

Minutes of School Committee Meeting on Governance 05/10/14

The Barrington School Committee held a Governance Workshop on Saturday, May 10, 2014, at the Barrington High School Library. Mrs. Brody called the meeting to order at 8:40 a.m. Present were Mrs. Brody, Dr. Dominguez, Mr. Guida, Dr. Shea, Mr. Messoro, Mrs. Dillon and Mr. Tarro. Absent was Mr. Fuller. Mrs. Dorothy Presser, Massachusetts Association of School Committees consultant, Chair of the Lynnfield, Massachusetts School Committee, and co-author of the Massachusetts District Governance Support Project curriculum, was present as facilitator of the workshop.

School Committee Operating Protocol: The School Committee members reviewed the draft “School Committee/Superintendent Operating Protocol” that Mrs. Brody had prepared, as well as language from other districts’ existing protocols. Mrs. Brody stated that the draft protocol reflected Barrington’s current norms and standards, and also integrated other approaches based on a review of other districts’ documents. Mrs. Brody mentioned that the draft operating protocol dropped the reference to the committee’s speaking through the chair, and incorporated communication with the community. Mrs. Presser underscored that these need to be broad statements focused on board purpose and responsibilities. Mrs. Brody indicated that it may be possible to include policies as well.

Mrs. Dillon asked if the protocol included too many norm-based expectations and wondered if they could be funneled into three to four statements, which might be easier from an accountability standpoint. In response, Mrs. Presser replied that protocols are meant to cover all roles for the School Committee, both inside and outside of meetings. It might be possible to separate out the subset that applies to meetings. Members discussed different approaches to sharing meeting protocols -- for example, on the bottom of meeting agendas, on the screen at the beginning of School Committee meetings, in a statement made by the chair at the beginning of meetings.

Dr. Shea maintained that the operating protocol could be further focused, for example, into teaching and learning excellence, on how we work together as a committee, and on outreach. Mrs. Presser said that it would be important to keep the protocol to a single page.

Mrs. Brody indicated that she favored having a signature line at the bottom of the page for all members to sign. Mr. Guida asked if there is any contingency if a member refuses to sign. Mrs. Presser stated that she supports the signature line, and also recommends that the School Committee adopt the operating protocol at a regular meeting and ask members to sign it at that time.

Mrs. Brody and Dr. Shea recommended that the protocol be reframed in terms of three broad statements:

1. educational welfare and well-being,
2. how committee members interact with each other, and
3. how the School Committee communicates outwardly.

School Committee members gave concrete recommendations on shaping the draft language (e.g., take out the agenda item, combine statements on communicating with residents and town officials, combine statements on respecting the leadership role and understanding the chain of command).

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Mr. Tarro mentioned that one responsibility is to know state law, and wondered if this could be added or referred to, perhaps as a closing statement.

A discussion of the policy review cycle ensued, and Mrs. Presser noted that changes should be made to streamline the operating protocols. These can then be references in policy, and then built on in an effort to review governance policies.

Goal setting: Mrs. Presser distributed examples of overarching goals, observing that there are several kinds of goals, but that SMART goals that are monitored and periodically refined represent a way to get increasingly close to the school district's vision. Mrs. Presser noted that goals are overarching statements that describe the big picture, and that the district's vision statement articulates what the School Committee cares about the most. The mission indicates why the School Committee exists. The vision provides a mental picture of the future the School Committee wants to create.

The School Committee reviewed the main goals of the district's strategic plan. As a starting point for the discussion, Mrs. Presser asked what the School Committee would like to accomplish in the next year to move the district forward on its strategic plan. She asked how Barrington defines "success for every student." In response, Mr. Messore described a number of academic initiatives that are underway throughout the district. Mrs. Presser asked if Barrington values "well-being," to which all School Committee members replied emphatically in the affirmative.

School Committee members described a number of shared goals, including the use of data, a dedication to continuous progress, an emphasis on the importance of reading and writing, the implementation of full day kindergarten, student growth, and equipping students with the capacity to handle stress. Members considered the different ways the district works to understand stress in the schools, both for students and for faculty, including through surveys and through accountability work underway with the guidance department.

School Committee members examined the challenges to achieving the goals that were included in the district's strategic plan. After some discussion, all present agreed that four priorities rose above the others, in the following order:

1. Recruiting, supporting, developing, and retaining highly effective educators and administrators.
2. Student mastery of an expanding and increasingly complex set of common core standards, the student learning outcomes, the implementation of a standardized assessment system, and implementation of federal and state initiatives, including without limitation the state Basic Education Program.
3. Ensuring a safe, civil, healthy and intellectually stimulating learning environment.
4. Strengthening communication, collaboration and partnerships between schools, parents, businesses and the community.

Mrs. Presser brought attention back to the central question: what actions can be taken over the next year by the School Committee and Superintendent to advance these four goals. Committee members

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discussed hiring and funding decisions as central to working closer to fulfilling goals. The Building Committee and work on the Middle School represents a way to rethink learning spaces. More coordinated communication with families and the community are essential to making goals happen. Homework that is assigned is a classroom- and subject-specific way to further the district's goals.

Mrs. Presser also pointed out that the presentations that are given to the School Committee at its meetings are another way that goals can move forward, and asked what presentations the committee would like to hear over the next year for them to understand whether priorities are being addressed.

Mrs. Presser stated that the Superintendent evaluation is an opportunity for the School Committee to express its expectations for action. Members examined the Superintendent rubric from the Massachusetts' Model System for Educator Evaluation, Part III: Guide to Rubrics and Model Rubrics for Superintendent, Administrator, and Teacher. Mrs. Presser pointed out that the rubric is objective, with defined standards and is evidence-based, and also discussed an End-of-Cycle Summative Evaluation Report for a Superintendent. Mr. Messore indicated that he appreciated this approach and that he would look at it more closely. Mrs. Presser recommended that two School Committee members should also be involved in examining tools for the Superintendent evaluation, and Mrs. Brody and Dr. Dominguez indicated that they would volunteer for such a task.

Year-long agendas: Members examined examples of year-long calendar and agenda items. They discussed several ways to look more strategically at the Barrington School Committee meeting structure and calendar. The presentations at each School Committee meeting can be tied to goals and priorities. Budget hearings represent an opportunity to highlight the district's priorities. Mrs. Presser advocated that School Committee agendas should not be adjusted to include public comments early on, since the district benefits when parents hear issues other than the one they came to discuss. Mrs. Brody discussed the language around "general public comments" and that it needs to be made clearer that no discussion of personnel can take place in open meeting. Mrs. Presser indicated that there are different approaches to stating this policy at meetings, and Mrs. Dillon stated that language included on the East Greenwich School Committee agenda pointed out that no personnel-related issues are permitted. Members also discussed the "chain of communication" (not command) that should be followed with parents. They also talked about linking each agenda item to a strategic goal.

In preparation for the next governance meeting, Mrs. Presser outlined several actions. Mrs. Brody and Dr. Dominguez would revise the operating protocols. All School Committee members would think about SMART goals. Mrs. Brody and Dr. Dominguez will work with Mr. Messore to put into place a process for the Superintendent evaluation.

Mrs. Brody adjourned the meeting at 12:45 pm.