

*******AMENDED 12/3/13*******

**BRISTOL WARREN REGIONAL
SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEETING
TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 12, 2013**

The bi-monthly meeting of the Bristol Warren Regional School Committee was held on Tuesday, November 12, 2013, in the cafeteria of Mt. Hope High School, 199 Chestnut Street in Bristol, RI. The Chairperson, Paul Silva, called the meeting to order at approximately 7:02 PM.

Present: Paul Silva, Chair; Karen Lynch, Secretary; Marj McBride, William O'Dell, John Saviano and Lynn Wainwright; Melinda Thies, Superintendent; Mario Andrade, Assistant Superintendent; Mary Almeida, Director of Literacy and Title 1, Leslie Anderson, Director of Pupil Personnel; and Pauline Silva, Director of Finance and Administration

Absent: Diana Campbell and Susan Rancourt

Deployed: John Bento, Vice-Chairman

OPENING BUSINESS

All present were invited to recite the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag.

PUBLIC COMMENT/PUBLIC FORUM

There was no public comment.

Chairman Silva stated for the record in order to accommodate Mr. Burke, he would move the vote on Superintendent's Recommendation #S2013-61, Application for Grant Funding for Drainage Issues on the athletic fields at MHHS, to the top of the meeting.

SUPERINTENDENT RECOMMENDATIONS AND ISSUES:

RECOMMENDATION #S2013-61

That the School Committee, upon the recommendation of the Superintendent, and supported by the Budget/Facilities Subcommittee, approve Application for Grant Funding for Drainage Issues on the athletic fields at MHHS.

MOTION: Mr. Saviano made a motion to approve the Application for Grant Funding for Drainage Issues on the athletic fields at MHHS; seconded by Mrs. McBride.

DISCUSSION: Mr. O'Dell asked if the grant would be a partnership with the Town of Bristol. Mr. Burke responded since the Town is the owner of the property, they would be applying for the grant and the School Department would work in collaboration with the Town.

Chairman Silva stated the School Committee would be paying the matching fund upfront and would be reimbursed upon project completion. Mr. O'Dell asked if the plan that the District already has for this project which was drafted years ago will be used. Chairman Silva responded "yes". He added it will need to be tweaked slightly once experts are consulted to determine the best place to begin the first phase of the project. Chairman Silva stated the grant would be 50/50 with Mr. Burke looking to assist the School Committee in obtaining a \$400,000 initial grant. Chairman Silva commented that the Town is merely the conduit for the School Committee to obtain the grant. He stated this grant is only available to the municipality not the School District. Chairman Silva stated that the School Committee would be matching 50% of the total \$400,000.

Chairman Silva thanked Mr. Burke for coming and for helping to move this grant request forward.

The motion passed unanimously.

RECOMMENDATION #S2013-60 – HOME SCHOOL REQUESTS

That the School Committee, upon the recommendation of the Superintendent, approve the request of (1) Bristol Family to home school their children for the 2013-2014 school year, adhering to all requirements as set forth by the Bristol Warren Regional School District.

MOTION: Mr. Saviano made a motion to approve the home school request of one Bristol Family; seconded by Mr. O'Dell.

DISCUSSION: Mrs. Wainwright asked where this student has been since September and whether they were being home schooled from that point. Dr. Andrade responded this was a family that was being pursued for documentation and they finally complied with the request. He stated that this child has been home schooled since September.

The motion passed with a 4-1 vote; Mrs. McBride dissenting.

AGENDA FOCUS

Kickemuit Middle School Presentation

Mrs. Thies stated it was her great pleasure to introduce the full complement of KMS representatives in attendance from students to faculty and administration. Mrs. Thies commented that there has been an effort to dedicate Workshop meetings to showcase best practices for different schools within the Bristol Warren Regional School District. She then introduced Mrs. Hayes, Principal of Kickemuit Middle School.

Mrs. Hayes thanked the School Committee for the invitation to present. She then turned the meeting over to Caroline Parker, President of the School Improvement Team. Ms. Parker stated that

the goal of the School Improvement Team is to make school better for the students. She added that team meetings are held once a month with Mrs. Hayes. Ms. Parker stated that when an issue is agreed upon within a SIT meeting, Mrs. Hayes passes along to the faculty.

Ryder Ferris spoke about the KMS Music Boost program which uses software to create songs that aid in learning about music structure and other aspects of music. He then introduced a sample song that was created using this technology and it was played for the audience.

Connor Little, a 6th grader at KMS, spoke about the IPAD Lab and how it benefits students.

Alex Cole, President of the Student Body, gave background of KMS's student government activities.

William Bullard spoke about the Lego Robotics Boost Program, and Robert Lima demonstrated a robot for the audience.

