

**TRANSCRIPT OF PUBLIC RECORD**

**OF**

**THE METHUEN SCHOOL COMMITTEE**

**WORKSHOP SESSION**

**OF**

**February 25, 2015**

**SUBMITTED FOR THE APPROVAL OF:**

**THE METHUEN SCHOOL COMMITTEE**

**AND**

**THE SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS**

**“AN OPEN MEETING ADVANTAGE FOR THE COMMUNITY OF METHUEN”**

**RECORDED BY:**

**MARTHA SIROIS, PUBLIC RECORDER**

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**METHUEN SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEETING**  
**WORKSHOP SESSION**  
**February 25, 2015**

This workshop of the Methuen School Committee was held in the Tenney Grammar School, Tiger's Den, and was posted for 5:30 PM.

**MEMBERS IN ATTENDANCE:**

Ms. Lynne Hajjar-Kumm, Vice Chairperson  
Ms. Mary Jean Fawcett, Secretary  
Ms. Jana DiNatale  
Mr. Bryan P. Sweet  
Mr. Robert F. Vogler

**MEMBERS NOT IN ATTENDANCE:**

Mayor Stephen Zanni, Chairperson  
Mr. Dennis D.J. Deeb

**OTHERS IN ATTENDANCE:**

Ms. Judith Scannell, Superintendent of Schools  
Dr. Brandi Kwong, Assistant Superintendent  
Ms. Martha Sirois, Public Recorder

**PRINCIPALS IN ATTENDANCE:**

Christopher Reeve-Comprehensive Grammar School  
Stephen Sierpina-Marsh Grammar School  
Mary Beth Donovan Grassi-Tenney Grammar School  
Timothy Miller-Timony Grammar School  
James Giuca-Methuen High School

**1. CALL TO ORDER AND ATTENDANCE:**

Lynne Hajjar Kumm called this meeting to order at 5:30 p.m. with a quorum of members in attendance, and listed above.

**School Improvement Plans Progress Update:**

Superintendent-This evening the Principals are here to update the School Committee on their School Improvement Plans. She is very disappointed that the Chairperson of the School Committee is not at the meeting this evening after he requested that the Principals attend this meeting to update the School Committee on their School Improvement Plans. She asked the Committee to please keep in mind all the positives that are happening in our schools. The missing piece is parent contact and to get the communication going between the parents/teachers/administration. We have weaknesses but she is confident we will get to where we need to be. She is confident in her leadership team and the teachers at the school.

**Methuen High School School Improvement Update:**

Mr. Giuca gave his School Improvement Update Presentation.

Mr. Giuca-Graduation Rate at Methuen High School increased from 81.5% to 86.4%. The Dropout Rate decreased from 3.0% to 1.7%.

Academic Support Lab started this year. 24 of the 43 students have already improved in English. Math Enhancement Classes have a 41% gain in grade 10 from pre test to post test and a 33% gain in grade 9.

Alpha Program is an alternative to day school. Currently 82% of the students are passing.

Summer School had 77 students participate in the summer of 2014. 91% of those students received credit.

Horizon staff is doing a great job. The program had a 91% passing rate from grade 9 to grade 10. The students stay in the Horizon Program for grades 9 and 10 and then for grades 11 and 12 they are in the regular student population.

We are pursuing all of these programs for next year's budget.

We also have grade 8 students from all of our grammar schools visiting the high school during the school day so they can see our students in action and feel the terrific vibe that is at the high school.

Superintendent-Mr. Giuca would you please speak about our level 4 Honors Program and our AP courses.

Mr. Giuca-The numbers are up in our AP classes. We have 700 AP exams being taken this spring. The teachers are doing a great job. These are diverse classrooms. We really want to encourage our students to take the courses if we feel they are capable of the course requirements. Our level 4 Honors Courses are doing well. Our level 3 and 4 courses are college level courses. Most parents do not realize that the level 3 courses are college courses.

