

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING
OF THE
MELROSE SCHOOL COMMITTEE
July 27, 2010**

A meeting of the Melrose School Committee was held this date in the Aldermanic Chamber of Melrose City Hall with the following members present: Ms. Driscoll, Ms. Thorp, Ms. Kourkouvelis, Mr. Constantine, Mr. LaRock and Ms. Casatelli. Mayor Dolan was not present.

Also in attendance were Superintendent Joe Casey and Business Manager Greg Zammuto.

Ms. Driscoll called the meeting to order at 7pm and led those present in the Pledge of Allegiance.

Ms. Driscoll noted that in accordance with the new Open Meeting Law, this meeting is being tape recorded, and presented for consideration for the purpose of clarity a restructuring in the agenda to vote on Agenda item #3a (second vote accepting Strategic Plan priorities) followed by a vote on the Bridge document compiled by Mr. LaRock. Ms. Kourkouvelis noted that she is confused by the process, the Bridge document and Strategic Plan should be voted within the same time frame, and the Bridge document was not posted for public view. Mr. Casey apologized for the non-posting oversight.

Ms. Thorp moved, Mr. LaRock seconded and with five (5) votes in the affirmative (Ms. Driscoll, Ms. Thorp, Ms. Casatelli, Mr. LaRock and Mr. Constantine), one (1) in the negative (Ms. Kourkouvelis) and one (1) absent (Mayor Dolan), it was

VOTED: To add discussion of the Bridge document under the Announcement of the School Committee Chair

Ms. Thorp moved, Mr. Constantine seconded and with six (6) votes in the affirmative (Ms. Driscoll, Ms. Thorp, Ms. Casatelli, Ms. Kourkouvelis , Mr. LaRock and Mr. Constantine), none (0) in the negative, and one (1) absent (Mayor Dolan), it was

VOTED: To open the Public Comment period

Public Comment #1

Ms. Carole Tate of West Foster St. commented on the district field trip policy regarding our guidelines in addressing risk, crisis or injury; district liability in case of legal action; and need for background checks on field trip volunteers. Mr. Gerry Mroz of Mt. Vernon St. commented that the Strategic Plan was overly broad and unrealistic and didn't address needs of all learners; one-way communication from district to community continues; and challenged the level of perceived defeatism in the district. Ms. Maryann Hollis of Melrose St. expressed need for simultaneous delivery of Committee member meeting packets and online posting of meeting documents. Ms. Thorp moved, Ms. Kourkouvelis seconded and with six (6) votes in the affirmative (Ms. Driscoll, Ms. Thorp, Ms. Kourkouvelis, Ms. Casatelli, Mr. LaRock and Mr. Constantine), none (0) in the negative, and one (1) absent (Mayor Dolan), it was

VOTED: To close the Public Comment period

Ms. Thorp moved, Ms. Kourkouvelis seconded and with six (6) votes in the affirmative (Ms. Driscoll, Ms. Thorp, Ms. Kourkouvelis, Ms. Casatelli, Mr. LaRock and Mr. Constantine), none (0) in the negative, and one (1) absent (Mayor Dolan), it was

VOTED: To change the order of the day to vote on the Elementary Handbook and the Strategic Plan

Subcommittees

Policy and Planning – Kristin Thorp

Elementary School Handbook –

Ms. Kourkouvelis moved, Mr. Constantine seconded to approve the Elementary Handbook.

Elementary Principals Dennet Sidell, Kery Cleary and Brent Conway presented overview of revisions and additions to the document and took questions from the Committee. The Principals reported that major changes address discipline in response to the state's new anti-bullying law; Ms. Driscoll commented on encouraging students to walk to school and reminding them to leave valuables at home; Ms. Kourkouvelis inquired about students biking to school and if helmets are required, and commended Principals on section include in the Handbook regarding good manners; and Ms. Casatelli requested that language be added regarding the ethics law addressing the acceptance of gifts by public employees.

With six (6) votes in the affirmative (Ms. Driscoll, Ms. Thorp, Ms. Kourkouvelis, Ms. Casatelli, Mr. LaRock and Mr. Constantine), none (0) in the negative, and one (1) absent (Mayor Dolan), the motion to approve the Elementary Handbook passed.

Vote to Approve Strategic Plan Action Plans –

Ms. Driscoll moved, Ms. Casatelli seconded to approve the Strategic Plan with its action items.

Ms. Thorp explained the action item document which summarizes the entire Strategic Plan. Mr. Casey commented that the document allows us to focus, grow and move forward, and at the same time identify immediate areas to be addressed.

In response to comment from Ms. Kourkouvelis, Mr. Casey will correct language to include "department heads" in the Curriculum section.

Mr. LaRock questioned the attending Principals regarding how the Handbook responds to the challenges that each school faces, and why will this document change the way the schools operate.

Ms. Kourkouvelis repeated that all documents being discussed prove that the Plan remains unfocused. Mr. Constantine commented that he remains uncertain about the process which distilled five priorities from the 50-page original document.

