

Minutes of School Committee Meeting on Governance 06/23/14

The Barrington School Committee held a Governance Workshop on Monday, June 23, 2014, at the Barrington High School Library. Mrs. Brody called the meeting to order at 7:15 p.m. Present were Mrs. Brody, Dr. Dominguez, Mr. Guida, Dr. Shea, Mr. Messorre and Mr. Tarro. Absent were Mr. Fuller and Mrs. Dillon. 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 a facilitator of the workshop.

Strategic Plan: Mrs. Presser began by observing that the discussion of the School Committee's goals has been constrained by an overriding concern to adhere to the district's strategic plan. Dr. Shea agreed with this comment. Mrs. Presser recommended looking in a more flexible manner at the strategic plan, an action that School Committee members supported. Mrs. Presser noted that in many school districts, the strategic plan gathers dust on a shelf, but that Barrington does not suffer from that problem. She also observed that there is an overall lack of awareness among Committee members regarding the plan's implementation. Mrs. Presser asked how changes in direction and reallocation of resources are handled. In response, Mrs. Brody replied that central office takes responsibility for deploying the strategic plan, with the Committee receiving updates. Committee members act as intermediaries, bringing forward concerns from the community. Mrs. Brody noted that highly effective School Committees have a process in place to gather feedback from the community, but that Barrington still relies on anecdotal reports. Dr. Shea stated that there has to be a balance between responding to concerns in the environment with keeping priorities in place, for the central office to act effectively, and wondered if an annual or semi-annual session would be a good way to balance these competing interests. In response, Mrs. Brody described the practice in place in the Pewaukee, Wisconsin Public Schools, recipient of the 2013 Baldrige Award in Education, which holds twice annual sessions to reassess its strategic plan.

Mrs. Presser recommended that the School Committee continue its discussion of goals in the fall, and suggested that the rest of tonight's Governance Workshop focus on considering a "strategic objective" approach that can be more nimble. The goal would be to reshape the strategic plan into something that responds to emerging priorities. Mrs. Presser noted the recent research of Douglas Eadie that proposes the shift from strategic plan

Mrs. Brody noted that All Day Kindergarten has required a herculean effort by the central office staff and represents an example of an objective that has been successful. Mrs. Presser commented that scrutiny of the agendas of the School Committee strongly signaled that All Day Kindergarten was a priority, and that the focus has to change to what needs to be done to keep improving the district's schools. Dr. Dominguez observed that the successful funding of All Day Kindergarten that took place recently came after last year's defeat, which underscores the need to build community engagement.

Mrs. Presser noted the recent research of Douglas Eadie that proposes a shift from strategic planning in education to strategic objectives that can incorporate changes in priorities with momentum. Mrs. Brody asked School Committee members what they thought of a strategic objectives approach. Dr. Shea stated that it is hard to see how this approach would not jump around. In response, Mrs. Presser stated that each objective has a plan, with a theory of action and initiatives associated with it. For example, All Day Kindergarten as a strategic objective would have curriculum, transportation, and community engagement as initiatives. Dr. Shea discussed school start time as a proposition ("If we change school start times, student learning will be positively impacted") and asked how actions would be identified and how this

Minutes of School Committee Meeting on Governance 06/23/14

would differ from a strategic plan. In response, Mrs. Presser indicated that the difference would be that everyone would be aware of the objective. Communication is constant, as is feedback from the community. Dr. Dominguez asked what would happen if community engagement suggested that an initiative is not a priority. In response, Mrs. Presser stated that if an issue is a priority just to the School Committee, it may require a great deal of education in the community. Mrs. Brody asked Mr. Messore and Mr. Tarro to share their thoughts on strategic objectives. Mr. Tarro replied that the recent work on strategic planning was the most he had seen during his career, and that he would like to see actions paced a bit more. Mr. Messore indicated that he had concerns about the public's wanting to change the district's direction. He maintained that actions have to be made more measureable, so that the public can see progress.

Mrs. Presser stated that the School Committee owns communication with the community as a bridge to the Barrington Public Schools and the Town of Barrington. Mrs. Presser stated that if the public understood what is involved with implementation before an initiative starts, everything would fall into place more easily. For example, with regard to the superintendent's evaluation and goal setting, if the School Committee identifies key actions and milestones (what you plan on doing), implementation would go much smoother, in a cycle of setting goals with actions and benchmarks.

Mrs. Brody reflected that she was unaware of how much work related to the strategic plan and SMART goals the central office staff was undertaking (39 SMART goals). She indicated that the School Committee missed an opportunity to say "hold on." In response, Mrs. Presser stated that one way to create balance is to have conversations over the summertime that allows everyone to prioritize goals and actions. In this manner, the School Committee can reflect on what their role is in making these priorities happen.

