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Board of Education Regular Meeting

Minutes

Ralph C. Mahar Regional School
Thursday, April 9, 1998

Chairman Silber of Brookline called the meeting to order at 9:05 a.m. The following were in attendance:

Members of The Board of Education Present:

Dr. John Silber, Chairman, Brookline
Ms. Patricia Crutchfield, Vice-Chairperson, Southwick
Dr. Edwin J. Delattre, Boston
Mr. William Irwin, Wilmington
Dr. Stanley Z. Koplik, Boston
Mr. James Peyser, Dorchester
Dr. Roberta Schaefer, Worcester
Mr. Micah Silver, Student Advisory Council, New Salem
Dr. Abigail Thernstrom, Lexington
Mr. Frank W. Haydu III, Commissioner of Education ad interim

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE:

Marianne Kusa-Ryll, Registered Professional Reporter
Ms. Carline Gele, Department of Education

Student Board member Micah Silver welcomed the Board and audience to the Mahar Regional School and introduced Superintendent Eileen Perkins and Principal Francis Zak. Superintendent Perkins and Principal Zak thanked the Board for their leadership and hard work. They praised Micah Silver for his commitment to education, and for receiving the Principals' Leadership Award from the National Association of Secondary School Principals.

1. Approval Of Minutes - Vote

On a motion duly made and seconded, it was

VOTED: that the Board of Education approve the minutes of the March 10, 1998 regular meeting.

The motion was made by Ms. Crutchfield and seconded by Dr. Koplik. The vote was unanimous.

Comments From The Chairman

Chairman Silber began by commenting on a recent California court decision on bilingual education. He said the court held that public schools must take action to enable limited-English proficient students to learn English, but there is no obligation to use any particular method of instruction. The Chairman stated: There is no requirement that the instruction be in the native language of the child. It should be whatever method is most useful in the acquisition of the English language. That is an important precedent. Dr. Silber said this decision would be of

guidance in Massachusetts when the law that mandates transitional bilingual education is reviewed. The Chairman commented: I hope that the legislature of Massachusetts will pay serious attention to the history of the developments in California, because while it is true that everyone needs to learn from experience, smart people ought to be able to learn from the experience of others.

Chairman Silber reported that the second annual administration of the third grade reading test is complete. He suggested that the Board consider moving the test to the second grade. The Chairman referred to a recent article in the Wall Street Journal on the subject of testing children's hearing at a very early age. He said studies have shown that hearing deficiencies impede children's development of linguistic capacity if the deficiencies are not corrected at an early stage of life. The Chairman commented: It is imperative that we pay attention to the very earliest years of childhood. It is for that reason that this Board has on two occasions testified before the legislature encouraging increased funding for early childhood education. I think the Board may want to consider in the future the introduction and set-aside of funds sufficient to provide hearing tests for children at age two or three where there is any question about their success in acquiring linguistic skills.

Chairman Silber also reported that the first round of tests for teacher certification is complete. Dr Silber recalled that before the 1970's, rigorous written exams were administered to all candidates for teaching positions. He stated: We are beginning to restore that requirement which is essential in maintaining the quality of our teaching corps and certainly central if we care about the welfare of our children.

Dr. Silber continued: It is not that the Board of Education believes that a test will demonstrate a person's capacity to be an effective teacher. It is rather that examinations are very effective in finding out whether a candidate knows enough to be an effective teacher, assuming that those other aspects of good teaching are present. The Chairman concluded by saying that the teacher test would demonstrate a teacher's ability in the English language as well as in the subject matter they will be teaching.

Comments From The Commissioner

Interim Commissioner Haydu welcomed Representative Hargraves and thanked him for his dedication to education reform. Mr. Haydu also recognized the work of former Commissioner Robert Antonucci and the staff of the Department of Education. He gave a special thanks to Jeff Nellhaus, the Massachusetts State Testing Director, and Deputy Commissioner David Driscoll for their excellent presentation on student assessment at the special meeting of the Board on April 8, 1998. Commissioner Haydu reported that at the next special meeting of the Board, there will be a presentation by Deputy Commissioner Driscoll and Carol Gilbert on the issues of teacher testing, recertification, and professional development.