In the Foreign Language Department we would like to send out a survey to the grammar school students and see what language courses they are interested in taking at the high school. If we have high school students that are interested in a language course that we do not offer at the high school they may be eligible to take it as a summer course at Merrimack College.

Dr. Kwong-We received support money from the State and put it all towards planning for these programs that Mr. Giuca has talked about.

Ms. DiNatale-What subject areas are available for the Nova Net Program at the high school?

Mr. Giuca-There are many courses available.

Ms. DiNatale-Can any students take advantage of this program?

Mr. Giuca-Right now the program is for students that need credit recovery. We do not currently have the technology to have students take courses on line but hopefully in the future that will be something we can offer. He will bring that up to the Guidance Department.

Dr. Kwong-Nova Net is for credit recovery. You are asking about virtual learning and that is different from Nova Net.

Ms. DiNatale-She was thinking that it would be good for advanced students that may be interested in taking courses over the summer. They could take the online courses to advance their education.

Dr. Kwong-Some school districts are doing that on a smaller level however it is very costly for the licenses.

Ms. DiNatale-It sounds like you have made so much progress at the high school do you feel that way as well Mr. Giuca?

Mr. Giuca-Yes I do. We also currently have students in our Biotechnical Program which is part of our CVTE Program spending afternoons at Raytheon for their externships.

Superintendent-Mr. Giuca and I can invite Nick Collopy to attend a Workshop and speak about the CVTE Program.

Mr. Sweet-He is happy with the graduation rate this year. Is that increase what you expected? He had thought that Mr. Giuca expected the rate to be in the 90% range.

Mr. Giuca-He was not the person that had that expectation. He said he was looking at an increase to 87%. He is happy that they met that goal.

Mr. Sweet-Unrelated to what you are talking about the high school is a level 3. The community is saying that we have a 100 Million Dollar high school and no one cares about being a level 3. What do we say to the community? Are you doing the right things to get the high school to a level 2 school?

Mr. Giuca-If we keep growing the way we are he believes they will. The aggregate scores of the high school are good. You need to realize that if you do not get all the diverse groups of students at the same growth rate it is difficult to increase to a level 2. We are being proactive with our intervention programs and he feels good about what is happening at the high school.

Mr. Sweet-Do you anticipate that in October you will no longer be a level 3 school?

Superintendent-She feels that with everything that they have in place that they will succeed.

Mr. Sweet-He has been into the building during the school day and the students are very happy and are respecting the new building.

Superintendent-She is looking to the School Committee to get the information out to the Community that every Community is different. It is very hurtful when people say we are a level 3 school and we do not care. It is not one size fits all in Methuen Public Schools. We have advanced students and students that have just entered this country. She is sad to hear that these kinds of things are being said out in the Community.

Ms. Fawcett-The credit recovery piece at the high school is incredible. She is happy that the high school is collecting data on these programs. We as a Committee are having a hard time explaining to our Community why other Communities around Methuen are going from a level 3 to a level 1 and they are underachieving schools. How do we explain that and share our story?

Superintendent-She has asked Dr. Kwong to look into this and she can speak about how that happens.

Dr. Kwong-The Target Goals in each Community are different. If our Target Goal is 90ppi, another school may be an 84ppi and some may be a 99.3ppi. If your community does not meet that target your level will go down. It is so complex that a lot of people do not understand it. We are working really hard to get our students to succeed. We are seeing students moving in reading levels so and we are hoping the schools will do well. A level 1 means the school met their Target Goal but that does not equate to an achievement level. It means the school has met their target.

Superintendent-If the School Committee can think of ways to help us to get this information out to the Community that would be great. School Committee is welcome to walk in to any of our schools at any time.

Ms. Fawcett-I will let the Community know how hard you are all working.

