



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

2023 FEB 24 AM 10:56

**MINUTES**  
**SCHOOL COMMITTEE**

January 24, 2023

Grafton Municipal Center – Room F  
7:00 p.m.

**Members Present:** Elizabeth Spinney, Chair  
Amy Marr, Vice Chair  
Graciela Vargas-Baker, Secretary  
Laura Ofen, Member

**Members Absent:** Liora Bram, Member

**Student**

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

**Also Present:** Dr. James Cummings, Superintendent of Schools

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. **Grafton Middle School Update** presented by: Roseanne Kurposka, Principal and Christine Martellio, Assistant Principal. They both began by thanking the numerous students, staff, and many other adults for their collaborative efforts to make this school year start with success. Christine Martellio spoke about the GMS School Pillars, and how these mottos are reiterated daily to the students to create the atmosphere of mindfulness. Roseanne Kurposka spoke about different opportunities where staff can highlight positive acts performed by students, and she will personally call families on the staff's behalf to commend the student. There are also opportunities for students to be nominated monthly for their acts of kindness. Here are some school specific updates:

1. **School Improvement Plan: Goal #1:** To incorporate strategies that maximize student engagement and personalized learning in order to meet the individualized needs of all students.
  - a. 2022-2023 Accomplishments:
    - i. Universal Design for Learning (UDL): 4 Pilots being selected by teachers – Focused PD is done on UDL
      1. Teachers share new information in multiple ways (modalities) with students daily
      2. Curriculum Director, Tracey Calo, coordinates this work with the teachers & administrators
    - ii. Student Support Team Meetings: by grade level teams & Tier 3 SST
      1. Every 2 weeks meetings with each grade level are held. And, then these meetings are followed up with meetings of upper staff hierarchy so that no student will ever fall through the cracks and no concern is ever unheard. The focus at GMS is not only academic, but especially social-emotional as well.
    - iii. Tier 2 Academic Advisory Program: for both 7th & 8th grade teams
      1. This provides additional individualized services in the classroom and with supportive programs for students at risk {i.e. Counseling, Expansion of Academic Advisories}
    - iv. Quebec Trip: held Friday, February 3rd to Sunday, February 5th
    - v. Schoology Courses: students are able to access materials anywhere, at any time.
      1. Individualized student-teacher communication, as well as individualized tasks & assessments, are used more readily
      2. Administrators are encouraging parents to create their parent portal accounts which will enable parents to: create their own notifications of their student's assignments for reminders; view their student's progress; communicate with the teachers; etc.
    - vi. Creative Instruction to Increase Engagement
      1. In Math: Cribbage Competition, Linear Stained Glass Window Competition, and Scholastics's Hardest Math Competition are being held. Also, a Math Team has formed after school.
2. **School Improvement Plan: Goal #2:** To align/revise curriculum horizontally within grade levels and vertically across grade levels and teach as written with a focus on integrating authentic, personalized learning experiences and assessments for all students.
  - a. 2022-2023 Accomplishments:
    - i. Data analysis by all GMS Departments – Focus on data driven remediation
    - ii. STAR Benchmark Assessments drive instruction in ELA and Math – taken in the Fall, Winter, and Spring
      1. Data analysis of results by individual teachers & teams
    - iii. Ongoing trainings on UDL and Data Drives in faculty & department meetings

- iv. Additional trainings around new programs such as Language Live, Notice & Note Close Reading Strategies, and STAR Benchmark Assessments
  - v. World Language Lessons in grades 7 & 8 – Curriculum changes over the past few years, and now all lessons are aligned across the department
3. **School Improvement Plan: Goal #3:** To increase the level of active participation of families and community members with the GMS community.
- a. 2022-2023 Accomplishments:
    - i. Increase parent/guardian participation on Schoology
      - 1. Increase in Parent Portal participation from 163 last year to 238 this year
    - ii. Hybrid Open House Night
    - iii. Hybrid Parent/Guardian & Teacher Conferences
      - 1. Parents are greatly appreciative of these hybrid options to accommodate to their busy schedules
    - iv. Grade 8 Intro to Naviance and the GHS College & Career Readiness Center
      - 1. GHS Counselor comes in 3 times throughout the 8th grade year to help get the students prepared for high school
    - v. GHS DECA Board Members Presentation to 8th Graders
    - vi. GHS Health Classes – Social Justice Project Presentations
    - vii. Blackstone Valley Education Foundation Collaboration – Manufacturing Field Trip, Tufts Veterinary School
4. **School Improvement Plan: Goal #4:** To initiate strategies and programs which foster a safe, school environment that is substance-free, respectful of all people, and supports student learning of the five social-emotional learning competencies: self-awareness, social awareness, relationship skills, responsible decision-making, and self-management.
- a. 2022-2023 Accomplishments:
    - i. 180 Days of Awesome Social-Emotional Skills Lessons
    - ii. Updated GMS Behavior Management & Discipline Protocols
    - iii. SMART Pass – Digital Hall Pass System used by students on their Chromebooks (or some teachers can use one iPad in “kiosk” mode for the entire class)
      - 1. Has greatly helped to reduce time loss in class, as well as increased safety protocols (since the administration can know where students are at any given moment in case of emergency or a teacher questioning the time out of class)
    - iv. Daily Mindfulness Minute
    - v. Variety of After School Student Clubs
      - 1. Driven by student interest; over two-thirds of students participate in the different clubs