Mr. LaRock noted that despite the Committee's positive efforts, members remain confused about the process and the multiple documents considered, and suggested we regroup to design a dynamic, clear plan.

Mr. LaRock moved, Ms. Kourkouvelis seconded to table the Strategic Plan including the Strategic Plan action plans. With five (5) votes in the affirmative (Ms. Thorp, Mr. Constantine, Ms. Driscoll,

Mr. LaRock and Ms. Kourkouvelis), one (1) in the negative, and one (1) absent (Mayor Dolan), the motion to table, passed.

Ms. Driscoll moved, Ms. Casatelli seconded and six (6) votes in the affirmative (Ms. Driscoll, Ms. Thorp, Ms. Kourkouvelis, Ms. Casatelli, Mr. LaRock and Mr. Constantine), none (0) in the negative, and one (1) absent (Mayor Dolan), it was

VOTED: To return to the order of the day

Announcements – Superintendent of Schools

Newsweek Report on MHS – The Superintendent commented on the coverage in *Newsweek* which reported Melrose High School as one of only 27 Massachusetts high schools to earn a spot in the publication's list of America's Best High Schools, based on the percentage of students participating in AP courses and who pass the AP test. We are honored to hold these rankings, and Mr. Casey thanked the students and teachers for their hard work and commitment.

DESE Update – Mr. Casey reported on the Superintendents' meeting with Commissioner Mitchell Chester where bullying, the Race to the Top initiative, and Common Core standards were discussed. At the Superintendent's request, Mr. LaRock reported that we are very grateful that Massachusetts is again one of nineteen finalists in the Round 2 competition, the results of which should be known by Labor Day; and the Common Core initiatives adopted by Massachusetts last week are as rigorous or more rigorous than our recognized, former high standards, and will be gradually implemented beginning this coming school year.

Announcements – School Committee Chair

Second Vote Accepting Strategic Plan Priorities - Ms. Driscoll noted that within a discussion between Mr. LaRock and Mr. Casey, Priority #4 "improve numeracy and literacy performance of English language learners" was changed to "strengthening partnerships with the broader Melrose community to increase the resources available to our schools and students."

Ms. Thorp moved, Mr. LaRock seconded to accept the five Strategic Plan priorities, with change

Ms. Thorp amended that for purpose of clarity, these priorities that we set out here, as amended, will be the Superintendent's priorities.

Ms. Kourkouvelis commented that she is confused with the four documents being discussed tonight and asked that the present vote be clarified

Ms. Thorp moved, Ms. Casatelli seconded and with six (6) votes in the affirmative (Ms. Driscoll, Ms. Thorp, Ms. Kourkouvelis, Ms. Casatelli, Mr. LaRock and Mr. Constantine), none (0) in the negative, and one (1) absent (Mayor Dolan), it was

VOTED: To amend original motion to make the priorities the Superintendent's goals for the 2010-2011 school year

Mr. Constantine again asked for clarification on the how and why of the process as there is no evidence of traceability as to how these five priorities resulted from the initial document.

Ms. Kourkouvelis agreed that the Plan priorities are also the Superintendent's priorities, but could not support the previous motion because the process is flawed and the priorities are unclear.

Ms. Driscoll agreed that she is also somewhat struggling with the priorities and their significance, and would like to reflect further on the mapping of the document.

Ms. Thorp moved, Ms. Kourkouvelis seconded and with five (5) votes in the affirmative (Ms. Driscoll, Ms. Thorp, Ms. Casatelli, Ms. Kourkouvelis and Mr. Constantine), one (1) in the negative (Mr. LaRock), and one (1) absent (Mayor Dolan), it was

VOTED: To table the five priorities and return them to the administrative team in order to incorporate tonight's Committee feedback and to clearly reflect the priorities of the Administrative team

Ms. Thorp noted that the Committee had discussed how the priorities tie into the Strategic Plan, and that the Bridge document would help us in tying it all together, but that this is not a place to add new items.

Mr. Constantine noted he is troubled by the absence in the document of any reference to human resources, staff development, and school/community partnering in achieving our goals, and that our attempt to distill five goals from the complexity of the Plan is unworkable and possibly ineffective.

Ms. Thorp requested that Mr. LaRock review the Bridge document to include the same terminology as in the Strategic and Action plans. Ms. Kourkouvelis commented that if done correctly without the need for translation, the only document needed is a Strategic Plan. Ms. Driscoll summarized that Mr. LaRock will revisit this issue with the Superintendent and present a revised version at our next meeting.

Consent Agenda

School Committee Minutes of July 13, 2010 -

In reply to Ms. Driscoll's question, Ms. Kourkouvelis requested that these Minutes be removed from the Consent Agenda.

Ms. Thorp moved, Mr. LaRock seconded to approve Minutes of July 13, 2010.

Ms. Kourkouvelis made note of typographical errors to be corrected.

