

**BEDFORD SCHOOL COMMITTEE**  
**MINUTES OF**  
**October 25, 2011**

**Bedford High School - Large Instruction Room**

**1. Call to Order**

At 7:30 p.m., Ms. Seibert called to order the meeting of the Bedford School Committee. Other members present included Mr. Hafer, Ms. O’Gara, Mr. Pierce, and Ms. Bickford. Matt Coughlin, student representative, was also in attendance.

**2. Performance by the Madrigal Singers**

The Madrigal Singers sang the National Anthem to start the School Committee meeting.

**3. Comments from Public**

None

**4. Personnel Report**

Dr. LaCroix announced the retirement of Jayne Viladenis, Principal of the middle school. She will be retiring at the end of this school year.

**5. Presentation: Music Department**

Nicole O’Toole, Program Administrator presented an update on the K-12 music department. She explained that Bedford Public Schools have 7 music teachers who have 156 years of teaching experience and teach 2425 students at 13 grade levels! She is proud of the robust learning experience for Bedford students.

Highlights of her presentation include:

- The department will be embarking on a program review in 2013.
- Curriculum is guided by National Standards for music education.
- Curriculum maps have been developed.
- Common and equivalent assessments are also being developed.
- There are currently 200 participants in the BHS band, orchestra and choruses.
- There are 190 students enrolled in JGMS performance classes.
- There are 180 students enrolled at Lane School ensembles.
- Students are asked to listen critically while performing.
- Students are challenged to write critically about their art.

Students learn to decode the language of music – skills that support their understanding of written language and math skills. These skills enable students to develop higher order thinking skills. Cooperative learning used in music enables successful ensemble performance.

Ms. O’Toole discussed how important live music performance benefits students especially in today’s age of mobile devices and technological isolation. “Students working together in an ensemble, on a face-to-face level is more important than ever.” Through ensemble skills students gain stage presence, teamwork, collaboration, problem solving skills, patience, and self-control.

Ms. O'Toole also described the robust extracurricular activities available to Bedford students. Examples include the Marching Band (for grades 8-12), musicals at BHS and JGMS, guitar ensembles at BHS and JGMS, Jazz ensembles at BHS and JGMS, and participation in district festivals for students in grades 7-12. Ms. O'Toole noted that students have even developed their own activities – the Bellachords, Bucapellas and the BHS String Quartet.

Ms. O'Toole completed her presentation by thanking the her colleagues in the music department – Amy Budka, Jim Felker, Evan Grunwald, Martha Lang, Phil Maffa, Diane Pritchett, and Phyllis Weiss. She also thanked POMS (Patrons of Music Students) for supporting K-12 music in Bedford Public Schools for more than 50 years.

Mr. Hafer said that he has always been impressed with the BHS program but wishes that there was even more participation. He asked whether technology would enable more students to participate. Ms. O'Toole said she believes it will.

Mr. Pierce asked if choosing more current songs would attract more students. Ms. O'Toole said that the teachers do try to include pop music but she hopes that students will learn to appreciate classics. She agrees it may very well attract more students into the program.

Ms. O'Gara said that the presentation was great, especially sharing examples of the music. She is also pleased to see all the connections to the curriculum. Ms. O'Gara appreciates all that the music staff does.

Ms. Bickford is pleased to see the entire K-12 program and believes that it is truly a hallmark of Bedford's school system. She is so pleased that the schools continue to do such a great job. Ms. Bickford is pleased that music is still a requirement at the high school because it is important for students to be exposed to both music and art.

Ms. Bickford also commented that she loves the tradition of the vertical concert. She realizes that it is a tremendous logistical event but it is a unique Bedford event. She thinks it is great for the younger students to be inspired by the older students.

Ms. Bickford asked how the new JGMS schedule affects participation. Ms. O'Toole said that it is hard to say if it is the schedule or student choice that participation lags in the middle school. She explained that in 6<sup>th</sup> grade, there are high numbers in instruments but these numbers begin to decline in 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grades. However, the good news is that chorus numbers increase in grades 7 and 8.

Ms. Bickford asked if there were any challenges. Ms. O'Toole said that scheduling continues to be the challenge – it is great that students have lots of choices but this puts pressure on scheduling.

Ms. Seibert asked about the music played in the background during some of the slides in Ms. O'Toole's presentation. Ms. O'Toole explained that one melody used was composed by a student in the Music Technology class.

Ms. Seibert asked Ms. O'Toole to describe her dream for the music department. Ms. O'Toole said a full ensemble where every student is involved regardless of where they live. Also, she would like to see more performance options for classes.