- vi. GMS Grafton Ambassadors Program – students serve as teacher helpers, “buddies”, or general helpers at MSES or NSES on a monthly basis (nominated by their teacher)
  - vii. Whole School-Collaborative Building Improvement Efforts
  - viii. Whole School/Community Service:
    - 1. Thanksgiving Food Drive by the GMS Student Council
    - 2. Holiday Season “Giving Tree”
  - ix. Participating in the “Arts in the Valley” event
  - x. Holocaust survivor, Mrs. Janet Applefield, will return again this spring to speak to the 7th graders
5. 2023 Project 351 Ambassador – Congratulations to Genevieve Le for being selected for her efforts in the district, and her presence in the community
6. Closing Questions/Remarks:
- a. Laura Often asked a question about the Tiered services: how are they determined (the teacher or the student)? And, who is instructing them once they get to the library?
    - i. Roseanne Kurposka replied that the librarian is a certified teacher, and is instructing them when the student is there; all while working in collaboration with each of the student’s classroom teachers. The librarian is working with 6 students at a time, and is pulled out of their related arts class, but not an academic course, for 6 weeks. The student is then evaluated to determine if further instruction is needed beyond the 6 weeks.
  - b. Amy Marr asked about the tardiness and absences this year.
    - i. Roseanne Kurposka replied that there is an increase this year. She had just looked back at last year, and there was a total of 2,888 absences. This year, to date, there are 2,150 absences already.
    - ii. Christine Martellio added that the administration team (herself, the school counselor, school psychologist, the attendance clerk, and the nurse) meet monthly to go through the absentee list in order to evaluate the reasons for absences and the plan for learning. Christine spoke about how a committee is being formed to investigate deeper into the absence issue.
    - iii. Roseanne Kurposka added that their bi-monthly SST meetings have greatly helped with this issue as well. Teachers will list students who have a need, and the administration will reach out to families to go over the plan for the student as well as offer additional services (going to the home, a Tier 3 Lighthouse Service, integration plans, Shrewsbury Youth & Family Services).
    - iv. Elizabeth Spinney asked if GMS has noticed if there are more occasional absences due to the pandemic, where parents/guardians were asked to keep their student home if there was any symptom of illness.
    - v. Roseanne Kurposka replied that this is not as much the case; that families are beginning to send their student(s) back to school even

with slight symptoms. The bigger reasons for absences are anxieties and struggles to return to routine.

- c. Elizabeth Spinney asked how students are chosen for certain programs: the Tufts Conference, the GMS Ambassador Program, the Blackstone Valley STEM Program, the Connections Conference?
  - i. Roseanne Kurposka replied that there are different parameters. For instance, with the STEM field trip, the students had to write a paragraph detailing why they would want to go. Other programs are “nominated by teachers for a variety of reasons”, mentioned Christine Martellio.
- d. Elizabeth Spinney asked, “If you could name a resource, or position, that you would love to have, as an ideal, what would it be?”
  - i. Roseanne Kurposka replied her immediate reaction would be another Adjustment Counselor, specifically to work with students on academics.
  - ii. Christine Martellio mentioned that the teachers would love air-conditioning, but knows that is in the works, and they’re grateful.