Commissioner Haydu said he would like to honor and recognize a few teachers at the start of every Board meeting. The Commissioner said: There is little question that we have issues we need to deal with to improve our teacher stock, and I am prepared to deal with those issues. But we also need to be clear that there are a lot of good things happening in classrooms by a lot of unsung heroes who are often insulated from their own peers. Before we move along the reform agenda, we need to pause and take the time to recognize those very good things that are happening day by day.

Commissioner Haydu reported that the subcommittee on professional development, which is comprised of Roberta Schaefer, Edwin Delattre and Department staff, has met and is making progress. He also mentioned that some of the sabbatical teachers in the Department of Education took the communications and literacy portion of the teacher test and reported that it was fair and reasonable. Commissioner Haydu called attention to op-ed pieces recently appearing in various newspapers, one by Irwin Blumer and one by the Curriculum Coordinators of Wellesley, Wayland and Lexington, supporting education reform and assessment. Mr. Haydu reported that he met with MAVA on vocational-technical education issues. In conclusion, the Commissioner reported that one of the most rewarding things he has done as Commissioner thus far has been to meet with Department staff who have not yet pursued higher education. He said the state has some great programs to help with tuition, and he has encouraged staff to take advantage of them.

Statements From The Public

Ms. Linda Fritts, a parent from the town of Franklin, addressed the Board on the issue of the upcoming administration of the MCAS test to 4th, 8th and 10th grade students. She voiced her opposition to the administration of the test. Ms. Fritts stated that having read a sample question on the 8th grade science test, she finds the questions too broad in scope and open-ended in nature.

Ms. Amy Contrada of the Northbridge Classical Charter School stated that the Department's decision not to recommend a charter for the school was based not on deficiencies but rather on differences of philosophy and opinion between the Department of Education and the Northbridge group. Ms. Contrada said that for the Department of Education, objectives without relation to specific knowledge come first. She claimed that Scott Hamilton, Associate Commissioner for Charter Schools, had modernist views with which she disagreed. She said the Department of Education labeled the school's application as deficient in relation to assessment, and also characterized the special education program as inadequate. Ms. Contrada asked the Board to grant a charter to the Northbridge Classical Charter School or give them an opportunity to appeal the evaluation.

Mr. Michael Goldstein from the Charter School for Media addressed the Board with concerns pertaining to the school's application for a charter. Mr. Goldstein stated that although he is disappointed, he was very impressed with the review process. He stated that having studied charter processes in other states, he believes that Massachusetts' review process is most reasonable. Mr. Goldstein urged the Board to act promptly in granting the charters.

Dr. Charles Deutsch, an instructor at the Harvard School of Public Health and Director of the National Committee on Partnerships for Children's Health, spoke on behalf of the American Cancer Society in opposition to any amendments to the Student Learning Time regulations that would weaken comprehensive health education. Dr. Deutsch spoke in favor of the revised recommendation being presented to the Board by the Commissioner at this meeting.

Ms. Suzie Kaitz, Chair of the PURPOSE Campaign (People United for Responsible Policies on Sexuality Education), also addressed the Board on the proposed amendments to the Student Learning Time regulations. Ms. Kaitz asked that the Board consider the 1,600 letters received on the issue and vote in favor of Commissioner Haydu's proposal that clarifies the relationship between Student Learning Time, core academic subjects and health education, which is required by state law.

2. Student Assessment - Discussion And Vote

Commissioner Haydu reported to the audience that the Board had a very productive and lengthy discussion on assessment at the special meeting the previous evening. Commissioner Haydu invited Jeff Nellhaus of the Department to summarize his presentation on student assessment and lead the discussion on the issue. Mr. Nellhaus reported that four topics were discussed: the schedule for implementing the question try-out in History and Social Science; the development of specific performance standards for the MCAS program; the grade 3 reading test; and the time devoted to MCAS testing. [A summary of the discussion is included in the minutes of the April 8, 1998 special meeting.]

On the issue of student performance standards, Mr. Nellhaus said that in order to report the results of the spring 1998 MCAS test, it is important for the Board to adopt the content-specific performance level descriptions. He said the Commissioner, in consultation with the Board, will appoint a steering committee to oversee the development of the content-area performance level descriptions. The steering committee and additional panels will help in establishing the threshold scores. In terms of the third grade reading test, Mr. Nellhaus said the Department of Education's two-year contract with Riverside Publishing Company (publisher of the Iowa test) is up this year. Because the contract is ending, the Board will be considering various options for assessing reading in the early grades. The options include continuing with the Iowa test or considering a different test, either commercially available or customized for Massachusetts.