Matt Coughlin said that he believes that the music department is an excellent opportunity for students. He would like to see more contemporary music in classes and thinks it would attract more students. He also believes having a music requirement is a good thing because some students may discover that they love music after all. He would like to see more performance opportunities for nonperformance classes.

## **6. Interview: Jon Sills-Internal Candidate for Position of Superintendent**

Ms. Seibert clarified that the interview tonight is only for School Committee members and there will not be any opportunity for public questions or comments.

Ms. Seibert explained that Mr. Sills would have about 5 minutes to discuss his background and then School Committee members would ask more specific questions.

### *Opening Statement*

Mr. Sills was given the opportunity to give an opening statement. Highlights from his statement include:

- He has been Principal of BHS for 12 years.
- He worked as a teacher in middle and high schools in urban settings since 1971.
- He was a Social Studies teacher in Brookline, Boston, and Newton North schools.
- He has experience developing curriculum.
- He has taught at a community college.
- He ran the Brookline Summer School program and was in charge of all operations.

Mr. Sills explained that over the years, he has gravitated from informal to formal leadership. He is committed to equity and his perspective on education has evolved over the years. He realizes that education is not about giving answers but nurturing and developing students' thinking skills.

Mr. Sills said that he has grown to love and respect Bedford and has discovered a tremendous, yet moderate and sensible, support of education. He would like the opportunity to give back to the community.

Mr. Sills recognizes that the Bedford Public Schools is a collaborative place and he feels that he will provide continuity to a system that is doing very well.

Excerpts of the questions and Mr. Sills' answers follow:

### *Question 1*

*Mr. Hafer asked Mr. Sills to elaborate on specific values he believes are most important to Bedford and where they most align with his own...*

Mr. Sills said that the School Committee and the community work well together and prove that the Town cares more about the students rather than politics. A core value he believes in is that it is important to have a well-rounded education and a focus on the whole child. He said the Town and the Schools believe in this too, based on the way resources are divided. He also believes that education is for *all* and is pleased that the School Committee and Town have resisted implementing fees.

### *Question 2*

*Ms. Seibert asked Mr. Sills to describe strengths and weaknesses of the Bedford Public Schools and to define his vision moving forward...*

Mr. Sills said strengths include bright, innovative and hardworking personnel. Also, Bedford is a well-resourced district and is committed to offering a well-rounded education. Mr. Sills said that he sees inconsistency within school building cultures – not all are truly collaborative. Also, there is a challenge with space needs, despite our building renovations.

Mr. Sills said that his vision is to continue with what is working well (i.e. no shake up) and move trends such as Response to Intervention and the one-to-one iPad initiative forward.

#### *Question 3*

*Ms. Bickford asked Mr. Sills to explain the main differences of being high school Principal and Superintendent...*

Mr. Sills said that he would no longer be involved in the day-to-day operations of a school. He has to learn and study what is going on at all of the schools. He plans on being proactive with the teachers, the parents and the students. He is looking forward to mentoring and working collaboratively with Principals and to having a wider focus. He will be managing budget responsibilities and will build relationships with the School Committee and town finance committees, etc. He will work with the Assistant Superintendent to go through all of the mandates and figure out which ones help students. He will also work with other Superintendents to influence policies that will help students.

#### *Question 4*

*Mr. Pierce asked how Mr. Sills plans to approach the transition from High School Principal to Superintendent and how he plans to change his role from Principal to District Leader...*

Mr. Sills explained that he would use the rest of this year to work with Dr. LaCroix especially in the process of hiring new Principals. He will participate fully in the budget process this year and will benefit from Dr. LaCroix's mentorship. This summer, he plans on meeting with parent organizations and Principals. He will set guidelines and boundaries with the high school teachers. He will also meet with the Town Manager and other important partners in town.

#### *Question 5*

*Ms. O'Gara asked Mr. Sills to define major challenges Bedford will face in transitioning to the Common Core Curriculum at the different schools...*

Mr. Sills said that the message to the lower grades needs to be that teachers can get through this change. He believes that the Common Core Curriculum is good because it emphasizes skills and not content. It is a move away from content-based frameworks. He sees lots of room for innovation and creativity because the standards are more than content. Innovation is not only possible, but also essential.

#### *Question 6*

*Mr. Hafer asked Mr. Sills to describe his vision for technology in our district...*

Mr. Sills has been excited about the Bedford Public Schools leadership in technology for years. He realizes that technology is not about "bells and whistles" but ways to help student learn. He sees technology as a way to nurture students' innate curiosity and ensure that student work is the center of learning. He sees the potential with the iPad project at the high school. It is an extremely powerful tool especially in the executive functioning areas. Mr. Sills said that we need

a deliberate plan and need to be judicious with our decisions. The challenge will be to find resources for technology with out impacting the operating budget. He will look to technology to help with efficiencies.

