

Milford Board of Education

Board Meeting Minutes
March 16, 2015

Board members present:

Michael DeGrego
John DeRosa
Suzanne DiBiase
Jennifer Federico
Laura Fucci
Susan Glennon, Chair
Anthony Piselli
C. Robert Satti, Jr.
Earl Whiskeyman

Administration present:

Dr. Elizabeth Feser
Michael Cummings
Jim Richetelli
Susan Kelleher

Board members absent:

Dr. Heidi Gold-Dworkin

I. CALL TO ORDER

Ms. Glennon called the special meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. in the City Hall Auditorium. She then asked that everyone join in the reciting of the Pledge of Allegiance.

II. BOARD WORKSHOP ON ELEMENTARY REDISTRICTING

Ms. Glennon offered comments relative to the work of the Board and the long range planning committee with regard to reconfiguration work that has been done over the past two years. In addition, she reminded the Board of the plans that were adopted last fall. Those were: return to K-5 in all eight elementary schools, decentralize PreK with agreement that the Board would allow administration to determine the best placement of those classrooms, redistrict city-wide to balance elementary enrollment across the district and ensure all students have access to similar program space and explore enhanced programs. She then turned the meeting over to Mr. Zuba and Ms. Augur for a presentation.

Mr. Zuba gave a brief summary of the items that would be covered during the meeting. He then turned the meeting over to Dr. Feser.

Dr. Feser circled back to the work of the long range planning committee, and the decision to return to a PK-5 elementary school system. She reaffirmed the six major components which led to the decision to return to PK-5. Those were: 1) Reduces transitions to only three, 2) Supported by the parent community, 3) Enables equity of programming across the district, 4) Leaves available space for program expansion, 5) Aligns with long-term alternatives, and 6) Potential for size parity in each building. She further stated, the Board met over the summer and into the fall to discuss the long range plan. The Board voted unanimously to redraw the elementary school boundaries at its October 2014 board meeting. The next step was to develop criteria for the redistricting, which the Board unanimously adopted in November 2014. The Board then charged consulting firm, Milone and MacBroom, with redrawing the boundary lines, complying with the plans adopted by the Board in October and keeping in mind with the five redistricting criteria:

- Adhere to natural boundaries and keep neighborhoods together to the greatest extent feasible
- Balance enrollment to ensure parity in available resources across schools

Approved

- Minimize student travel time and transportation costs
- Mitigate impact on students already redistricted and remain cognizant of and sensitive to those families
- Avoid unequal distribution of redistricting burden

Dr. Feser concluded her presentation by encouraging the Board to keep the goals they voted on at the forefront when making their decision.

Ms. Augur reviewed the challenges that arose when developing the boundaries based on the criteria. Mr. Zuba shared data, relative to each option that showed enrollment, capacity, average class size, utilization and the long term space impacts as well as the educational impact. He noted a decision would need to be finalized soon for implementation in the 2015-16 school year.

Ms. Glennon confirmed the recommendation of Milone and MacBroom is Option 4c, as it is the most efficient option. She further stated that 4a, 4b and 4c built upon one another. She asked Board members if they were willing remove 4a and 4b from the table. A consensus of the Board was reached to remove options 4a and 4b. All members agreed, with the exception of Mr. DeGrego, who went on record stating that he would not support options 4a, b, c or d.

The Board members then began discussion of the remaining options; Options 4d (Minuteman Drive), 4e (Milford Point Road), 4f (Beaver Brook), 4g (North Milford), 4h (Gunn Street/Lamp Light Lane), and 4i (combining 4f, 4g and 4h).

Option 4d – Minuteman Drive

A discussion ensued on option 4d with note it had no impact on PreK and Special Ed classes and allowed more balanced utilization of Calf Pen and Orchard Hills schools.

Option 4e - Milford Point Road

Mr. Zuba confirmed there are concerns with this option. The west would lose two PreK rooms and have no chance of expanding program rooms or getting back the PreK at JFK for the foreseeable future. Also noted Meadowside would have the least enrollment and JFK would have the most, however, JFK is not the same square footage as Meadowside. Parity would be compromised.

Mr. Satti reminded the Board of the agreement to spread out the PreK program across the district. The Board needs to ensure the programs are kept on the west side.

Mrs. Federico gave the example of how not having PreK would affect parents if the program was not at JFK. She again reminded the Board of the need to spread out the placement of the program to bring parity to the district.

Mr. DeRosa commented, he is struggling with implementing too much at once. Everyone agrees with the decentralization of PreK, however, he believes the programs can be phased in as the enrollment needs decline. His intent is to minimize the impact on families. He wanted it to be clear that he is not negating the need.