Mr. Vogler-He appreciates everything being done at Methuen High School. Maybe we could do a cable show to get the word out there to the Community. We could also do something with

Methuen Life. It is difficult once the impressions are out there. Certain people have put a perception out to the public and that is what they are hearing. We need to change that.

Mr. Vogler-What is the 5 year plan?

Dr. Kwong-ELL had a high jump in the 5 years. Students that come into the high school from other countries need the 5 years to learn the English language.

Mr. Giuca-We just had 2 new students last week that registered at the high school that have recently come to the United States and they do not speak English. They will be expected to take the MCAS exam next year.

Mr. Vogler-He would like to see the MCAS scores for all of our sub groups.

Dr. Kwong-That information is in the Accountability Data Book that was given to the School Committee in October, 2014.

Mr. Vogler-Nova Net sounds great. He knows other communities have online courses and he would like to see that in Methuen. He did not know that the MCAS was 4 year weighted. He asked Ms. Bozek to address how her staff handles the MCAS.

Ms. Bozek-We have the MCAS Alt. Portfolios. Although we have been progressing with the Portfolios, we still fall into Failing and Proficient. All our Special Education students have the opportunity to use all the programs. Our students have had growth at the high school with the reading program.

Mr. Vogler-Will the cuts for the at risk students effect your department?

Ms. Bozek-It effects all our students.

Mr. Vogler-Do we do MCAS pretesting at the high school?

Mr. Giuca-The teachers have the students practicing MCAS exercises all of the time.

Superintendent-They are doing this in every subject, every day of the week.

Ms. Hajjar Kumm-She thinks our website could be utilized to explain MCAS scores. We can share it on social media. Great things are happening at Methuen High School and no one knows about them.

Ms. Hajjar Kumm-Our students that have been with us from grades 9-12 their graduation rate is 88.4%. Did you expect that to be higher?

Dr. Kwong-She is thrilled with that percentage increase in 1 year's time. DESE never thought we would make that goal. We were working towards a 5% increase goal and we beat it! The Special Education, ELL and Guidance department heads worked on looking at who did not graduate and why. Our Special Education students that stay with us until the age of 22 and will not graduate are counted in the Graduation Rate.

Ms. Hajjar Kumm-Is this information we can share with the Public?

Ms. Kwong-Yes it is Public Record. They calculate the 88% rate and give us that information but they do not include it.

Ms. Hajjar Kumm-It is great that your team has identified the issues and is dealing with them.

Ms. Hajjar Kumm-How many students are in the Horizon Program?

Mr. Giuca-42 students are in the Horizon Program.

Ms. Hajjar Kumm-When students are selected for the program is there a contract between the parents/students/school?

Mr. Giuca-We meet with all the parents of students in the program. We want to make sure the students feel they are part of the school.

Ms. Hajjar Kumm-Do the students do math in the Academic Support Lab?

Mr. Giuca-They do math enhancement. There are 5 classes with a total of 100 students.

Ms. Hajjar Kumm-What is the backup plan for the grammar school open response time if the Professional Days turn into full days of school?

Dr. Kwong-We have shared the open response questions with the teachers and the principals will decide how they would be used. If the days do become full days we are still doing 1 open response a month.

Ms. Hajjar Kumm-You said that the A.P. Program and the Honors Program has no pre requisites for the students that want to take the courses. She would like to understand what the criteria are for taking one of these courses.

Mr. Giuca-The Guidance Department sits down with the students to let them know that they can or cannot succeed in an honors course. Our level 3 courses are college prep courses. We don't want the honors courses slowing down for students that cannot keep up with the curriculum.

Mr. Sweet-One of the challenges is the Community sees a new 100 Million Dollar school and we are level 3. Please help us with getting the message out there to the community.

Mr. Vogler-He agrees with Mr. Sweet that we need P.R.

**6:53-Mr. Bryan Sweet dismissed himself from the meeting.**

**Comprehensive Grammar School Improvement Update:**

Mr. Reeve gave his School Improvement Update Presentation.