*Question 7*

*Ms. Seibert asked what characteristics and qualities are important when hiring teachers... How can we attract and retain exemplary teachers in Bedford...*

Mr. Sills said that it is important to see teachers teach during the interview process. Background is important but delight in student success is more so. Also, teachers need to be collaborative by nature. They also need to be successful learners themselves. Bedford can attract and keep exemplary teachers by paying competitive salaries, having the right resources, creating a collaborative culture and to allow teachers to be part of the process.

*Question 8*

*Ms. Bickford asked Mr. Sills to reflect on his educational background and career – is it important for a Superintendent to hold a Doctorate degree... What advice would you give college students interested in education...? Is there an experience that you wish you held which in your mind would enhance your ability to succeed as a Superintendent...?*

Mr. Sills said that schools benefit from ongoing research and practice. He believes a Superintendent needs to be well versed in research methodology and be a student of national and international trends. He understands the importance of data. A Doctorate degree is only one way to learn these skills but certainly not the only way. Mr. Sills said that he has always been a researcher.

He would advise students to go into education if they truly want to make a difference.

He does not believe his lack of being an Assistant Superintendent will be a negative.

*Question 9*

*Ms. O’Gara asked Mr. Sills to address his lack of elementary experience...*

Mr. Sills said that he will set up a process to meet with curriculum leaders and teachers as well as Principals. He will listen to their challenges. He is aware of many but needs to learn the details. He believes his educational leadership philosophy will help. He believes his first hand parental experience will help too.

*Question 10*

*Mr. Pierce asked Mr. Sills to describe his overall management style...*

Mr. Sills said that he is a hands-on manager and he likes to be part of the process. He will have to learn how to delegate effectively. He sees relationship building as being critical. He is an inclusive manager and gathers information on a regular basis. Input is important but he recognizes that decisions have to be made.

Mr. Sills said he will have to take a big step back and it will be hard to not micro-manage.

Mr. Sills said one of his strengths is that teachers at the high school feel cared about and valued.

Mr. Sills will be deliberative in his decisions because his decisions will affect a lot of students and their families.

*Question 11*

*Ms. Seibert asked Mr. Sills to tell them about a significant mistake or error in judgment he made and what he learned about the experience...*

Mr. Sills said when he was a new Principal at BHS he spent one summer gathering information on an issue and then crafted a plan. However, he soon learned that he did not listen enough. He learned that it is critical to take time, identify strengths and value people responsible. He learned that if he did not do these things, people would be resistant to change.

*Question 12*

*Mr. Pierce asked Mr. Sills to explain how he will balance the need to know to avoid surprises versus a perceived need to know with the various constituencies...*

Mr. Sills said that communication will start by building relationships with all of the various constituencies in town. He will draw on his experience as a high school principal- anticipating and being proactive yet filtering appropriately. He will also rely on Dr. LaCroix's mentoring in this area. He recognizes it is important to know how to frame communications and to build trust.

*Question 13*

*Mr. Hafer asked Mr. Sills his thoughts on running a public school like a business...*

Mr. Sills said that it probably means different things for different people. Some districts are run inefficiently and could benefit from a more business-like approach. However, he thinks it is difficult and not a good thing to apply the business model to an entire school system. Teachers and students are human beings and education is an organic process. It cannot be run strictly like a business.

*Question 14*

*Ms. O'Gara asked how Mr. Sill's plans to approach the development of a system-wide budget considering his lack of experience in this area...*

Mr. Sills explained that in his experience and role as Principal, he has had experience developing a system-wide budget. The current budget process includes input from all of the Administrative team. His participation in the process was inclusive and not solely about the high school.

*Question 15*

*Ms. Bickford asked Mr. Sills to divide a symbolic \$100 into 3 or 4 piles that represent what has the most impact on student learning....*

Mr. Sills said \$70 for personnel/programs, \$15 for technology and supplies, \$10 for facilities and transportation, and \$5 for professional development.

*Question 15 – part II*

*What would you do now that the \$100 is reduced to \$90...?*

Mr. Sills said he would ask the building leaders to look for efficiencies in personnel and to try to reduce areas that do not involve personnel/programs.