Another issue discussed was testing time. Mr. Nellhaus suggested that the Board consider various options for reducing testing time in future years. Some options would be to spread out the testing within a grade level or across grade levels, reduce the number of questions or look at other aspects of the testing program that would help reduce the testing time.

On the issue of the History/ Social Science question try-out, the Commissioner said he had originally proposed that the Board delay the administration of both the grade 4 and grade 10 History/ Social Science try-out until next spring, to give schools more time to align their curricula with the state framework. He said that Board members seemed to be in agreement to postpone the grade 4 test, but that there was some concern about postponing the grade 10 test. Therefore, Jeff Nellhaus and he had consulted and tried to come up with another approach on the grade 10 issue. Mr. Nellhaus explained that the revised proposal would be to delay the grade 4 try-out, and to administer the try-out at grade 10 only to students who have had a course covering the material. The test would be sent to all schools with a letter to principals explaining that they are required to test those students who have had a relevant world history course. He explained that this would be about 40% of the tenth graders and would be a large enough sample to be representative.

In response to a question by Dr. Koplik, Mr. Nellhaus explained that the test would be required for any student who has had that course work. Mr. Silver expressed concern that if world history is an elective in a school, students who take it may not be a representative sample since not all students would choose world history as their elective. Mr. Nellhaus said that if that was a concern, the form for the principals could ask them to indicate if the classes were required or elected.

Mr. Peyser asked whether they should specify that a student has to have had the subject for one full year and Mr. Nellhaus answered in the affirmative. After Dr. Driscoll read a proposed motion, Dr. Delattre said that the course names should be listed in the motion to be clear. Mr. Nellhaus said that they could include a list of specific course names in the letter to the principals. The Board then discussed whether the test should be given to those who had relevant courses in 9th grade, in 10th grade, or in both 9th and 10th grades. Mr. Irwin said that it should be given to those who had world history in ninth or tenth grade. Dr. Silber said that since the History/ Social Science curriculum framework is based on a two-year sequence, they should test those students who had the courses in tenth grade or in both ninth and tenth grade. Mr. Silver suggested placing a survey in the beginning of the test for students to indicate when they took the course(s). Mr. Nellhaus explained that the test booklets have already been printed and that is not a viable option.

Dr. Delattre explained that they are trying to safeguard those schools that now teach U.S. history in grade 10. Mr. Irwin said he feels strongly that students who have world history in grade 9 or 10 should be tested. He said that when the Board discussed the framework, they agreed to allow schools to teach world history in grade 9 if that worked best for them and therefore those students should be tested. Dr. Silber said that the level playing field is not jeopardized by testing students who have had the subject in grade 9 or 10. He explained that the test is for diagnostic purposes and does not have so-called high stakes associated with it. He warned against not including students who had the course in grade 9, stating that students should be expected to know in grade 10 what they learned in grade 9.

Dr. Thernstrom asked whether history is more likely to be an elective in grade 10 than in grade 9, and if that is a factor in the representative sample. Mr. Silver responded that it really depends on the school, and grade 10 history is not necessarily more likely to be an elective.

Mr. Nellhaus said that all these unanswered questions illustrate the reason the Commissioner originally proposed that the Board delay the test for one year. He said the framework is based on a two-year sequence of world history and therefore so is the test. He said that by 1999, all 10th grade students will have had at least some world history and the Board would still be on schedule to implement the high stakes test as planned. Dr. Thernstrom responded that she sees no reason to delay testing students who have had world history. She said that nobody could claim it is unfair if the students have had the course.

On a motion duly made and seconded, it was

VOTED: that the Board of Education postpone until the Spring of 1999 the question try-out for the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System in History and Social Science for grade 4; and administer the grade 10 question try-out to students who have studied World History, Western Civilization or a similar course in grade ten or in grades nine and ten.

The motion was made by Dr. Schaefer and seconded by Mr. Irwin. The vote was unanimous.