Sloan Simpson spoke about her wonderful experience at KMS as a newcomer to the school.

Mrs. Hayes then introduced a video showcasing KMS which began with the educational standards used at the middle school. She then spoke about the assessment criteria of student's school and also spoke about professional development for faculty. Mrs. Hayes stated

that faculty meetings at KMS are very special in that teacher leaders share information they have learned with their colleagues. Mrs. Hayes shared the different types of interventions that are utilized if an assessment area shows a need. She also spoke about opportunities presented to those students who are excelling in learning such as the Boost Advanced Learning Program. Mrs. Hayes stated KMS has active parents groups as well as Parent Advisory Groups. She commented that during one of the Advisory Group Meetings a parent made a suggestion to include more inquiry and project based learning opportunities for gifted and talented children. Mrs. Hayes stated as early as September, KMS will be able to bring forward more of these opportunities for certain groups of students which could then be filtered out to the entire school population.

Mrs. Hayes commented when you stand side by side with people you have tremendous respect for, exciting things happen. She said the transition from one principal to the other has had a few bumps along the way, but through working together she and the faculty are closer and on their way. Mrs. Hayes stated she is very proud to work with the faculty at KMS in a time of change.

Mrs. Hayes introduced a video created by Jen Saarinen which showcased the vision of KMS. She commented that this video does a remarkable job at showing the very best KMS has to offer.

Mrs. Thies commented that she attended a faculty meeting at KMS

and was very impressed with how collaborative it was. She was also impressed with those who shared their best practices. The team effort was very evident.

Mrs. Thies asked Mrs. Hayes to introduce those faculty members that were present.

Mrs. Wainwright complimented the amazing video and encouraged that it be shown to incoming sixth graders.

Chairman Silva thanked Mrs. Hayes, KMS staff and the students for coming and sharing. He added it is the goal of the School Committee to see what the schools are doing first hand. He thanked everyone for a great job.

Mrs. Thies thanked the parents for their attendance and involvement in their children's education.

Mr. Saviano asked if the KMS mascot has always been the Wildcats. Mrs. Thies responded that it has. She said there has been exploration in regard to unifying KMS and MHHS under one theme and one mascot. She added it was her understanding that the Athletic Director will be speaking to faculty, staff and students in regard to making a transition to unifying KMS and MHHS under one mascot. Mrs. Thies said there would be a variety of positives in doing so especially economically in regard to resources.

MHHS Academic Eligibility

Chairman Silva stated for the record that all School Committee members were given a copy of the proposed Academic Eligibility Requirements for review. Mrs. Thies added this document comes under the auspices of the Administration.

Mr. O'Dell gave background on this policy stating it came before the Policy/Community Affairs Subcommittee at their last meeting. He stated there have been several discussions about Academic Eligibility. Mr. O'Dell commented that he is not sure that everyone from the High School and the School Committee are on the same page concerning their vision for this policy. Mr. O'Dell stated that in September there was a misstep concerning Academic Eligibility that made it to the front page of the Bristol Phoenix. At that time, the proposed policy was presented to address these missteps. Mr. O'Dell stated the subcommittee decided to take a look at two policies; the School Improvement Team Policy and a more focused approach to Academic Eligibility rather than global. Mr. O'Dell asked Mr. Rebello, principal of MHHS, to present at the Policy Subcommittee. He said at that time it became evident there was a disagreement on how to move forward with this policy. Mr. O'Dell then asked Administration to write a School Committee Policy that would work for them; their dream policy, and to bring it back the following month for the Policy Subcommittee to review. He stated during that review, some changes were made, but it was agreed not to take any more action on the

policy until evidences of support systems were in place. There was much discussion on one fail, two fail or no fail. The Subcommittee interpreted the proposed policy as written as two fail, but Dr. Andrade explained that it is indeed a one fail policy. The Subcommittee was more at ease after hearing Dr. Andrade's explanation.

Mrs. Lynch commented that she keeps hearing that this is a policy and asked whether it is being presented for consideration as a School Committee Policy. Mr. O'Dell responded that he sees it as a School Committee Policy in order to get the discussion beyond disagreement. He added that policies are generally written by administration so in that sense, nothing has changed. Mr. O'Dell hopes to adopt a School Committee Policy reflecting what Academic Eligibility should look like. Mrs. Lynch asked if it will be in the student handbook. Chairman Silva responded, "not necessarily". Chairman Silva commented this was the first he was hearing that the Academic Eligibility Requirements were going to become a School Committee Policy. He added that he thought it was to be high school specific only and the School Committee would simply okay for implementation. Mr. O'Dell commented that the first policy related to this topic was very global. He said there were two approaches that could be taken, either addressing a global policy or a more "surgical approach" of addressing Academic Eligibility and School Improvement Teams. He said the Subcommittee decided to forgo for the time being. Mrs. McBride commented that she wasn't sure whether this was to be a School Committee Policy or not, but that she