Approved

A discussion ensued about the amount of program rooms in the elementary schools. Mr. Zuba explained prior Long Range Planning Committee work revolved around six program rooms per school, but that was increased to seven rooms last summer as a second computer lab was planned for each school. The district currently has seven programs in its elementary schools.

Following the discussion, Ms. Glennon asked Mr. DeRosa if he had a suggestion to solve the problem.

Mr. DeRosa told her no. He needs time to review the information, as the information provided tonight is the first time he is seeing it.

Mr. Zuba confirmed that there is no new information from the last workshop, however, it is presented in a different format with more detail that the board had requested.

Ms. Glennon reminded the Board the plan was to shift enrollment to balance the schools to fix the problem that has been ongoing for many years. The current families will move on, and new families will come. The plan is long term for the entire city and will add parity.

Mr. Satti referred to option 4g. He asked the question of how many special education classrooms were located at Mathewson. He was told there are two self-contained at Mathewson and Orange Avenue.

Mrs. Kelleher gave some examples of why you would want to decentralize the PreK program. Ms. Augur confirmed you would need to displace three self-contained classes at Mathewson under option 4g. You may bring back in a few years but not certain after that.

Option 4f - Beaverbrook/Caswell Cove

Mr. Federico asked about the impact of grandfathering students who would be moved to a school outside of their sister school for one year if this modification were implemented.

Mr. Zuba stated the grandfather option this area has all the students attending JFK and would delay the 2 PreK there rooms for one year. This option jeopardizes that.

Further discussion ensued about displacement of the PreK classrooms if options 4f, g and h were implemented.

Ms. DiBiase asked where the special education PreK classes would be placed in the option 4g.

Dr. Feser spoke about the complexity of having the PreK program solely at OA. It doesn't allow the school to have a K-5 school like the other schools. It doesn't support the criteria to add parity throughout the district. The travel pattern becomes a safety concern, etc. Many start and dismissal times. Orange Avenue already has 200 small children there now.

Mrs. Kelleher told the Board that the staff would be taxed and it would be very challenging. In addition, each program requires different types of equipment. Many students need a home base of the self-contained rooms; however, they could be in a regular classroom some of the day.

Approved

Mr. DeRosa asked Dr. Feser where the PreK classes would be placed if the Board opted to adopt one of the modified plans. Dr. Feser told him administration had not discussed that.

Mr. Richetelli also noted that there are 11 self-contained and PreK classes on the east side and seven are on west side. If any number is removed you will further exasperate the condition that exists on the west side.

(During discussion Mr. DeRosa left the room for a personal matter).

Following the discussion, Mr. Piselli suggested removing options 4e, 4f and 4g from the table. All Board members, with the exception of Mr. DeGrego, agreed.

Mr. Whiskeyman asked the Board to consider moving the special meeting on redistricting to March 23rd and the Committee of the Whole meeting to the 30th. Mr. Richetelli noted the sooner a decision is made the more time they will have to complete the reconfiguration for September. Teachers need to know where they are going too. There were no objections to voting at a special meeting on the 23rd with the COW meeting moved to the 30th.

Mrs. Federico asked for a recess at 8:37 p.m.

Ms. Glennon called the meeting back to order at 8:47 p.m. Mr. DeRosa returned to the meeting. Ms. Glennon told Mr. DeRosa what had been decided in his absence.

Mrs. Federico asked about option 4i (4f, g and h combined). Mr. Piselli suggested that option 4i taken off the table as two of the options it contained have been removed. All Board members, with the exception of Mr. DeGrego, agreed.

II. PUBLIC COMMENT ON ELEMENTARY REDISTRICTING

Sherri Franzman – 46 Somerset Lane – Mrs. Franzman emphasized the space issues for the PreK students. She quoted a comment made by Dr. Feser about the PreK kids should be limited transitions. All your arguments are going against what you are trying to accomplish. In all of the discussion, there has not been a discussion on the middle school and high school issue. To have the conversations without talking about middle and high school boundaries is not right.

Carol Mariani – 37 Cleveland Avenue – Currently in the Pumpkin and JFK district. Her son attended Ready to Learn and the PreK program at Orange Avenue. She does not support moving the Ready to Learn program and splitting the classes up as she feels it would not benefit the program. She doesn't understand the argument of transportation for the PreK program. Transportation is offered for PreK. She also stated it is not fair to the fifth graders to have to go to a new school for one year. She also voiced her concern about the before and after care programs across the district. Please think about the needs of the kids and the disparity of the costs across the district.

Cathy Berni – 96 Centennial Dr. – Mrs. Berni told the Board that redistricting has been discussed far too long. She wants to see equity across the city. She urged the Board to adopt a long term plan.

