



TOWN OF GRAFTON
GRAFTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS
30 PROVIDENCE ROAD
GRAFTON, MASSACHUSETTS 01519
(508) 839-5421

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MINUTES

SCHOOL COMMITTEE

January 10, 2023

Grafton Municipal Center – Room F

7:00 p.m.

Members Present: Elizabeth Spinney, Chair
Amy Marr, Vice Chair
Graciela Vargas-Baker, Secretary
Liora Bram, Member
Laura Olfen, Member

Student Representatives: Anuvita Guruvada, Junior at GHS
Meroska Gouhar, Senior at GHS

Also Present: Dr. James Cummings, Superintendent of Schools
Kristen Gasper, Assistant Superintendent

1. **Call to Order:** At 7:00 p.m, Chair Elizabeth Spinney called the meeting to order.
2. **Public Comment:** n/a
3. **General Business:**
 - A. **School Updates from Millbury Street and North Street Elementary Schools**
presented by: Mandee Lape, Co-Principal at NSES; Stephen Wiltshire, Co-Principal at NSES; Joanne Stocklin, Principal at MSES; and, Paul Schwab, Ass't Principal at MSES.
Here are some updates:
 1. The "Culture of Community & Collaboration" has returned to their routine this school year, after the past 18 months of Covid adaptations.
 - a. School Communities and the value of Family Partnerships
 - i. Family Partnerships: parent volunteers, mystery readers, in-person conferences, & family literacy nights

1. Joanne commented on how it's also been nice to see GHS students coming into the elementary schools to work with the younger students
 - ii. PTG: Fun Fair (Spring, 2022), Oktoberfest (Fall, 2022), and support for classrooms
 - iii. Enrichment: Colonial Day, Thanksgiving, Wampanoag History Day, Staff Professional Days
 - iv. Events: All school assemblies, art gallery walks, and Band & Choral concerts
 - b. Professional Collaboration among staff, support staff & district staff: how it impacts student learning
 - i. ELA & Math academics data: highly used during PD days to review and determine if any interventions are needed to get the students' comprehension leveled
 1. Actions taken by both MSES & NSES with this data: coaching of students & staff; supporting new teachers; intervention and/or differentiation; modeling; and, cross-building PD days
 2. The math blocks have increased from 60 minutes to 75 minutes, which has helped the students greatly
 - ii. Literacy, Special Education, and ELL Data & Instruction: coaching has also been a big part of these areas with targeted programming, trainings, progress monitoring & coaching for staff (and students)
 1. The schools have increased their literacy learning block from 90 minutes to 2 hours, which has had a positive impact on instruction and retention
 - c. Student Experience: the long-awaited return to a "typical" school environment
 - i. How the students are involved daily, in making decisions for themselves, as well as leadership opportunities for students
 - ii. Extracurricular activities and clubs are back in full-swing to such an extent that the schools are having to add more programs due to the desire to attend the clubs & activities
 - iii. Field trips, Nature's Classroom, etc are back into the schedule
 - iv. Student Council is back as well
 1. The Council even went to the local food pantry to see how it works, and to help
 - v. Students have presented their needs & passions for extracurricular activities, and have worked hard to get new clubs up and running
 - d. Their Commitment to SEL *{Social-Emotional Learning}*: plans to implement new curriculum
 - i. An Adjustment Counselor being put in each building has been vital to students, families and staff
 - ii. Proactive lessons have greatly impacted the schools' environments

1. i.e. Mindfulness lessons: taught when a more stressful academic topic is upcoming in order to aide the students in how to organize their time and themselves; Results of Gossip: taught to the older population to prepare them for these social situations and the effects of their decisions
2. Closing Questions/Remarks:
 - a. Graciela Vargas-Baker asked for further information about the trialing of the "Second Step Program": if it was being done in a couple classrooms or over all the rooms.
 - i. Stephen commented that both schools are introducing the program at the staff meeting coming up in February. The schools are ready and able to do the program in as many classrooms that will want to do it; a few teachers who know of it already are eager to try the new program.
 - ii. Joanne commented that the program is a Stand-Alone program, meaning each teacher can assess where their students are, and choose a lesson needed for their classroom without having to go in a specific order.
 - iii. Dr. James Cummings noted that the trial was set up pre-Covid, and was due to advance from trialing in the Pre-K & K program up through the higher elementary grades. Covid got in the way of this plan, but the trial has been running successfully in those younger grades these past years.
 - iv. Graciela asked if the program will be done weekly, or will the teachers decide further of timeframe.
 - v. Stephen & Joanne mentioned that each lesson is set up as a week-long theme, and the classrooms are designed to use this program during their morning meetings (first thing they do in their day which will help set the school body up for daily success).
 - b. Liz Spinney had a couple of questions and comments. She has enjoyed hearing that interventions are happening in the classroom, with the coaches & co-teachers. rather than being taken out of the classroom, therefore missing what was happening in that timeframe in their class.
 - i. Joanne mentioned how it is beneficial to pull a small group of students aside with the coach/co-teacher, and remain in the same room as the other students, so that they are all a part of the same learned topic. She did mention that some programs are more systematic, and must be followed more strictly, therefore are monitored outside of the classroom.
 - ii. Stephen added that it's important to closely look at the need of each individual student: is it comprehension, awareness, a decoding concern. Then matching that need with the proper program: whether that's a Tier 2 or 3 level. The team is making sure they're continually making adjustments if growth is not seen.