Dr. Shea stated that even though the strategic plan reflects a lot of work, he is hard-pressed to find anything to take out. He noted that the past few years have brought a transition from one administration to another, with a different philosophy about how to use information and make decisions better. He stated that report templates can take some of the mystery out of preparing for School Committee meetings. Dr. Dominguez asked if the Barrington Middle School building project could be a way to build conversations between the School Committee, central office, schools, and community. In response, Mrs. Presser indicated that the community has to be assured that All Day Kindergarten is being monitored to maximize the public's investment. The School Committee has to think about how it will prepare the community for the next major investment in the Middle School, and that members need to be specific about their actions over the summer and fall. Dr. Shea opined that the central office does a great job carrying out the work, but that the weak part is the School Committee's job communicating the district's priorities to the community. He maintained that informational reports during meetings must be much shorter, and that the School Committee can be doing much more outside of its meetings. Mr. Messore observed that the task force has been an effective way to move initiatives forward with the School Committee's cooperation. Mrs. Brody underscored her support of consistent messaging about the district's priorities and offered the Board Briefs practice as a vehicle for School Committee communication with the public.

Mrs. Presser described an initiative in one school district in Massachusetts that failed to gain support in its first year. In the second year, School Committee members and central office staff made deliberate efforts to reach out to key groups with a consistent message, which resulted in broad support in the second year. She asked the School Committee what it wanted to accomplish next year. In response, members discussed a comprehensive Guidance curriculum and guidance counseling at the high school,

Minutes of School Committee Meeting on Governance 06/23/14

curriculum cycles for World Languages and, Art, and the Induction Program. Mr. Messor spoke of the reporting on All Day Kindergarten that had taken place, and about how it allowed the public to follow the story of kindergarten in the district. In response, Dr. Shea observed that it is hard to see how this approach would apply to an overhaul of the guidance program.

Mrs. Presser indicated that if the guidance program is a goal for this year, then the School Committee needs to know (a) where the district is right now, and (b) where it is going. An approach would be to start with research on the baseline, including professional standards and best practices. Then there would be a shift to “here is how we are progressing.” The product would be a report about recommendations for changes and the identification of decisions that need to be made. Dr. Shea wondered if the School Committee’s role would be to receive updates and unpack the implications for budgetary purposes. Mrs. Presser replied that in order to understand the recommendations, School Committee members need to have a baseline of understanding, which might come from a streamlined series of presentations (three bullet points), but that the School Committee would have to help the central office stick to this approach.

Members discussed options for reporting progress, including weekly reporting from the superintendent, and School Committee presentations that focus on the big picture. Dr. Shea described an approach that:

- began with a self-study of the strengths and weaknesses of the current model,
- transitioned to recommendations and budget implications,
- went on to the identification of metrics and expected outcomes, and
- included a timeline for review.

Dr. Dominguez suggested adding community outreach and feedback to Dr. Shea’s outline. Mrs. Brody spoke of Norfolk, Virginia’s approach, which incorporated the questions: how will this impact student learning? Why is it important to address this topic now? She noted that the Norfolk presentation format is broken up over time and across different meetings to incorporate communication with relevant stakeholders.

Mr. Guida asked what the central office staff thought of this approach. In response, Mr. Tarro asked who determines what is feasible? Mrs. Presser replied that one good test is whether an initiative is consistent with the strategic plan. Mrs. Presser noted that the guidance program is consistent with the district’s strategic plan and can be included in a year-long strategic agenda.

Members spoke of the superintendent’s evaluation, and whether there could be a goal of community outreach connected to the guidance program. Mrs. Presser recommended that there be no more than five goals associated with the superintendent’s evaluation. In response to a question from Mrs. Brody, Mrs. Presser stated that the Massachusetts framework is a good approach to follow for an evaluation. She indicated that the most valuable components are the shared understanding and knowledge of what is to be monitored. Dr. Shea noted that the Massachusetts evaluation framework emphasized inputs, with not many outcomes, and Mrs. Presser pointed out that the Massachusetts model represents a two-year cycle, with measures in Year 2. Mrs. Presser asked what metrics would be appropriate to include in the evaluation of the guidance program. Increasing the number of students who get into and attend their first choice college? Increase the graduation rate?

Mr. Messor identified the data collection and reporting cycle for the 2014-2015 academic year.

**SCHOOL COMMITTEE
BARRINGTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS
BARRINGTON, RHODE ISLAND**

Page 4

Minutes of School Committee Meeting on Governance 06/23/14

Members concluded by identifying three key actions to address during the summer:

1. Drafting goals for the superintendent's evaluation
2. Identifying a year-long agenda, which will be goal driven
3. Provide central office staff with guidance on presentation format for school committee meetings
4. [Once goals are set, the school committee identifies how it develop its goals to support them, e.g., through community outreach and budgeting.]

Mrs. Brody adjourned the meeting at 9:05 p.m.