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

- I. At the last meeting, Election Day was brought up as an edit along with the discussion for when Parent/Guardian - Teacher Conferences will be held.
  - a. Dr. James Cummings asked principals to survey their staff for their preference.
    - i. The majority prefer the Conference Day to remain on the 9th of November with the Evening Conferences held on the 8th.
  - b. Laura Often made a motion to approve the GPS 2023-2024 School Calendar updated on January 18, 2023. Amy Marr seconded the motion. Liz Spinney asked for any discussion. None were mentioned. Motion carried 4-0.
  - c. Dr. James Cummings mentioned that the calendar will be posted to the website the next morning.

C. Student Representatives’ Reports:

Meroska Gouhar noted that the 1st semester is coming to a close this week, and the 2nd semester’s classes will begin this Friday (1/27/23). The Student Council is attending a 3 day conference in March in Hyannis, MA. At this conference, the Council will attend workshops and lectures, as well as get to meet other Student Council members from other districts. As part of this conference, there will be a *Polar Plunge* fundraiser, which costs \$100 per student, where students wear silly costumes and plunge into the ocean. The Student Council will also be holding their own *CandyGram* fundraiser for Valentine’s Day.

Anuvita Guruvada commented that on February 16th, the GHS is holding their presentation for 8th grade parents as well.

D. Fiscal Year 2024 Budget: Dr. James Cummings noted that the Preliminary Budget Book has been released online on the GPS website, as well as having a meeting with the Town Administrator the same week as the last SC meeting (1/10/23). The numbers are base, conservative numbers with a very good chance to receive more than the town is asking for.

1. James went over the details of the level service needs again, and no numbers/details changed from the last presentations. Therefore, the forecasted town budget would be \$43,427,796 which is about \$815,000 less than what the School Department needs [\$44,242,872].
  - a. James Cummings is proposing the following reductions:
    - i. NEASC Expenses ... \$10,000
    - ii. Paraprofessionals ... \$50,000
    - iii. Extraordinary maintenance (backfill with rental fund) ... \$70,000
    - iv. Professional Development (decrease in supplies & contracted services) ... \$20,000
    - v. Nursing (eliminate .8 FTE float position) ... \$60,000
    - vi. New counseling position at PK-1 ... \$60,000
    - vii. Teaching Position ... \$60,000
    - viii. Increase use of transportation revolver fund ... \$25,000
    - ix. Increase use of school choice revolver fund ... \$460,000
  - b. This totals an \$815,000 reduction. The resulting problem, however, is this reduction will leave roughly \$300,000 in levy capacity (override funds) for the next 2 years. Evan Brassard, the Town Administrator, asked James to write up what else could be reduced in order to have \$1 million in levy capacity for FY25. Evan asked this as an exercise, to be proactive; not as a need to request a lower FY24 amount. Evan is comfortable with the \$43.4 million FY24 budget amount, but would like James and his team to be proactively thinking about the upcoming years.
    - i. As a result, Kristen Gasper has been focusing her efforts this week on additional school aide, on efficiencies within each school (school schedules, class sizes, staff schedules), and non-personnel spending (i.e. apps, software).
2. James also mentioned the Capital budget that focuses on HVAC and plumbing needs, and that number is expected to be around \$766,000. If any additional Capital monies do come in, they would go towards further funding, especially in ADA compliance bathroom renovations.
3. Comments/Questions: Amy Marr mentioned that there is still \$100,000 earmarked for ADA but it is currently labeled as "GHS". It will get spent where the greatest need is come the school year.
  - a. Graciela Vargas-Baker voiced her concern about cutting the counseling position in PK-1, especially upon hearing this evening about the emotional

needs of students in GMS and hearing last meeting how much the upper elementary students have grown with their counselor.