- iii. Joanne noted that the students, if being supplemented with additional help, are not losing out on the learning but rather are being “double dipped” and hearing that information more than once. The student is in the classroom for a full block as well as in an intervention block for additional help.
- c. Liz Spinney's other comment and question regards the Adjustment Counselors. She enjoyed hearing the update that SEL lessons are being taught to entire classrooms, which therefore can help all students rather than just those that noticeably need the lesson. She asked if there are actions like this also going on at the NSES too?
 - i. Stephen noted that, yes, the Adjustment Counselor goes into classrooms as a whole. He also will go into classes, particularly the 6th grade classes, to speak on SEL topics such as rumors, gossip, and drama. These in-class lessons help the students have a familiar face, but one that isn't their daily teacher, to recognize and then feel more comfortable approaching privately with any personal needs. He added that the Speech & Language Pathologists have also participated in classroom support and lessons as well, working with all students.
 - ii. Joanne mentioned that the Adjustment Counselor has also added times in the daily schedule where they meet with smaller groups of students to go over specific SEL topics. The AC has grouped different combinations of students together such that the groupings meld very well, and the topics taught have much more intention and time-value rather than the quick “lunch bunch” groups of the past. This change was able to happen because the schools now have the human resources and volunteers now. Joanne noted that the schools' relationships with Shrewsbury Youth & Family Services has grown so much better because of the connection with the AC acting as a better bridge between the two.
- d. Liz Spinney's last question was regarding the numbers in the Band and Chorus. Are students coming back to the groups?
 - i. Particularly in the 4th and 5th grades, the numbers are increasing. They're beginners, but there is great excitement to join. The 6th graders unfortunately lost out on the last 2 school years of practicing and performing. Both schools are very excited with the concerts that are up and coming.

B. GPS 2023-2024 School Calendar: Dr. James Cummings presented.

- I. Minor edits were made to the draft calendar that was presented at the December, 2022 meeting.
 - a. April vacation was moved due to being on the wrong week initially.

- b. Reporting dates were added, and noted that they're subject to change if further edits are needed
 - c. Tentative Open House dates were also added to the draft
2. Laura Often brought up the concern about the Wednesday Half-Day issue: the consistency of the Wednesdays, and why they're on that particular day?
- a. The principals, after discussing the concern with James, feel that the schools could plan accordingly knowing that there will be five Wednesday half-days in the schedule. And, that the schools could plan academics around those scheduled days. James also pointed out that having the half-day PD times booked for a Monday or Friday would not be a prudent usage of anyone's time, when looking at the schedule from an employer's perspective versus the student's perspective. And, the half day schedule, therefore, could be on any day, Tuesday through Thursday.
 - b. Laura points out that families are already used to the Wednesday scheduling of half days, and that, like James said, it is only 5 days out of the school calendar year.
 - c. Liz notes that, yes, it's mentally good for the students to have a longer weekend if the PD day was on a Friday; however, the half day is for PD which in the longer run, is more successful for all involved to have a midweek PD session.
 - d. Liora Bram also wanted to make note that a Friday PD schedule is helpful to working parents, since a mid-week half day can cause disruption in home lives. But, overall, the school staff would be more engaged during a mid-week PD day, than at the end of a school week.
 - e. Liz asked the Student Representatives their opinion: they particularly like the mid-week half day because it breaks up a long week, and gives them a chance to catch up with friends, school work, etc.
 - f. Amy Marr mentioned the consistency is wonderful, and no one would ever find a time that pleases everyone. The most she could add is that maybe schools could put out a monthly communication of dates for that upcoming month: because, in their busyness, parents can have the half day sneak up on them and then scramble to find childcare.
 - g. Laura Often had a clarification question about why the half days are scheduled when they are, and why they are considered "full days" for federal requirements.
 - h. James clarified that the government requires 180 school days, and therefore the half day counts towards a school day. However, the government also requires specific "time on learning" hours spent on academics (i.e. not recess, nor lunch, hours). There are 900 hours for elementary and 990 for middle & high school. The 5 allotted PD half days are all the calendar can afford to spare so that academic hours are reached and teachers get their training throughout the year.
3. Liora Bram brought up the November Conference Day, and how that scheduled day along with others, then makes for many days in November where students will not be attending school.