3. Charter Schools - Discussion And Vote

Commissioner Haydu stated that after numerous evaluations and reviews of applications from various schools, only the Champion Horace Mann Charter School of Brockton is being recommended to receive a charter. Mr. Haydu said he and the reviewers were impressed with the school's leadership and alternative education program. He said he hopes the school will be able to serve 75 - 100 students in its first year of operation. Mr. Haydu also reported his dismay with the Northbridge Classical Charter School group, stating that they tape-recorded their meeting with him and others without his knowledge.

Commissioner Haydu invited Associate Commissioner Scott Hamilton to join in the Board's discussion on charter schools. Mr. Hamilton said he first wanted to note a correction for the record: Materials that the Department previously provided to the Board incorrectly listed Representative Christine Canavan as an opponent of the Champion Horace Mann Charter School of Brockton. He said the Representative was in fact a faithful supporter of that application, and that she had contacted the Department to express her support. Representative Canavan sent a letter to the Department in opposition to another charter school application, the Commonwealth charter application for Foxborough.

Mr. Hamilton stated that only applications that are fully developed and articulated, with a clear, sound educational program that is ready to go, are being recommended for charters. He said that the review committee was very impressed with the Charter High School for Media's founder but that they still questioned the value of using media project-based learning as a model. Mr. Hamilton said they also had concerns about the clarity and coherence of the Andover Classical Charter School's proposal.

In response to the statement presented earlier by the Northbridge Classical Charter School, Mr. Hamilton commented: I have been called many things, but never a modernist. The word curriculum, of course, is Latin. It literally means path or course. It is not a destination. I think Plato, Aristotle and others would take issue with anyone who suggested that a path was a destination; in fact, it seems to me utterly modernist to suggest that the process, or the path, is a destination itself. With this kind of application, we were interested in knowing what the objective was. He went to say that he and the Commissioner as well as the review committee had concluded that the school did not meet the standards to be recommended for a charter.

Dr. Thernstrom stated that next year, the schools that did not receive a charter in 1998 can reapply. Mr. Hamilton also informed the Board that five Commonwealth charters and eight Horace Mann charters are available to be awarded next year.

On a motion duly made and seconded, it was

VOTED: that the Board of Education in accordance with General Laws Chapter 71, Section 89, and 603 CMR 1.00, and subject to the conditions set forth below, hereby grants a charter to the following school as recommended by the Commissioner: the Champion Horace Mann Charter School, Brockton.

[Add The Rest Of The Charter School Motion Here]

The motion was made by Ms. Crutchfield and seconded by Dr. Thernstrom. The vote was unanimous.

4. Student Learning Time Regulations - Discussion And Vote

Commissioner Haydu invited General Counsel Rhoda Schneider and Associate Commissioner Carole Thomson of the Department to lead the discussion on the Student Learning Time Regulations. Ms. Schneider reported that in January 1998 the Board authorized the Department to seek public comment on a proposed amendment to the regulations to clarify the definition of core subjects. Ms. Schneider stated that after review of the many comments that were received, it became apparent that the proposed amendment could and should be clarified.

Ms. Schneider said the revised amendment to the regulations tracks precisely the definition of core academic subjects in Chapter 69, section 1D. She explained that the amendment clarifies that other subjects that also count towards Student Learning Time are those that are required to be taught pursuant to state law (specifically Chapter 71, sections 1 and 3), and other subjects that are approved by the school committee as part of the district's program of studies. She said the revised amendment will increase awareness among school officials and others as to what courses are required by state law. Specifically, the amendments affirm that within the context of the applicable statutes and regulations and the state curriculum frameworks, school committees are, as they always were, responsible for deciding what courses will be offered and at what grades they are offered.

On a motion duly made and seconded, it was

VOTED: that the Board of Education, having solicited and reviewed public comment in accordance with the Administrative Procedure Act, G.L. c. 30A, § 3, hereby amend the Student Learning Time Regulations, 603 CMR 27.00, by deleting from § 27.02 the definition of "core subjects," and inserting in place thereof the following two definitions: Core subjects shall mean the core academic subjects specified in G.L. c. 69, section 1D (mathematics, science and technology, history and social science, English, foreign languages and the arts), and the subjects covered in courses which are part of an approved vocational-technical education program under G.L. c. 74.

Other subjects shall mean subjects other than core academic subjects that are required to be taught pursuant to G.L. c. 71, sections 1 and 3, and other subjects approved by the school committee as part of the district's program of studies.