would not have a problem were it to become one. Chairman Silva stated that if the policy is coming before the School Committee to address it as a future School Committee Policy, he would have a lot more issues with it. He added that he doesn't believe it should be a School Committee Policy, but that it addresses the specific needs of the school. Chairman Silva stated that School Committee Policies are more global or district-wide. He added that this policy is an in-house procedure and has never been a School Committee Policy. Chairman Silva stated there needs to be trust of the Administration and faculty to implement rules. The School Committee's role would be to have some oversight of the rules and requirements. Chairman Silva reiterated that he thought the goal this evening was to receive endorsement from the School Committee on the high school's Academic Eligibility Requirements.

Mrs. Thies stated this is an informational piece. The administration at the District level was charged with communicating to Administration at the high school level. That charge was to present their best effort of redesign of the Academic Eligibility Policy which is currently in place and printed in the handbook. This is a culmination of that work.

She restated Chairman Silva's comment that this has never been a School Committee Policy, but an internal policy of the high school.

Mrs. Thies stated those are the folks that are in the trenches implementing protocols and policies on a daily basis. She added that her team was charged with bringing forward to the School Committee to show their recommendations and to refine their current internal

policy.

Mr. Saviano stated that he feels this policy should be in the handbook as it has been traditionally. He stated that the job of the School Committee is to oversee and recommend changes if necessary.

Chairman Silva stated that he agrees supports need to be in place. He disagrees with the language referring to those supports with the word “homework”. He believes a student is primarily failing a class because they can’t grasp the concept, not due to homework. Chairman Silva stated that the proposed policy is better than what is currently in place. He said this policy attempts to dangle a carrot to entice kids to do better in the classroom. He feels it still has a long way to go. Chairman Silva feels this policy is more one of punishment rather than providing assistance. Chairman Silva stated he has discussed with the Superintendent his concern that too much time passes before identifying a student who is having difficulties. He cited the example of the football season being almost over by the time the first report card is issued which means failing students could play the whole season. Chairman Silva would like to see a quicker way to address students who are failing. The goal should be to make sure a student has learned something, not just inform them they have failed and can’t participate in extra-curricular activities. Otherwise, the carrot won’t work. Chairman Silva expressed confusion over the social expectation grade in that if a student increases their academic grade, they cannot participate if their social grade has not increased

as well.

Mrs. McBride stated that children need to learn that actions have consequences. She responded to Chairman Silva's comment stating that it is a punitive policy, but in no place is any onus put on the student unless they are in trouble. She is concerned that this is only addressing their lack of responsibility. Mrs. McBride doesn't like the fact that if a student is failing a class a student can still play. Mrs. McBride feels this policy is more like "herding sheep", but not helping. She said she recognizes that a majority of schools have a one failure policy, but she cannot agree with this policy as written because she doesn't see student accountability.

Mrs. Lynch believes that when mandatory interventions are in place, students will make an effort, complete homework assignments, and grades will go up which is the goal of educators. She feels there is a timing issue with determination of failing students. Mrs. Lynch suggested that rather than mid-term grades shown as pass or fail, a number grade would be issued instead which is more black and white. She added this would address the scenario Chairman Silva presented about football season and the timing of the first report card. Mrs. Lynch stated she has talked to a lot of people in the trenches about participation in extra-curricular activities with one failing grade vs. two. Feedback indicated parts of the policy are good, yet other areas are of concern. Mrs. Lynch closed by stating she feels there needs to be a better way for how and when students

are evaluated.

Mr. Saviano stated with all the technology available, there are means to notify parents as well as administrators early on when a child is not grasping a concept to ensure early intervention.

Mrs. Wainwright stated she asked the Policy Subcommittee why students are failing. She asked whether it was due to incomplete reading assignments or not doing homework. Mrs. Wainwright stated that at the high school level students are being prepared for the future. Currently, 47% of the District's students are going on to four year colleges. Mrs. Wainwright would like to see more accountability on the student's part. She wondered if intervention should begin at the middle school level. She stated that she appreciates the School Improvement Team's time and effort. Mrs. Wainwright would like to see a way to intervene when problems first present. She added that participating in extra-curricular activities is a privilege and that a student's grades should be first and foremost consideration in the life of a student.