- a. James stated that because that Conference Day is also Election Day, of which the schools must close anyways, then it makes sense to have it scheduled on that date in November.
- b. Amy Marr pointed out that there is no Election Day in 2023 because the only held elections are city based, and Grafton is a town.
- c. James noted that the calendar should be held in that consideration.
- d. Laura Often noted that the Conference Day should be questioned, and moved based on if people want the day to be held before or after report cards come out.
- e. Amy Marr's opinion is that the day should be held before grades close but after the first progress reports go out: giving families a chance to assess their child's progress & needs, and ask questions to their teachers before grades close.
- f. The discussion went back and forth between making conferences more accessible for parents while considering the contracts and commitments of teachers.
- g. James requests to hold on a vote so that he can return to his team to discuss the possibility of change as well as these other ideas in how to make the conferences work best, and the schedule to work smoothly.

C. Fiscal Year 2024 Budget: Dr. James Cummings noted that not much has changed since the December meeting when he first presented the budget to the SC. He met with Evan Brassard, the Town Administrator, regarding the timeline and the system transition. Due to the delays with the transition, the timeline is recommended to be pushed back to:

1. General Timeline:
 - a. James and his team will reduce the preliminary budget to hit the target amount of \$43,427,796.
 - b. 1/13/2023: Share full book and reduction recommendations to the SC
 - c. 1/24/2023: Review Reductions during SC Meeting to revise the FY24 budget if needed so that it could be finalized for February
 - d. February, 2023: FY Budget Hearing
 - i. Evan was comfortable with this new timeline of presenting the Town with the voted budget by the end of February
2. Comments/Questions: Amy Marr asked if the target amount included capital.
 - a. James stated that it should include capital, but at the next meeting he can speak to that in depth.

4. Superintendent's Report: Dr. James Cummings wanted to focus on the work being done for bullying prevention and the response plan.

A. James noted that Kristen Gasper and her leadership team have been working on the Response Planning for months. James expects to be presenting the completed plan at the next SC meeting.

1. The present Bullying Response Plan finds that the staff is proactive & responsive, however not everything is perfect since the bullying topic is very challenging.

- a. The great majority of gateway behaviors happens outside of school, and then bleeds into the school day. Therefore, the team is looking to help all staff understand the district's policies.
 - i. For instance, coaches, paraprofessionals, substitutes, volunteers, etc should be reporting any behavior or action to a higher authority. This should be done because an adult who may not be spending a majority of time with students. may not know any pattern of behavior that could potentially be a problem.
 - b. Plan is updated mirroring the DESE model.
 - c. Updated training and frequency along with increased efficiency: a process that is easier to use and more consistent.
 - d. Safety and conduct plans are changed to be consistent and formalized to match across all schools.
 - e. Progress reports will be conducted and made available to parents once a Response plan is put in place.
 - f. The actual reporting of bullying incidents will be made more readily available and user friendly (online).
 - g. All changes should be finalized on January 19th so that the plan can be presented to the SC on the January 24th meeting.
2. Questions/comments: Liora Bram asked if there is a good way to clearly define "bullying" so that it cannot be misinterpreted.
- a. James replied that their approach is to not address an incident once it is defined as bullying. Their approach is to address any incident so that, even if it is a gateway behavior, the student can be walked through how this one incident can grow into something major.
 - b. Liz Spinney commented how this approach could mitigate further behaviors as well as majorly hurt emotions.
 - c. Kristen Gasper made note that the global approach can show the pattern of behavior to all staff.
 - d. Amy Marr brought up the concern of who will be the most impacted from the uptick of reported cases when this plan roles out? What staffing is in place to handle these new reported cases?
 - i. James doesn't feel as though there will be an increase in reporting since the district already places a high regard in bullying, and the GPS students already have trust with staff members because reports are taken seriously.
 - ii. Amy wanted confirmation as to who receives these reports when they do come in.
 - iii. James replied that himself, Kristen Gasper, the Tech Director, the school's principal and assistant principal, the Adjustment Counselor, the student's guidance counselor all get flagged that a report was created. And within 5 minutes, the Tech Director is reaching out to that team to verify that everyone received it.
 - iv. Kristen then added that she will follow up with the adult who addresses the report as to what is the resolution to the situation,

and Kristen will log that resolution into the report as well.