Ms. Thorp amended the motion to approve, with changes, Ms. Casatelli seconded.

With five (5) votes in the affirmative (Ms. Driscoll, Ms. Thorp, Ms. Casatelli, Ms. Kourkouvelis and Mr. LaRock), none (0) in the negative, one (1) abstention, and one (1) absent (Mayor Dolan), it was

VOTED: To approve School Committee Minutes of July 13, 2010, with changes

Return to Policy and Planning – Kristin Thorp

Ms. Thorp noted that over the last year a draft of new procedures had been worked on, and that it is not the Committee's responsibility to determine the procedures, but to vote that they meet

Committee standards and are understood. The policy is not on tonight's agenda, but will be discussed at our next meeting and posted online for public view.

Field Trip Administrative Procedure Approval –

Ms. Casatelli moved, Ms. Driscoll seconded to approve the Field Trip administrative procedure.

Ms. Kourkouvelis noted that the Committee needs to resolve contractual and legal issues before procedures can be discussed, and moved to table the motion, Mr. LaRock seconded. With four (4) votes in the affirmative (Ms. Casatelli, Ms. Kourkouvelis, Mr. Constantine and Mr. LaRock), two (2) in the negative (Ms. Driscoll and Ms. Thorp), and one (1) absent (Mayor Dolan), the motion to table passed.

MHS Field Trip/ Spanish Exchange –

Ms. Driscoll moved to approve the MHS Field Trip/Spanish Exchange, Ms. Casatelli seconded. Ms. Kourkouvelis repeated that the Committee can only give provisional approval until policy issues are resolved.

Ms. Kourkouvelis amended to make this approval provisional, Mr. LaRock seconded. With two (2) votes in the affirmative (Ms. Kourkouvelis and Mr. LaRock), four (4) in the negative (Ms. Driscoll, Ms. Thorp, Ms. Casatelli and Mr. Constantine), and one (1) absent (Mayor Dolan), the motion to grant provisional approval until policy issues are resolved, failed.

Return to original motion – With five (5) votes in the affirmative (Ms. Driscoll, Ms. Thorp, Ms. Casatelli, Mr. LaRock and Mr. Constantine), one (1) in the negative (Ms. Kourkouvelis), and one (1) absent (Mayor Dolan), the motion to approve the MHS Field Trip/Spanish Exchange, passed.

The Superintendent requested that discussion and votes be postponed regarding the field trips to Greece and Georgia in order to gather more information.

Educational Programs and Personnel – Donald Constantine

Superintendent Evaluation Update – Mr. Constantine reviewed the evaluation process and noted that at our next meeting we will have a public discussion of individual Committee member assessments of the Superintendent's performance, and then adjourn to an Executive Session to draft an evaluation report. Members were advised to refer to the evaluation instrument used last year as a basis for discussion. Mr. LaRock commented on the high quality of the evaluation instrument.

Ms. Kourkouvelis questioned if it is the Committee's intention to publicly discuss tonight the evaluation of its sole employee, and create a written record of Member input during Executive Session for future public view. Mr. Constantine noted that in compliance with the new Open Meeting Law and Personnel Records Law and as previously outlined, the evaluation process this year has been revised.

Finance and Facilities – Chris Casatelli

No new business

Ms. Thorp moved, Ms. Kourkoumelis seconded and with five (5) votes in the affirmative (Ms. Driscoll, Ms. Thorp, Ms. Casatelli, Mr. LaRock and Mr. Constantine), one (1) in the negative (Ms. Kourkoumelis) and one (1) absent (Mayor Dolan), it was

VOTED: To open the Public Comment period

Ms. Kourkoumelis asked that members respectfully allow time for and be engaged in a full comment period,

Public Comment Period #2

Mr. Gerry Mroz of Mt. Vernon St. stated that the Strategic Plan did not focus equally on all schools; our expectations for next year cannot change if our actions don't change; goals have not yet translated into improvement for any given school year; principals and department chairs need to be more involved in achieving district improvements; challenged Committee to hold another open meeting on the Strategic Plan; Elementary principals are not focused on meeting the needs of all learners; Newsweek rankings referred to tonight are irrelevant.

Ms. Thorp moved, Ms. Kourkoumelis seconded and with five (5) votes in the affirmative (Ms. Driscoll, Ms. Thorp, Ms. Casatelli, Mr. LaRock and Mr. Constantine), one (1) in the negative (Ms. Kourkoumelis) and one (1) absent (Mayor Dolan), it was

VOTED; To close the Public Comment period

Ms. Thorp moved, Ms. Casatelli seconded and with five (5) votes in the affirmative (Ms. Driscoll, Ms. Thorp, Ms. Casatelli, Mr. LaRock and Mr. Constantine), one (1) in the negative (Ms. Kourkoumelis) and one (1) absent (Mayor Dolan), it was

VOTED; To adjourn

The meeting adjourned at 10pm.