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Milford Board of Education

Meeting Minutes
October 28, 2013

Board members present:

Tracy Casey
Michael DeGrego
Suzanne DiBiase
Laura Fetter
George Gensure
Susan Glennon
Dora Kubek
Christopher Saley
Earl Whiskeyman

Administration present:

Dr. Elizabeth Feser
Michael Cummings
Susan Kelleher
Wendy Kopazna

Board members absent:

Beverley Pierson

I. CALL TO ORDER

The Milford Board of Education held a meeting on Monday, October 28, 2013 in the Board Room at the Parsons Complex. Mrs. Casey called the meeting to order at 7:02 p.m. with the reciting of the Pledge of Allegiance.

Seeing that most of the people in attendance were interested in hearing the update on the Response to the Special Education Audit, Mrs. Casey asked for a motion to reorder the agenda.

Ms. Glennon motioned to reorder the agenda moving Follow Up to the Response Plan to Item 2. Ms. DiBiase seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

Mrs. Casey announced that Mr. Richetelli is attending a state arbitration hearing with the MEA union, and Mrs. Pierson is out of town.

Mrs. Casey turned the meeting over to Dr. Feser.

II. FOLLOW UP TO RESPONSE PLAN

Dr. Feser provided the Board with a history of what had occurred resulting in the Board's decision to hire a consultant to conduct an audit of the Special Education program. The audit was completed in the spring of last year. A report was presented to the Board in September, 2013. The number one goal of the study is to increase student achievement. Following the audit, the consultant submitted four opportunities to Milford to gain student achievement.

Dr. Feser then turned the meeting over the Mr. Cummings to review the plan of action.

Mr. Cummings reported the administration will focus its efforts on the first three opportunities presented by the District Management Council. Those being: 1. Develop and implement a clear and consistent vision for providing reading instruction at the elementary level; 2. Develop and implement a clear and

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consistent vision for raising academic achievement at the secondary level, with a focus on increasing time on task with content strong teachers; and 3. Establish clear roles and responsibilities of leaders in regular and special education, and increase coordination and planning between them.

He then reviewed the timeline for the opportunities. The timeline provided work to be done over the next 11 months. Opportunity #3 would be the first to be addressed. The team will continue to do discovery of data. A strong focus will be given to the push-in model. Speech and language, and the pre-school curriculum are currently being reviewed. He further explained the literacy Response to Intervention (RTI) plan needs to be revisited.

Mrs. Casey added that an independent plan would be brought forward in May, 2014.

Mrs. Casey reiterated that no decisions have been made at this time.

Mr. Cummings further explained that to make changes in a quick way would be imprudent, unwise and potentially damaging. Changes will need to happen to help close the achievement gap. However, the entire plan will need to be carefully orchestrated to insure it is done correctly.

Dr. Feser added that the principals and staff should be disturbed that the students are not achieving at higher levels. Eighty percent of special education students with mild or moderate disabilities are not reading at grade level. The district will need to recognize the skills needed for students to succeed. That is the shift that needs to take place.

Mrs. Casey committed that the process is meant to be transparent. She then encouraged everyone to be part of the solution.

A Board discussion ensued.

The Board was in agreement with the timeline provided.

2104-15 Budget Priorities & Assumptions

Dr. Feser explained the Budget Priorities and Assumptions help guide the budget discussions. She then reviewed the Budget Priorities & Assumptions with the Board.

Mr. Whiskeyman asked if PowerSchool was to be replaced. Mr. Cummings explained the need for a system that can be easily manipulated to meet the district's needs; a system with the ability to drill down into the data. Discussions have begun with another provider.

District Goals

Dr. Feser explained the three overarching goals and that they focus on academic achievement, relationships with parents and the community, and school safety and climate.

While achievement of each of the objectives was to occur by the end of the 2013-14 school year, significant changes in state testing prompted a need to revise some of the objectives. For example, in the existing adopted goal on student achievement, two objectives are tied to performance on the CMT and CAPT. The tests are no longer being given with the exception of the science exam in grades 5, 8 and 10.

Dr. Feser then explained there are three sets of objectives to be presented. They are:

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- Objectives Set in 2011 to be met by June 2014
- Additional Objectives to be met by June 2014
- Objectives for 2014-2017

Goal #1 has 12 objectives tied to it relative to achievement. ~~Six will be met by 2014.~~ They are:

1. Achieve 100% of students in grade 2 and grade 5 reading at grade level using as a baseline 2011 performance on DRA and other measures.
2. Develop policy and structures to enable students to earn up to 3 credits toward graduation while in middle school corresponding with an increase in high school graduation requirements.
3. Create and implement a District Improvement Team, which includes parent and community representatives, which will give input to and monitor the District Improvement Plan.
4. Research and select an alternate literacy measure(s) to the DRA with the purpose of developing a more completed literacy profile.
5. Achieve 75-80% of 6-12 students meeting or exceeding standards on designated course assessments.
6. Conduct necessary research in order to declare a goal on the graduation rate.

Dr. Feser explained the district will need to declare a goal on the graduation rate. The principals are aware of the fact that they are being held accountable for the graduation rate. There are a lot of questions.