- v. James feels this new plan will help to have the entire team know the details from the initiation rather than during an aftermath of a bullying episode. He then asked the Student Representatives their opinion on their comfort level of speaking to an adult staff member at their school.
 - 1. They replied that the Guidance Department is a good resource, and despite them having so many students under each counselor, which could lead to not as quite a trust relationship as a singular teacher, they are still a go-to.
- vi. A summarized comment was made about how this new plan would be working “smarter not harder”.
- vii. Liz Spinney also noted that, according to MA General Law, bullying not only entails a student to student issue, but also an issue if a staff member is bullying a student. She wanted to note this as it may not be known to all, nor may it be on the form. “Everyone should feel safe coming to school.”

5. **Future Agenda Schedule Planning:**

- A. Health Survey Results: will be moved, tentatively, to the next meeting
- B. Budget Hearing: February 7, 2023
- C. School Calendar Vote: February 24, 2023
- D. Budget Discussion of the Full Book and Potential Reductions: February 24, 2023

6. **Approval of Minutes:** Amy Marr made a motion to approve the minutes of December 13, 2022. Liz Spinney seconded the motion, and asked for any discussion. Amy Marr noted a spelling correction on page one. Liz Spinney noted a comment correction on page three that was documented but was shown not to be pertinent to the agenda, and Amy Marr motioned to strike the comment. Motion carried 5-0 with amendments.

7. **Financial Report:** two warrants to approve

- A. Warrant: Elizabeth Spinney looked for a motion to approve the warrant dated December 22, 2022 in the amount of \$624,763.81. Amy Marr moved to approve the motion. Laura Often seconded the motion. No discussion of the warrant was mentioned. Motion carried 5-0.
- B. Warrant: Liz Spinney looked for a motion to approve the warrant dated December 29, 2022 in the amount of \$534,602.41. Amy Marr moved to approve the motion. Liora Bram seconded the motion. No discussion was mentioned. Motion carried 5-0.

8. **Policy:** there are four policies to present as a Second Readings this evening. Amy Marr made a motion to adopt Policies JLCD, JFABD, JFABE, and JFABF as the Second Readings. Laura Often seconded the motion. No discussion of the readings were mentioned. Motion carried 5-0.

JLCD – ADMINISTERING MEDICINES TO STUDENTS – Second Reading

JFABD – MASC POLICY UPDATE for HOMELESS STUDENTS’ RIGHTS – Second Reading

JFABE – MASC POLICY UPDATE for MILITARY STUDENTS’ RIGHTS – Second Reading

JFABF – MASC POLICY UPDATE for FOSTER STUDENTS’ RIGHTS – Second Reading

A. Comments: Laura Often noted about moving to host the policy subcommittee to meet up with the MASC in order to work smarter not harder. The quote from MASC would be \$3,000 for the initial set up, and an additional \$900 per year. Other districts have used MASC directly, and have had great success. The policies of GPS can utilize this collaboration in order to make sure the policies are in compliance.

1. Liz Spinney asked where the policies are housed.
2. Laura replied that they are all online at the MASC website, and a viewer can click on the GPS district page to view the policies of the district.
3. Amy Marr noted that by using the MASC website, the search tool in the current school district’s website will not be able to find the policy since the policies are no longer housed on the district’s website.
4. Laura commented that a link could be created directing searchers to the MASC website.
5. Overall, the MASC is led by experts who dive deep into each policy’s grammar, so that the Grafton Policy Sub-committee can focus on creating new policies, and revising old policies to the ever-changing laws and times.

9. **Member Reports:** Liz Spinney asked if the Student Members would like to give a report.

Anuvita Guruvada commented that DECA has their District Competition this coming Thursday, January 12, 2023. They also have their Winter Gala at Highlands on January 21, 2023 at 6pm. Anuvita also noted that semester one is ending on January 26, 2023. A presentation will also be held for 8th grade parents at GHS on February 16, 2023.

Meroska Gouhar noted that the rehearsals for the musical will begin next week. The show has been planned for March 31st, April 1st, and April 2nd. She is really excited about the musical, “Mean Girls.” Meroska noted that AP classes will begin taking mock exams in preparation for the May exam. And, lastly, the National Honor Society will hold a babysitting fundraiser the Friday before Valentine’s. Entertainment, crafts, movies, and more will be provided. There will be a flyer, and online postings, put out with information on how parents can sign up.

Graciela Vargas-Baker spoke about the Wellness Committee Meeting she attended on December 15, 2022. The second meeting is being held tomorrow, Wednesday, January 11, 2023. Graciela mentioned that she has yet to receive a confirmation email; however, Laura Often spoke of how she received an email as a parent, but not as a SC member. Confirmation of the second meeting to be held at GHS was noted.

10. Correspondence: none to discuss

11. Executive Session: n/a

12. Adjournment: Amy Marr motioned to adjourn the session. Liora Bram seconded the motion. Motion carried 5-0. The meeting ended at 8:42 p.m.

Respectfully submitted.



Jessica Fugere
Recording Secretary