

**BELMONT SCHOOL COMMITTEE MINUTES  
CHENERY MIDDLE SCHOOL COMMUNITY ROOM  
August 23, 2012**

Present: Ms. Laurie Graham, Chair  
Mr. Daniel Scharfman, Secretary  
Ms. Laurie Slap  
Mr. Kevin Cunningham  
Ms. Anne Lougée  
Ms. Pascha Griffiths  
Dr. Thomas Kingston, Interim Superintendent  
Ms. Janice Darias, Assistant Superintendent

Mr. DiCologero joined the School Committee for the second half of the meeting.

1. **OPENING BUSINESS**

1.1 Call to order

Ms. Graham called the Committee to order at 9:10 a.m. Dr. Kingston briefed the Committee on various topics including the status of the Butler playground and Amy Wagner's intention to retire before the end of the school year.

1.2 Roles and Responsibilities

Dr. Kingston and Ms. Graham reviewed pertinent sections of Mass. General Law chapter 71, section 13 to remind Committee members of the legal roles and responsibilities of Committee members, and members discussed ways to bring new ideas to the table in different kinds of meetings: business meetings, workshop meetings, subcommittees, and so on.

1.3 Superintendent's New Evaluation System

Dr. Kingston presented the new superintendent evaluation timeline, system, and rubrics developed by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. He proposed the following timeline:

- 9/11/12 – Dr. Kingston will present his self-evaluation and goals to the School Committee (he noted that most aspects of superintendent evaluation must be conducted in open session). He made it very clear that few people will achieve “exemplary” ratings in more than a few rubric categories. The term “exemplary” is reserved only for truly outstanding performance. He also suggested that the timing of the Superintendent's assessment is unique: year-end financial, student achievement, and system health factors for which the Superintendent bears overall responsibility are not available until well into the summer, making September the earliest practical time for assessment.

- 9/25/12 – Deadline for individual School Committee members to provide responses to the self-assessment and goals. They will send their responses to the School Committee. The Chairperson will present the consolidated results at the 9/25 meeting and receive comments.
- 10/9/12 – The Superintendent will, taking into consideration the School Committee’s evaluation propose his goals and annual plan, which the School Committee must review and endorse. 4 months after endorsement – The Superintendent and School Committee will conduct a mid-cycle review approximately four months after the goals and annual plan are endorsed.

#### 1.4 Superintendent’s Rubric

The Committee discussed the actual rubric and challenges members will face in collecting information about the Superintendent’s achievement in so many areas and categories, when most of their observations are limited to School Committee business matters.

#### 1.5 Long-Range Planning

Dr. Kingston reported that the district leadership will present reports on progress made toward the goals of the existing 18-month plan, the term of which will expire in October. The Council has started developing vision, mission and goals for a new plan, which he expects to cover a three-year span.

Mr. Cunningham described the work of the Finance Subcommittee toward a long-range financial plan, and some of the challenges we face in extracting necessary data from antiquated and complex systems. He and Mr. DiCologero are reviewing proposals from expert consultants who should be able to develop reports and processes to provide necessary data accurately, simply, and with far less manual effort.

#### 1.6 Fund Raising

Ms. Graham, on behalf of the Policy Subcommittee, requested School Committee guidance on establishing policies and procedures for a variety of activities lumped together as fund raising. These include naming rights, dedications, and solicitation of funds by private organizations that support specific school activities. Committee members discussed various ideas, including the need to distinguish policy from procedure from guidance in fund raising. The sense of the Committee was that our policy should insure that the Belmont Public Schools can receive donated funds for specific purposes, but that associated procedures must make clear who has the authority to approve such gifts and under what circumstances – especially for projects with long-term commitments to maintenance and use.

The Committee discussed collection of funds by private organizations on behalf of the schools and agreed that, while we have no direct control over private organizations, we could establish guidelines or authorization for groups that comply with standards that we set. Mr. Scharfman agreed to develop a list of organizations known to be doing this work as a starting point for further discussion.

#### 1.7 Curriculum and Instruction Sub-committee

Ms. Graham suggested that the School Committee needed an in-depth discussion of the role and scope of responsibility of the proposed Curriculum Subcommittee before its establishment. To this

end she presented Mr. Scharfman's memo on practices used by peer School Committee's, asked Ms. Darias to brief members on the current seven-year review cycle. Ms. Darias noted that several years with fewer curriculum directors, leadership turnover, and financial constraints had interrupted the cycle, but that departments now have review teams in place and are proceeding along the cycle as before.

Committee members expressed interest in curriculum and instruction and noted that they have had little exposure to the substance of what is taught in our schools outside occasional PLT presentations or approval of materials. How can and should the School Committee advocate for change in instructional practice, push for innovation, and engage in long-term programmatic planning for the Belmont Public Schools?

Members suggested that the Chairman include at least three responsibilities for the proposed Curriculum Subcommittee:

- Review proposed curriculum changes before presentation to the School Committee
- Grapple with student achievement and progress data
- Receive public input on innovations, issues, and opportunities.

#### 1.8 Communication and Outreach

Ms. Graham led a wide-ranging discussion about possible ways to communicate with and listen to public input. Ideas included outreach to PTO and PTA organizations, renewal of Community Dialogues, blogging, and numerous other methods. Dr. Kingston expressed his intention to start a blog with opportunities for public response. The Committee discussed in some detail the question of whether the public broadly finds interest in general news about the schools, questioning whether we might communicate on an as-needed basis rather than a regular basis. Some members expressed the sense that too much communication makes it likely that critical messages will be ignored, while too little communication provides no context for major decisions. Chairman Graham took these ideas under advisement as she considers how best to charge the proposed sub-committee.

#### 1.9 Finance and Planning

The Committee received updates on the status of various revolving accounts, as well as more information about the limitations of our existing systems. Mr. Cunningham and Mr. DiCologero elaborated on plans to improve those systems.

## 2. **ADJOURNMENT**

At 4:10 p.m., on a motion offered by Ms. Griffiths and seconded by Ms. Lougée, the School Committee

**VOTED** unanimously (6-0-0) to adjourn the meeting.

Respectfully submitted by

  
Daniel Scharfman, Secretary