The other six objectives will be met by the 2016-17 school year. Those objectives are:

7. Increase by 15% the number of students accepted into two and four-year colleges and by 5% the number accepted at top tier colleges using 2011 statistics as a baseline.
8. Increase by _____% the number of special education students reading on grade level by the end of grade 3, and by _____% the number reading on grade level at the end of grade 5 as measured by the DRA using 2012 statistics as a baseline. *(The percent increase to be declared at the November meeting).*
9. Increase by _____% the number of free and reduced meal students reading on grade level by the end of grade 3, and by _____% the number reading on grade level at the end of grade 5 as measured by the DRA using 2012 statistics as a baseline. *(The percent increase to be declared at November meeting).*
10. Achieve an Equity and Excellence Ratio of 40%, using 2013 statistics as a baseline, while simultaneously continuing to increase the number of students enrolled in AP courses and the number of AP exams with scores of 3 or above.
11. Develop and implement a K-8 standards based reporting system to supplement current reports.
12. Require a Capstone Project as part of meeting graduation requirements beginning with the class of 2019.

In reviewing some of the objectives, it was recommended to remove objective 10. The district exceeded the goal. In addition, objectives 11 and 12 could be postponed.

The Board asked that administration not bring forth 2014-17 Goals/Objectives. They asked the administration to bring forth the existing Goals/Objectives.

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The last four objectives are linked to Board Goal 2, strengthening school/parent/community relationships and Goal 3 ensuring a safe and orderly environment.

Dr. Feser thanked the Board for their feedback on the objectives. The suggested changes will be made and they will be presented for approval at the November Board meeting.

III. PUBLIC COMMENT

Tom Jagodzinski – 27 Berkley Terrace – He is disappointed in listening to the plan. Ideally what the district should want is less intervention. This cannot be done by adding additional layers. The Board should get an outside source to develop the plan.

Amy Petremont – Ms. Petremont is a special education teacher. She questioned the interpretation of urgency. She feels every day is very important. However, what concerns her are the constant changes. Resources in reading and learning centers have been cut. If the focus is on the kids, then why do you keep cutting resources?

Dana Pinsince - 16 Ocean Avenue – Ms. Pinsince is concerned about the kids. A survey was done at West Shore Middle School in preparation for a grant on mental health. Statistics from the study proved the need for more resources. She concluded her comments by updating the Board that one in 88 kids have been identified on the autism spectrum.

Sheree Zweibel – Ms. Zweibel feels the audit tells the public that her bachelors and masters degrees degree in education don't mean anything. The audit states that she doesn't have what it takes to teach special education children. She proceeded to go over her daily plan. She is upset over the report.

Mark Ahrens – 258 Oak Ridge Lane - Mr. Ahrens recommended that the parent satisfaction survey be done on an annual basis. He would like to see more plans put in place to make it better. He also noted there is no explicit mention of teachers on the survey. He would like to see them incorporated in the survey.

Robbie Silver – 55 Governors Way - Ms. Silver is a Speech Language Pathologist. She has a concern with how the comparisons were done in the audit. Many of the comparisons were done with Massachusetts. Why weren't they done in Connecticut? Some of the numbers surprised her. They are not the norm for Connecticut. She further said that language is the foundation of all learning. Speech language pathology needs to be considered. Not all students can be serviced in the push in model.

Laura Fucci – 136 Welchs Point Road - Ms. Fucci is a parent who took part in the survey from DMC. They promised they would provide the report but never did. In terms of morale, everyone feels they are going to lose their job. The special education teachers are very dedicated. The kids are the ones who will ultimately suffer. To put them in to a regular education classroom without the supports would be a disservice. She also told the Board the paraprofessionals are very concerned.

Cathy Berni – 99 Centennial Drive – She told the Board there is a timeline and plan but there has been no communication. Furthermore, the students are lost by 3rd grade if they are not reading at level. But this district has a retention policy. She encouraged the Board to get parent involvement. It seems they are always talking about it but she questioned if the schools really want parent involvement.

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Stacy Godek – 154 Mary Ellen Drive – She commended the staff who affected the education of her son, many of whom were in the room.

Peggy Lomax – 113 Robert Treat Parkway – Mrs. Lomax’s daughter is in 2nd grade. It took her until 2nd grade to get an IEP for her daughter. She currently reads on a kindergarten level. If you take the services away, how are we going to get her to graduate? One teacher will be overwhelmed with the responsibilities. The scores and the rates that you are so worried about will go down.

Lisa Biagioni – 73 Sentinel Hill Road – She commented that the objectives are vague. They need to be more specific.

Elizabeth Sheridan – 33 Fowler Terrace – She is currently a student at Foran High School. She has attended school in the Milford Public Schools since preschool. She has never been a victim of bullying nor was harmed. However, she feels if placed in a regular education class, she will struggle. She will be lost without her resource teachers. She will fail and won’t be able to graduate.

IV. BOARD COMMENT

Ms. Glennon reiterated that services were not being eliminated.

Dr. Feser asked if she could speak. She reaffirmed that there has been no discussion about taking away services. The audit is not intended to be an indictment against anybody. However, the program needs to be reviewed. We should be able to say we can do better by our kids. We are looking at the point of view of children. We will not be making decisions independently. We will also be looking at what proficiencies staff have. We need to look to see if there are better ways to service kids. She then told the Board, “we can’t be satisfied that 80% of our special education kids not achieving at goal level.”

Mrs. Casey offered her support to her fellow Board members who are running in the election.

V. ADJOURNMENT

Ms. Glennon made a motion to adjourn. Ms. DiBiase seconded the motion. The motion passed.

Meeting adjourned at 9:45 p.m.

Pam Griffin
Recording Secretary

Ms. Susan Glennon
Corresponding Secretary