- i. Amy Marr agreed with Graciela's concern. She feels that the school's are asking merely for one more position, and that the School Committee should go back to the town and ask for this specific position. We will have future problems and expenses if we don't get a handle on the emotional state of students now. Amy expressed her disappointment and concern, when there is possibly/hopefully another area that can reduce its budget (i.e. software).
- ii. Liz Spinney also agrees with Graciela Vargas-Baker and Amy Marr. She, too, feels as though the counseling position is a high priority. However, she also is concerned for other areas where reduction is being proposed (i.e. maintenance – she has spoken with custodial staff, who voiced concerns about not having enough time to clean bathrooms as much as they'd like to, for example, since they are overwhelmed with their daily tasks). She is concerned for reductions made to the revolver funds which can be used each year for emergency purposes. Elizabeth's big concern is that the forecasted amount was from last summer, before prices increased, and before new needs were known. That forecasted amount is now below the level service required amount, which is to keep up with what the schools are currently doing. She spent time watching the Finance Committee Budget meeting on January 18, 2023 to hear where all monies are planned to be spent. She questions the town's desire to increase police officers when there is not enough money to staff school needs (like nursing and counseling). Elizabeth would like to get more information about the entire budget and ask Evan Brassard if other departments are making cuts as well, because she did not see these cuts in the January 18th meeting from other departments. Her question is that if the town is able to make cuts elsewhere, or receive more funding efforts than anticipated for other departments, then will the School Department receive that extra money (over the forecasted amount)? Liz voices her concern that the town may ask for more cuts, and that this low forecasted amount is already very low. She is voicing all this to point out that the School Department should not accept this forecasted amount so early in the budget process, as it's not enough to meet the needs of the schools and the students.
- iii. Laura Often noted that the Town Administrator is currently discussing cuts in police budgets in another [separate] meeting this evening. She suggested the School Committee should get together with the other sub-committees, possibly at the library, to discuss the budget as a whole. Laura noted that the budget is being looked at later than normal, with a new TA who budgets differently,

therefore many things need to be digested and looked over. She feels that the School Committee needs to look at what they can balance [compromise] in their reductions, as she's sure this is Jay's best thinking of what reductions would hurt the schools the least. Laura recommends looking at this as a 2 year budget, not just a FY24 budget, so that the School Committee is not in a worse position next Fiscal Year. She also wants information on where things have been spent (i.e. amounts for police officers were not in the original override: which was for fire, schools & capital). Laura recommends that the Chair request, to Miss Roy, that a meeting be put on the calendar for all committees to discuss the FY24 Town budget together.

- iv. Amy Marr noted that this is still early in the process as well. Fincom will be interviewing the individual departments, grilling them on their requests, and they will not necessarily recommend granting all these requests. So, this budget could look a lot different in 6 weeks from now. Amy feels that the SC needs to figure out what their case is going to be for when Fincom comes. She notes that no one can predict a pandemic, nor, during the pandemic, could they have predicted how bad the inflation would be affecting the schools' budget.
- v. Laura Often suggested talking to the State, Mike and Dave, to see if there is money somewhere and get their thoughts as well.
- vi. Elizabeth Spinney wants it made clear to the Town that this is not the final position for the School's budget. Liz wants clear communication of the impact of these reductions. She agrees that the schools need to be efficient with their spending, and save money where possible. However, the idea that further cuts may be asked in a planned budget that is already below level needs to be addressed to the Town (and our case needs to be stated).
- vii. Amy Marr noted that thankfully the budget doesn't need to be voted on this evening. She then stated that she didn't feel as though a February 7th hearing would be realistic, and then asked if the School Committee needs to have their hearing before Fincom comes in?
- viii. James Cummings stated he would speak to Evan Brassard tomorrow, but that he believes the hearing can be held at the 2nd February meeting.
- ix. Laura reminded everyone that a hearing doesn't necessarily mean the Committee needs to vote the night of the hearing, and that a budget is fluid (so even after the vote, line items can be adjusted if needed). She also strongly feels that communication between, at least, the Chairs of all the departments, would greatly benefit and also answer many questions.
- x. Amy wanted to clarify her suggestion, that Jay Cummings take the



\$60,000 amount for the Counselor position off the reduction list. Therefore, the reduction list will not total \$815,000; but that is what the School Committee is presenting to the Town as a need. The schools need this extra position to prioritize mental health.

- xi. Laura asked Graciela to request a meeting with TriCom, and copy Jay on the email request.
- xii. Liz will verify dates (as will Jay) in order to determine if pushing the vote back to February 28th is acceptable rather than rushing a February 7th vote if there are still so many questions and concerns.

4. **Superintendent's Report:** Dr. James Cummings will follow up further on last meeting's bullying Response Plan at the next meeting once he is able to meet with Worcester Health Alliance. Tonight, he wants to focus on the 2021 Youth Health Survey.

A. James reminded the Committee that every other year, grades 7-12 participate in an anonymous survey provided by the Central MA Regional Public Health Alliance. The results were delayed due to Covid.