Mr. O'Dell clarified that this policy has nothing to do with trust or lack thereof at the High School. Mr. O'Dell gave the analogy of how a good marriage works and when there is a disagreement, the couple strives together to reach an agreement. He sees the Academic Eligibility debate in the same light. Mr. O'Dell feels the School Committee is "driving administration crazy" with this never-ending

debate. The Administration has asked for some clarity. Mr. O'Dell would like to see both sides happy with the final result. Mr. O'Dell asked the School Committee if they want to address this as a School Committee Policy or an internal policy. Mr. O'Dell would like to see this as a School Committee Policy stating it would be helpful for both sides to have a mutual buy-in drafting the policy.

Mrs. Wainwright asked if a student is failing and is able to move their grade up to a D, why would they have to wait until report cards are issued to participate in an extra-curricular activity.

Mrs. Thies stated there are so many issues on the table which makes it difficult to respond. She stated that a student could bring an F up to a D in a week, but two weeks later could be failing again. Administration looks at measured timeframes that are equitable between all students. Mrs. Thies added it is difficult to have that level of fluidity in real-time grades. A prescribed time frame would be equitable for all students. Mrs. Thies stated she agrees with Mr. O'Dell that this policy has been debated for years between the School Committee and administration at the high school. She stated clearly there is disagreement where the folks at the high school whether SIT or faculty or administration feel very strongly regarding providing access and opportunities for students. Administration feels that engaging students in athletics or extra-curricular activities engages students in the school community and that belief system raises the level of performance for all students. She shared how very

passionately Mr. Rebello spoke last spring about the current no fail policy not being in the best interest of students, and that faculty and administration could not support it. There needs to be a joining of thought which is clearly what this internal policy was attempting to accomplish by sharing their best thinking and then sharing with the School Committee. Mrs. Thies stated she does not normally make a recommendation, but she would like a resolution to this issue. She commented it is about the supports that are provided and the timing of their implementation. Mrs. Thies stated it was the recommendation of the Policy Subcommittee to provide some guidance to administration to begin building a support system that is a firm and solid safety net ensuring students don't "fall through the cracks". Mrs. Thies stated there aren't protocols in place for real-time grades, but added this could be revisited. Mrs. Thies requested guidance and a recommendation from the School Committee so that she can speak with the Administration Team.

Mrs. Lynch feels the School Committee and Administration are much closer than in the past to meeting in the middle and creating a policy that will work. She believes if everyone has a stake in the policy than all would agree with it.

Chairman Silva believes that if the policy is left to the Administration and Staff at the High School to develop, they will be more apt to buy into the end result with some type of passion. Dictating from above will most likely get compliance, but the Administration and Staff will

not be thrilled with enforcing it. Chairman Silva reiterated that he does not believe this should be a School Committee Policy, but a site-based internal policy.

Chairman Silva polled the School Committee on whether Academic Eligibility should be a School Committee Policy or an internal policy. Based on the results of that polling, the Academic Eligibility Policy will be an internal policy.

Mr. O'Dell responded that the Academic Eligibility Policy will come off of the Policy Subcommittee's agenda to be handled by the Administration and High School. He commented the expectation was to voice the School Committee's view of the document and to bring it back to the powers that be administratively. At that point, an endorsement from the School Committee would be requested. Mr. O'Dell clarified just because the policy was designed to be a School Committee Policy it wasn't meant to dictate from above. The policy content originally came from the High School to the School Committee. He commented this will now be a discussion between Administration and the School Committee which is where it was two months ago, two years ago. He encouraged everyone to move quickly on this.

Mrs. McBride stated she sees this as Administration representing the High School and the School Committee stating concerns.

Chairman Silva stated that all the above comments apply whether it is an internal policy or a School Committee Policy.

Mrs. Lynch commented she does not believe this debate will go on for another two years. Mrs. Thies will be taking the School Committee's comments back to the School Improvement Team and Administration where they will review our input to see if there is anything they can work with. At that point, the document will come back to us for endorsement.

Mrs. Thies commented that she was taking notes and highlighted recommendations put forth by the School Committee. She added there are a number of School Committee members that haven't weighed in and requested that the Chairman make contact with those individuals to forward their recommendations.

Mr. O'Dell clarified that any policy that comes out of the Policy Subcommittee is assumed to be School Committee Policy.

FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS

Mrs. Thies requested that the State Assessment Graduation Requirements be placed on a future agenda. She stated this is an urgent matter that needs to be discussed and brought to the public soon.

Mrs. McBride wanted to publicly thank the MHHS student who served

as Aid Station providers during the recent race at Colt State Park. She was very proud to see them serving in that capacity.

ADJOURNMENT – 8:45 p.m.

MOTION: At 8:45 PM Mrs. McBride made a motion to adjourn; Mr. Saviano seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,

Karen A. Lynch, Secretary

/kd