Approved

Laura Fucci – 418 Anderson Avenue – She encouraged the Board to speak with Mrs. Kelleher regarding the different needs of special education , PreK, Ready to Learn and self-contained. PreK special education students are bussed, however, regular education students in those classes are not. Keep option 4i off the table. Moving special education students out of Mathewson will make it the school with the largest population (500 students). There would be 500 students who will not have attended school with any disabled students. Teaching inclusion is much more successful when done at an early age. Moving classes out of JFK to Orange Avenue would not only reverse a Board directive but keep all the PreK classes on the east side of town. There has been a great deal of expense in reaching option 4c. It is the culmination of two years of hard work while adding programs and parity to the district. She urged the Board to vote for 4c with the modifications.

Christine Hessler – 15 Augusta Drive - She feels the children have been uprooted. Would like to see North Milford stay in their home school. Would like the board to come up with a better option for the PreK classrooms. Find a way to keep the JFK students in their home school also.

Carla Regina – 50 Centennial Drive – There was mention to keep the 5th graders in their home school for the one year. Please give consideration to this request. Her daughter will want to go to school with her sister and friends in the community.

Kiersten Naumann - 66 Centennial Drive – She raised her concerns with the placement of the PreK classrooms at JFK. If there is so much ample space on the east side, why are bussing children west so we can have 2 PreK classes at JFK. Put PreK on the east side. 25% of North Milford are being relocated. Hope the Board hasn't made their decision.

Sandy Boehm – 148 Centennial Drive. – Thinks the Board is putting the needs of kids who are not in the system first. Have you talked to the PreK teachers? She has heard they like being together. The whole process is crazy. Needs of the fewer are being put over the kids in the system. PreK seems to be the focus. She is afraid of what her third grader's education is going to be in years to come.

Sue Fehmel – 52 Somerset Lane – Ms. Fehmel has 5th grader and 2nd grader. She is very upset with the change. The children should go to neighborhood schools.

Bruce Bishop – 12 Lamplight Lane – Take a look at the decision to make sure it is long term. Fairfield typically redistricts every 13 years. Son has gone through a lot of transitions this year. Teacher was put into a non-children position. Another transition with what happens tonight. Make an educated decision.

Denise Ambrusco – 52 Myrtlewood Drive. – Voice for special education student. She lives in North Milford area. Son currently attends Orange Avenue Ready to Learn – Her son attends prek and ready to learn at OA. Very upset the decision to decentralize PreK and ready to learn. Her son's PreK classroom is directly across from the Ready to Learn program at Orange Avenue. She asked the Board to consider keeping Ready to Learn and PreK at one location so the students would not have to incur a transition. She then mentioned Haley's Hope was created at Mathewson.

Lisa Robinson – 52 Old Country Lane – At first she supported decentralizing PreK. It now seems that spreading out PreK is hurting kids. The Board is disrupting many for only a few. She urged the Board not to decentralize at this time.

Approved

Jacqueline Smith – 205 Centennial Drive – Ms. Smith asked the Board where the family resource center is going to go. She asked the Board to consider moving two PreK classrooms from JFK to Calf Pen. That seems to be the least amount of change. She urged the Board to make the right decision.

Deb McKenna – 94 Seaside Avenue – Ms. McKenna told the Board she has heard a lot of emotions. As parents, we want the best for our kids. She views redistricting as an opportunity. Make a long term decision so the city is not in this position in two or three years. Living south of the post road and on the west side, we need adequate changes. She urged the Board to make a long term decision. .

Carol Maurati – 165 Centennial Drive – Ms. Maurati feels North Milford has gone through more change than any other area in Milford. As a parent, we are trying to deal. She is concerned about the social aspect of the changes made.

Pat Pacelli – 7 Beth Ann Circle – Mr. Pacelli has followed the redistricting plan since the beginning. He encouraged the Board to step back and go back to the key points and make a long term decision that will work for today's and tomorrow's children.

Carol Thomas – 84 Thompson Street – Mrs. Thomas charged the Board with doing what is best for all of the children in Milford. It has to be for the kids. Parents need to accept the change. She asked the Board to make sure it is a long term plan.

Beth Solai – 81 Cheryl Ann Drive – She is an Orange Avenue parent. The PreK population is almost as large as the K-2 population at Orange Avenue. You need to put PreK in as many schools as possible. It is going to be mandatory soon. Typical children need to be in PreK too. She urged the Board to think long term.

Circe Deitlbaum - 501 Burnt Plains Road - Ms. Deitlbaum is in support of decentralizing PreK.

Being no further discussion, Ms. Glennon asked for a motion to adjourn.

III. ADJOURNMENT

Mr. Satti made a motion to adjourn. Mr. DeRosa seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

The meeting adjourned at 9:39 p.m.

Mrs. Pam Griffin
Recording Secretary

Mr. Robert Satti
Corresponding Secretary