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Milford Board of Education

Workshop Minutes
September 30, 2014

Board members present:

John DeRosa
Suzanne DiBiase
Jennifer Federico
Laura Fucci
Susan Glennon, Chair
Dr. Heidi Gold-Dworkin (6:07 pm)
Anthony Piselli
C. Robert Satti, Jr.
Earl Whiskeyman (6:07 pm)

Administration present:

Dr. Elizabeth Feser
Michael Cummings

Others present:

Laura Boutilier, CCSC

Board Members absent:

Michael DeGrego

I. CALL TO ORDER

Ms. Glennon called the Special Meeting of the Board to order at 6:00 p.m. in the Board Room at the Parsons complex. She then led those present in the reciting of the Pledge of Allegiance.

Ms. Glennon announced Mr. DeGrego would not be present as he was still recuperating from an accident.

She then turned the meeting over to Mrs. Boutilier.

II. LONG RANGE PLANNING WORKSHOP

Mrs. Boutilier reviewed the goals for the meeting: review the agreements to date, discuss information shared at the public information sessions and the next steps.

Mrs. Boutilier recapped the concepts of which the Board supports. They are:

- End K-2, 3-5 and return to K-5
- Redistrict system-wide to balance school enrollment
- Decentralize Pre-K classes
- Close Harborside in 3-5 years when the planned renovation and expansion at West Shore is complete
- Implement new programming at all levels and ensure the space in which to deliver them.

The Board then reflected on the comments that were made at the Public Information Sessions, independently. The Board then broke into groups where they shared two or three of their affirmations, determined issues raised, categorized them and worked to determine a response or solution. The groups then shared their affirmations with the whole Board.

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The outcome of the discussion led to the development of suggested “marching orders.” They are:

- Communication- emphasize positive perceptions
 - Bussing
 - Measures of quality education (beyond testing) at all schools to counter perceptions (about Harborside and other schools)
- Redistricting Outline – agree on process, develop and share, include info on location of pre K, consider future needs
- Begin to get support from city officials
- Make sure correct data is shared with public, specifics about MS enrollments
- Transparency
- Focus on acknowledging fears around transitions and support transitions for students, families, and school staff
- Focus on increasing academic achievement by facilitation of innovative programming at all levels- use as selling point

The Board members were asked to share their views on the short term plan relative to closing an elementary school.

Mr. Piselli stated that he believes that an elementary school should close stating that it is fiscally responsible.

Dr. Gold- Dworkin reviewed the elementary school capacities in seven schools. She thinks the number of rooms being allocated for programming is excessive and by reducing that number new programs could still be accommodated in seven schools. She thinks elementary students could be given computer tablets or laptops can be used in the classrooms in lieu of dedicated computer labs.

Mr. DeRosa agreed with Dr. Gold-Dworkin.

It was noted that Administration has indicated a need for nine rooms at the elementary level for special programming: Art, music, two resource, enrichment, science lab, two computer labs and a dedicated classroom to accommodate a flexible schedule for instruction for strings, band and therapies such as OT/PT.

Ms. Glennon told the Board it is a value statement of the Board.

Mr. DeRosa supports closing an elementary school. Ms. DiBiase is unsure. Dr. Gold-Dworkin reiterated she believes it can be done even with the addition of programs.

Mr. Whiskeyman warned the members of closing a school. Enrollment could stay flat or increase. It would be much harder to regain the space once it is turned over to the city. He used Simon Lake as an example.

Mrs. Boutilier circled back to the options on the table.

1. Close an elementary school
2. Don't close an elementary school
3. Revisit the conversation when Harborside is closed in three to five years.

Mr. Satti does not want to close an elementary school.

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Mrs. Federico does not support closing two schools. There are better costs savings and economies of scale is with the closure of a middle school.

Mrs. Fucci feels elementary level children need the student/teacher connection. The added rooms are necessary to promote increasing student achievement. The probable savings is a little more than \$400,000. Closing a school would give a less than community feel that the parents and residents are seeking.

Mr. DeRosa supports closing an elementary school as recommended by the Long Range Planning Committee and stated he thinks the annual savings is closer to \$470,000. The costs would save approximately 2.35M over three to five years.

Ms. Glennon said she feels the Board is being fiscally responsible by closing Harborside.

Mr. Piselli made the suggestion to add programs gradually as the enrollment declines. Therefore an elementary school could be closed in the 2015-16 school year to save money.

Mrs. Fucci stated that not having enough space and gradually adding programs would force the administration to choose between science and computer labs and strings/band/ OT/PT. Research has shown that music and instrument instruction improves academic outcomes. We are supposed to be expanding programming opportunities, not limiting them.

Additionally, Mrs. Fucci feared a school closure could result in development of a subdivision of homes as Live Oaks and Calf Pen are located in residential areas.

Mr. DeRosa restated his desire to close an elementary school. He recommended the Board put in place a policy to review enrollment every three years. The enrollment is declining while the costs are rising.

Ms. Glennon asked Mr. DeRosa which elementary school he thinks should be closed. He indicated he has changed his mind since the process began and now feels Calf Pen Meadow or Live Oaks should be closed.

While Ms. DiBiase would like the option of closing a school keeping it under the Board of Education, Mr. Cummings explained there are state laws in place that would prevent the Board from keeping the building.

Mrs. Federico disagrees with closing an elementary school. With the existing eight schools, they will be balanced with equity and parity. Furthermore, the elementary schools are feeder schools for the middle schools.

Mrs. Fucci asked Dr. Feser for any other input that the Board should consider. Dr. Feser stated that in listening to the discussion regarding the elementary school issue, the decision was between economics vs. expanding or adding programming and leaving room for “what ifs”.

Seeing that it seemed the Board would not come to a clear consensus on the elementary school question, Mrs. Boutilier suggested the group move on.

Ms. Glennon asked Dr. Feser to speak to redistricting.

Dr. Feser explained the school system has never undertaken redistricting at this level. When Simon Lake closed the students were simply split among the neighboring schools and the schools were paired with a sister school. There was no real redistricting. This redistricting will impact every school. There are no staff

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members with the expertise or capacity to do this work and the school system does not have the needed software to do it properly. She feels it is best to have a consultant who understands the work be brought in. She also cautioned an RFP could take too long. Milone and MacBroom has most of the information from the work for the long range plan.

Ms. Glennon reported Milone and MacBroom is able to do the necessary redistricting work within the short timeframe at a cost of \$44,000. The work would include refining the data, public sessions, etc. The cost of going to an RFP would most likely be higher and a new firm would not be familiar with the data and school district. Funds from the non-lapsing account could be used for the costs involved. She reiterated her concern of time with submitting an RFP and the risk of not meeting the timeline for Kindergarten registration.

Mrs. Fucci, Mrs. Federico, Mr. Whiskeyman, Mr. Satti and Ms. DiBiase support working with Milone and MacBroom.

Dr. Gold-Dworkin, Mr. DeRosa and Mr. Piselli would prefer to submit an RFP.

III. ADJOURNMENT

Mrs. Fucci a motion to adjourn. Mr. DeRosa seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Meeting adjourned at 9:40 p.m.

Mrs. Pam Griffin
Recording Secretary

Mrs. Laura Fucci
Corresponding Secretary