Further, that the Board make corresponding editorial changes in three other sections of the Student Learning Time Regulations, to be consistent with the amendment to 603 CMR § 27.02, as follows:

603 CMR § 27.01 is hereby amended by deleting subsection (2) and inserting in place thereof the following :

27.01 (2) The purpose of 603 CMR 27.00 is to ensure that every public school in the Commonwealth provides its students with the structured learning time needed to enable the student to achieve competency in "core subjects" and "other subjects" as defined in 603 CMR 27.02.

603 CMR § 27.02 is hereby further amended by deleting the words "core academic or other core subjects" in the definition of "optional school programs" and inserting in place thereof the words: " 'core subjects' or 'other subjects' ."

603 CMR § 27.02 is hereby further amended by deleting the words "core subjects" in the definition of "structured learning time" and inserting in place thereof the words: "'core subjects' and 'other subjects' ."

The motion was made by Mr. Irwin and seconded by Ms. Crutchfield. The vote was unanimous.

5. Lawrence Agreement - Progress Report

Deputy Commissioner Driscoll updated the Board on the progress in Lawrence. Dr. Driscoll reported that 25 candidates had applied for the Lawrence superintendency, out of which 9 were selected by NESDEC and the screening committee to be interviewed. Dr. Driscoll informed the Board that once the screening committee selects finalists, their background will be presented to the Board and to the Lawrence School Committee, and the finalists will visit Lawrence. Dr. Driscoll said that under the Lawrence agreement, the Board, the School Committee and the Commissioner are to confer and agree upon a candidate for appointment. He said he and Commissioner Haydu will be interviewing the finalists. The new superintendent should be ready to assume responsibility by July 1, 1998.

6. Approval Of Grants - Vote

Commissioner Haydu recommended that the Board approve 8 grants under Workplace Education and 2 grants under the Adult Basic Education Mentoring Project. Regarding the Workplace Education grants, Mr. Peyser suggested that the list of objectives should also include the development of performance measures to determine whether workplace education programs deliver the intended results, instead of only citing the needs or the outcomes that we expect.

On a motion duly made and seconded, it was

VOTED: that the Board of Education approve the grants as listed.

The motion was made by Mr. Irwin and seconded by Ms. Crutchfield. The vote was unanimous.

7. Mailbag

Chairman Silber recommended that the letter to the Massachusetts Board of Education concerning "school reform myths and misunderstandings" be placed on the Department's website. The Commissioner agreed.

Other Business

Commissioner Haydu distributed to the Board a revised organizational chart for the Department of Education. Chairman Silber noted that the organizational structure of the Department is an administrative decision for the Commissioner to make, and this is being provided simply for the Board's information. Mr. Haydu said the revised organizational chart will enable the Department to work effectively during this transition period. Deputy Commissioner Driscoll thanked the members of the Department's senior staff for their recommendations and said this re-organization of the Department will work very well.

Board members discussed dates for meetings of the Board in May and June.

At 10:55 a.m., on roll call vote, the Board voted unanimously to go into executive session to discuss matters pertaining to the Commissioner's salary. The Board returned to open session at 10:58 a.m.

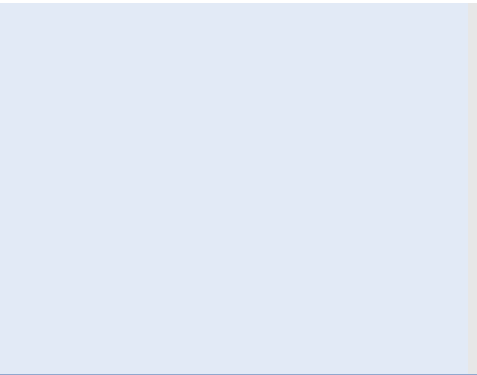
Once in open session, the Chairman reported that the Board unanimously agreed to set the annual salary of Frank W. Haydu III, Interim Commissioner, at \$140,000, the same amount that his predecessor received.

On a motion duly made and seconded, it was

VOTED: that the Board of Education adjourn the meeting at 10:58 a.m., subject to the call of the Chairman.

The motion was made by Dr. Koplik and seconded by Mr. Irwin. The vote was unanimous.

Respectfully submitted,



Frank W. Haydu III
Secretary to the Board

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