCroix agreed to follow up.

Ms. Bickford also mentioned that the first BHS Graduation Requirements Committee meeting will be tomorrow.

8. Superintendent's Report

Dr. LaCroix reported that on January 29th, the NEASC removed BHS from warning status. She said it took ten years to do this. NEASC will visit on November 4th to begin the accreditation process.

Dr. LaCroix also announced that on March 4th, there will be a community forum on security. Kristen Vogel will present what has been accomplished at the schools. Richard Jones will present various security options. The Police, Fire and Youth and Family Services will also be a part of this forum. This will be an information session and no actions items are expected to result from the meeting.

Dr. LaCroix said that Davis Town is happening at Davis School. This tradition is when the kindergarteners recreate their community at school. School Committee members are invited to stop by and see the excitement and learning happening at Davis School.

At Lane School, twelve classrooms are involved in a project where they connect with other students from around the world.

9. Minutes

Mr. Pierce made the following motion:

MOVED: That the School Committee approve the minutes from the June 5, 2008 School Committee meeting as amended.

MOTION SECONDED by Mr. Hafer

MOTION APPROVED: 4-0-1

Roll Call Vote:

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| Ms. O'Gara | Yes |
| Mr. Pierce | Yes |
| Ms. Seibert | abstained |
| Mr. Hafer | Yes |
| Ms. Bickford | Yes |

Mr. Pierce made the following motion:

MOVED: That the School Committee approve the minutes from the October 14, 2008 School Committee meeting as amended.

MOTION SECONDED by Ms. Bickford

MOTION APPROVED: 5-0

10. Future Agenda

The Open Budget Hearing will be held at the next School Committee meeting.

11. Adjournment

Ms. Bickford made the following motion:

MOVED: Motion to adjourn at 10:15 to Executive Session, not to reopen

MOTION SECONDED by Ms. Seibert

MOTION APPROVED: 5-0

Roll Call Vote:

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| Ms. O’Gara | Yes |
| Mr. Pierce | Yes |
| Ms. Seibert | Yes |
| Mr. Hafer | Yes |
| Ms. Bickford | Yes |

School Committee Secretary

Date

BEDFORD SCHOOL COMMITTEE

**EXECUTIVE SEESION
MINUTES OF**

February 10, 2009