- 1. A team of 6 people from the Worcester Health Alliance came out to discuss these results, and determine resources, focus groups, Wellness Committees, etc that can help students and staff moving forward.
  - a. James noted that he asked the WHA team if anything in the GPS results jumped out as an anomaly compared to other districts (regarding concern for the GPS students), and the WHA stated that they had no concerns in comparison to the other districts' results.
  - b. Overall, stress and anxiety are the 2 biggest concerns voiced by students at both the high school and the middle school.
  - c. The increase in screen time is a struggle to balance since so many online products are now excellent resources, but the balance of the exposure and accessibility to the internet needs to be discussed.
  - d. The WHA plans to create a Focus Group in GMS run by professionals from WHA, within the next couple of weeks, to address the stress/anxiety and bullying. A Focus Group in GHS will mainly focus on stress and anxiety.
  - e. Grants are being pursued with WHA in order to help fund mental health programming for the 2023-2024 school year.
- 2. **Questions/comments:** Laura Often asked if a similar program, to the bullying "See something, Say something" program, could be created to aide with suicide concern. She mentioned that often friends may not know what to do if a fellow friend mentions some of their suicidal thoughts. Therefore, if there was a program in place where the student could safely call for advice without feeling as though they are "snitching", that could be very helpful.
  - a. James replied that he will certainly look into this idea as well as speak with WHA to determine if they already have a program in place.
  - b. Amy Marr brought up the concern of the physical activity level, especially as students enter the high school level. She wonders if there is a way to

encourage students to try out for a sport, or feel as though they could make it on a team. She also feels that if students were on some sort of team together, that it could also benefit mental health as well as socialization.

- i. James reminds the committee that more teams means more money. Of which, Amy noted she isn't sure what the exact answer is, but would love to open a new discussion to help encourage students so they do feel included and that they could be successful.
- ii. Laura mentioned the possibility of having Freshmen teams, since GPS does not have those yet. She also mentioned the sports that do not have cut-offs, like track, cross country, unified sports, etc. Part of growing up is realizing that you may not be great at a specific team sport, but that a student's enjoyment of the sport could be translated into a club.
- iii. Liz Spinney mentioned the possibility of creating an "intramural" sports club aspect where students can stay after school and simply play the sport they like (i.e. a soccer club) that is not MIAA regulated, nor for competition: it's just for fun and inexpensive. Liz also asked if there is a way to know how this social-emotional aspect impacts academics?
- iv. James stated that the truancy project (that Christine Martellio had mentioned earlier in the evening) will give a lot of answers. The project will give a 2-3 page synopsis to determine what is best practice when a student is absent, especially when the schools discover the reason behind each absence.
- v. Graciela Vargas-Baker mentioned that the Wellness Committee, which she is on, has met twice already, and this has been their main focus of their meetings: academic effects of mental health and social-emotional issues.

5. **Future Agenda Schedule Planning:**

- A. Budget Hearing: February 7, 2023
- B. Budget Discussion of the Full Book and Potential Reductions: February 28, 2023

6. **Approval of Minutes:** Liz Spinney mentioned that there are 2 sets of meeting minutes up for approval this evening [11/29/2022 and 1/10/2023]. Liz asked if there was any discussion.

A. Amy Marr moved to approve the minutes for 11/29/2022 and 1/10/2023. Laura Often seconded the motion. Amy Marr mentioned a few grammatical errors on the 11/29/2022 minutes. She also mentioned that according to the Open Meeting Law, the minutes are required to state who is absent at each meeting. No mention of any changes needed to the 1/10/2023 minutes. Motion carried 4-0 with amendments to the 11/29/2022 minutes.

7. **Financial Report:**

A. Warrant: Elizabeth Spinney looked for a motion to approve the warrant dated January 19, 2023 in the amount of \$83,804.96. Laura Often moved to approve the motion. Amy Marr seconded the motion. No discussion of the warrant was mentioned. Motion carried 4-0.

8. **Policy:** none to discuss

9. **Member Reports:**

Amy Marr noted that CIPC will meet Tuesday, January 31, 2023 to discuss the bylaw changes. The Bylaw Study Committee has asked all committees that have suggestions, comments, etc on bylaws for their particular department to submit these to the BSC.

Graciela Vargas-Baker spoke about the Wellness Committee Meeting she attended on January 11, 2023. The committee added a few more members: the Park and Recreation Director, another nurse, a GHS science teacher (Miss Stephanie Konas), and three students. The committee will meet again on March 22.

Laura Often attended the DECA Gala, and congratulated Mrs. Spinney and the DECA student members on the lovely evening. Liz Spinney also mentioned having a wonderful evening at the gala; as well as how well spoken the students were that evening.

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 4-0. The meeting ended at 9:11 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,



Jessica Fugere  
Recording Secretary