Mr. Reeve- He started his presentation with the following statement. He has worked in 4 school districts, Methuen being the longest. He continues to be blown away by what is offered to the students in Methuen Public Schools at no charge. The staff works so hard to give these students these opportunities. Houghton Mifflin was in the CGS and was so impressed with the school they offered to partner with the CGS to do a workshop for our ELL students and their families called Learn Together Workshop. We are in the process of planning this workshop and it will be soon. We are very excited for this workshop.

Ms. DiNatale-She is also blown away by what she sees happening in all the schools. She does not understand why our students do not do well on the MCAS. She cannot figure out where the disconnect is.

Mr. Reeve-We need parents to come into the schools to learn how to support their students at home. We do a lot within the 6 ½ hours we have the student. The parents seem to have a lack of interest in the MCAS. It is a completely different environment than when we were in school.

Ms. DiNatale-The parents are happy with the ½ day MCAS Prep. They are happy the students are getting the extra practice. It is improving their classroom test scores.

Dr. Kwong-She feels the disconnect is with the parents that feel the MCAS test is important until the students get to high school.

Ms. Fawcett-She will be interested to see how the DRA scores correlate to the student MCAS scores at the end of the year. She also feels that the ELL parents are intimidated coming into the schools.

Mr. Reeve-We have a new program that is targeting our second language families.

Ms. Hajjar Kumm-How do you share the suggestion box with parents?

Mr. Reeve-He wants to put it on the website and do Connect Ed calls to advertise the suggestion box.

Ms. Hajjar Kumm-She is disappointed to see the parent involvement drop from the Kindergarten to Grade 8. Parents do not come to PTO meetings or School Committee Meetings. She feels

there is a disconnect with parents. She would like the schools and School Committee to try to figure out how to get parents involved.

Superintendent-School Committee should attend the PTO meetings.

Mr. Vogler-Years ago School Committee went to the PTO meetings. He thinks this is a good idea.

Ms. Bozek-The Special Education Advisory Council has also seen a decline this year in the parent attendance at meetings.

Ms. DiNatale-Along with the Connect Ed calls she would also like to receive a text and email with the message.

Superintendent-Houghton Mifflin was at the CGS and was so impressed with the school that they offered this free program that will target second language families. We are very excited about this program.

### **Marsh Grammar School Improvement Update:**

Mr. Sierpina gave his School Improvement Update Presentation.

Mr. Sierpina-He also commented that last year there were 75 students that applied to attend private high schools. This year there were only 33 students. A lot of students are choosing to stay in Methuen and attend our beautiful new high school. He also spoke of the wonderful partnership the Marsh has formed with the Days Inn to provide services for their homeless students and their families. It has really made a difference in the students' lives.

Ms. DiNatale-She asked if the tutoring that is provided in the classroom is disruptive to the other students.

Mr. Sierpina-If there are more than 1 or 2 students the tutor will take the students from the class. In the classroom the students get the instruction from the teacher and the tutor can give additional help if needed.

Ms. DiNatale-She is going to take what is being said about all the wonderful things happening in the classrooms and tell parents.

Ms. Fawcett-What is an intervention log?

Mr. Sierpina-At the beginning of the year each teacher received their students names along with their MCAS information. They discussed the students' strengths and weaknesses and how they can meet the students' needs. They bring that information to their Common Planning time and they help each other with strategies to help their students to improve.

Mr. Vogler-He is happy to hear about Academic Climate change.

Ms. Hajjar Kumm-Are the teachers sending out positive notes and messages to parents about how well their students are doing?

Mr. Sierpina-He encourages teachers to do a few positive phone calls and notes home each week.

Ms. Hajjar Kumm-Do you feel you are on track to meet your goals?

Mr. Sierpina-Yes he does.

The School Committee had a break from 7:50-7:56

### **Tenney Grammar School Improvement Update:**

Ms. Donovan Grassi gave her School Improvement Update Presentation.