*Question 16*

*Ms. Seibert asked about the future - what criteria would you use to determine success...*

Mr. Sills answered that in 90 days, success would be for him to follow through on an entry plan. People feel that he listens and understand their concerns. Also, Mr. Sills envisions that he has established relationships and is well versed in the budget process. At year 2, he sees success as having positive relationships with all of the Principals, staff and community. Staff culture goals will be met. Also, the educational community sees value in technology investment and we have a clear funding source to support.

At the end of his tenure, Mr. Sills wants Bedford to be appreciated for its uniqueness and for the Bedford Public Schools to be a beacon for other schools. Also, the depth of the K-12 professional culture for teachers is well-known beyond Bedford. His legacy would be that the culture that is internalized at the high school is internalized district-wide.

Mr. Sills made a brief closing remark.

Mr. Sills said that he is excited about this opportunity. He has lots of experience and has built a lot of valuable relationships already. He sees his leadership skills to be similar to Dr. LaCroix's leadership skills and feels that continuity will be good for our district.

**7. Superintendent's Report**

Dr. LaCroix asked the School Committee to accept a donation to the music department from Elaine Kennison, a BHS alumnus.

Ms. Bickford made the following motion:

**MOVED: That the School Committee accept the donation of a French horn from Elaine Kennison to the music department.**

**MOTION SECONDED by Mr. Pierce**

**MOTION APPROVED: 5-0**

The School Committee thanked Ms. Kennison for her generosity.

Dr. LaCroix also asked the School Committee to accept a cash donation from the JGMS Parent Association to be used to help pay the costs of the after school homework club.

Ms. O'Gara made the following motion:

**MOVED: That the School Committee approve the \$1500 donation from the Middle School Parent Association to help fund the after school homework club at JGMS.**

**MOTION SECONDED by Ms. Bickford**

**MOTION APPROVED: 5-0**

The School Committee thanked the Middle School Parent Association for this donation. Many students and families appreciate the homework club. Mr. Pierce commented that he believes that this is a service that should really come from the operating budget of the schools.

Dr. LaCroix thanked the Madrigal Singers for performing at the opening of the School Committee this evening.

Dr. LaCroix said that later this week, she will be testifying to the State legislature regarding the Collaboratives and how they work. Dr. LaCroix said it will be important for the Collaboratives to have more financial oversight and to have School Committee representation (many of things Bedford already does).

Ms. O’Gara said she thinks it is important to teach the legislature about the Collaboratives.

## **8. Liaison Reports**

Mr. Hafer reported that the CEC will be meeting on 10/26. He also noted that the School Committee, along with Facilities, will present to the CEC on November 30<sup>th</sup>. Also, the Field Partnership Committee will incorporate the School Committee’s comments on the policy.

Mr. Pierce said that the Strategic Planning Committee’s work continues and that they will present to School Committee in the February or March timeframe.

Ms. O’Gara asked everyone to check out the suggested activities planned in November for Bedford Unplugged.

Ms. Bickford said that the Finance Committee did bring up the idea that all town energy conservation projects should be bundled together.

Dr. LaCroix reminded everyone of the Special Town Meeting scheduled for November 7<sup>th</sup>.

## **9. Minutes**

Ms. O’Gara made the following motion:

**MOVED: That the School Committee approve the minutes from the Open Session meeting of the September 9, 2011 School Committee meeting as amended.**

**MOTION SECONDED by Ms. Bickford**

**MOTION APPROVED: 5-0**

## **10. Future Agenda**

Meetings in November will be on Nov. 8<sup>th</sup> and Nov. 29<sup>th</sup>. The FY 2013 budget request will be presented on Nov. 29<sup>th</sup>. December meetings are tentatively scheduled for December 6 and 13 and the focus will be the FY 2013 budget.

## **11. Adjournment**

Ms. Bickford made the following motion:

**MOVED: Motion to adjourn, at 10:00 p.m., not to reopen.**

**MOTION SECONDED by Ms. O’Gara**

**MOTION APPROVED: 5-0**

### **Roll Call Vote:**

<b>Ms. Seibert</b>	<b>Yes</b>
<b>Mr. Hafer</b>	<b>Yes</b>
<b>Mr. Pierce</b>	<b>Yes</b>
<b>Ms. Bickford</b>	<b>Yes</b>
<b>Ms. O’Gara</b>	<b>Yes</b>

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School Committee Secretary

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Date



**BEDFORD SCHOOL COMMITTEE**

**October 25, 2011**

**Exhibits/Documents**

- **Bedford Public School's K-12 Music Department presentation**
- **Draft of minutes from September 9, 2011 open session meeting.**

**Bedford School Committee**

**Executive Session Minutes  
October 25, 2011**