Ms. Donovan Grassi-We have done many wonderful things this year that have helped with parent involvement including our Tree Lighting Ceremony that drew over 1,000 parents and

students. It was such a wonderful evening. We also had our PTO commit to providing every student in our building taking the MCAS test a brown bag breakfast/lunch. This is a huge commitment from the PTO. They know how important it is for students to not be hungry when taking such an important test.

Ms. DiNatale-Again she is blown away by everything that the Tenney is doing. She is happy to hear the school is a welcoming environment.

Ms. Fawcett-She is also happy with everything that is being done in the schools.

Mr. Vogler-Everything that you are doing in your schools is fantastic.

Ms. Hajjar Kumm-Your ideas are great. She hopes the school principals are communicating with each other and sharing ideas.

### **Donald P. Timony Grammar School Improvement Update:**

Mr. Miller gave his School Improvement Update Presentation.

Mr. Miller-He is working with his administrative team to create some ideas to help increase their MCAS scores. His school has also implemented the Positive Behavior Intervention System (PBIS). This system has made a big impact on changes in the classroom and the school. The rules have changed so that there is positive reinforcement for positive behavior. The students that do not have positive behavior are observing the other students that are being rewarded for their behavior and have change their behavior to positive. It is a system that involves the students, parents and staff and it is working.

Ms. DiNatale-Great job. Can we ask Wayne Vespa in Food Service to provide snacks on MCAS days?

Superintendent- She will speak to Wayne about this.

Ms. Fawcett-She would like to thank all the principals for being here tonight. She enjoyed the candid conversations. She commends the principals for all their hard work.

Mr. Vogler-You are all leaders. You are all a team and do not use the work "I". We as the School Committee need to get the positive work out in the community. Good luck with your MCAS testing.

Ms. Hajjar Kumm-You spoke about your needy families. Is your staff connecting these families with people that could help them?

Mr. Miller-Our school Guidance Department has a list and they reach out to them.

### **Other Business:**

Superintendent-She is frustrated with having the TV studio at the high school not up and running. She worked all summer to get the segments together. The studio is still not up and running. There is a huge design flaw. There was a big plan to use the studio to get the word out to the Community about all the great things that are happening in our schools. We are meeting with the Mayor about this. We are also unable to hook up to any cable service.

Ms. Hajjar Kumm-Is there a solution to this problem?

Superintendent-It all comes down to money.

Mr. Vogler-He knows that there is not much money left. Can we have a report at the next meeting?

Superintendent-It has impacted her as well as the high school.

Superintendent-The early release days are in the teacher's contract. She would like to make a decision to dissolve them for the remainder of the school year. She is meeting with the MEA on



Friday. She is also speaking with the school attorney but she would like to move forward. The MEA is supposed to be coming to the meeting with their ideas to make up the snow days. Do not be surprised if the last day of school is June 26<sup>th</sup>. She has told the MEA this is a time sensitive issue. She will also be discussing the 2015-2016 school calendar. If we do not start in August they may have to lose their 2 week vacation next year. We need the Parent Center completed at the Central Building. She is moving forward with that plan.

Ms. Hajjar Kumm-How will the Parent Center be staffed?

Superintendent-We are looking at different ways of staffing.

Superintendent-I would like to thank you all. Tonight was a very important meeting. You are all welcome to go into our buildings at any time.

Ms. Hajjar Kumm-She feels really good about tonight's meeting.

**\*ADJOURNMENT:**

With no further business to discuss at this Workshop Session, Mayor Zanni entertained a motion to conclude the Workshop Session for the evening at 7:57PM.

**MOTION:** Robert Vogler moved to adjourn the Workshop at 7:57PM.  
Lynne Hajjar-Kumm seconded.

**VOTE:** 7-0-0 UNANIMOUSLY APPROVED

Respectfully submitted,  
Martha Sirois, Public Recorder  
Methuen Public Schools