

**EASTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS
EASTON, MA**

Minutes of School Committee meeting, February 11, 2009, Moreau Hall Library, convened at 6:05 p.m. Present: Caroline O’Neil, Dawn Boynton, Dr. William Braun, Jane Martin, Rebecca Turley, Dr. Michael Green and Dr. William Simmons.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION:

None.

MINUTES:

On a motion by Mrs. Martin, seconded by Dr. Braun, and with a 4 votes in favor and one abstention, the Minutes of 1/8/09 were approved.

On a motion by Mrs. Martin, seconded by Dr. Braun, and with a 5-0 vote, the Workshop Minutes of 1/22/09 were approved.

**OLD BUSINESS:
Schedule of Payments:**

Circulated for signatures.

Municipal Building Committee Update:

Dr. Green reported that all areas are substantially complete at both the high school and middle school.

At the High School, work continues on the monetized punch list. Significant progress had been made. Dr. Green mentioned that during the next week, which is winter break, the contractor has several of the subcontractors coming in to complete work.

At the Middle School, there are only a few items remaining on the punch list that need to be addressed.

Update on the Superintendent’s Search Process:

Chair O’Neill reported that 23 applications had been received for the Superintendent Search. The consultant, Dr. James Walsh of NESDEC, screened all the applications and provided 9 candidates to be interviewed. Chair O’Neill stated that initial screening of the applicants is held in close session.

OLD BUSINESS(continued):

Update on the Superintendent's Search Process(continued):

Interviews took place last Friday and Monday and will continue on this Friday. The Committee will then announce the names of 3 to 5 finalists, who will be interviewed in Open Session. Those meeting dates will be identified and posted. From that point, site visits will be made and then the final selection will be made by the School Committee.

Update on the Stadium and Fields Project:

Dr. Green stated that, as he had mentioned at the January meeting, the work on the stadium had stopped in late December due to the weather. Because of the break in the weather, Dr. Green received word that the contractor is working on trucking the remainder of unscreened topsoil from the field area. The next phase will be the installation of sub grade surface drainage as soon as the frost breaks.

NEW BUSINESS:

Retirements:

None.

Resignations:

None.

Appointments:

None.

Placement Recommendations for Grade 2 Students

Entering FLO/HHR:

Chair O'Neill stated that the School Committee had voted several months ago to research a non-geographic placement process for students going from grade 2 to grade 3. A committee was formed consisting of Mike Green, Allen Duarte and the five elementary principals. A substantial amount of information was received from parents and staff as a result of a survey that was conducted. The Chair spoke of the public informational meeting that was recently held in which a very comprehensive presentation was made by Mike with the support and assistance of Allen and the five principals.

**Placement Recommendations for Grade 2 Students
Entering FLO/HHR(continued):**

Dr. Green reported that after careful review of the information received, brainstorming, and thoughtful discussions, the Administrative Team recommends the following:

1. Recommendation for approval of a non-geographic placement process
2. Implementation to be phased in during the 2009-2010 school year
3. Planning to begin immediately to include progress updates and an Implementation plan to be presented to the School Committee in November, 2009

Chair O'Neill commented that many questions were received from interested parents at the forums.

One parent in the audience wanted consideration to be given to those grade 2 students entering grade 3 for the upcoming 2009-2010 school year.

Another parent asked if there would be parent involvement in the implementation process.

Chair O'Neill responded that the principals' group solicited information and every parent received the questionnaire. She added that the School Committee will vote on this plan tonight, unsure of a formal role of parents but open to new ideas.

Dr. Green inserted that there is no formal process in place to involve parents in the next stage but concurred with Chair O'Neill that parents could certainly share their thoughts. He stated that there will be no further surveys or discussion.

**Placement Recommendations for Grade 2 Students
Entering FLO/HHR(continued):**

The Chair asked for the Committee to entertain a motion to approve the non-geographically based Grade 2 to Grade 3 placement process developed by the Elementary Principals' Working Group. The new placement process shall include, but shall not be limited to, the following components:

1. A phase-in, with a planning period beginning February 12, 2009, and continuing through the summer of 2010, with full implementation at the start of the 2010-2011 academic year;
2. Extensive collaboration between Grade 2 and Grade 3 teachers across all five elementary schools, for the purpose of familiarizing them with each others' teaching styles and strategies;
3. Review by Richardson and Olmsted psychologists of all Individual Education Plans for Grade 2 students, for the purpose of increasing placement options for those students when they enter 3rd grade;
4. Pre-placement of students receiving support services;
5. Parent requests for placement of entering 3rd graders in the same school as 4th or 5th grade siblings to be honored;
6. Coordination by staff, PACs, and School Councils of multiple joint activities and events for Olmsted-Richardson students and parents during the planning period and thereafter;
7. Development, during the planning period, of an effective bus drop-off procedure;
8. Revision of criteria for student placement , as needed;
9. Revision of written placement materials for parents, as needed;
10. Periodic progress reports to be provided to the School Committee by the Elementary Principals' Working Group, with the first such report to occur no later than early November, 2009.

Mrs. Martin made the motion which was seconded by Dr. Braun and opened up for Committee discussion.

Vice Chair Boynton expressed her appreciation and the tremendous respect she has for the principals and administrators who have worked on this task. She commented on the sincere desire that the School Committee has to improve our school system. Vice Chair Boynton is confident that our students will continue to thrive regardless of placement option.

**Placement Recommendations for Grade 2 Students
Entering FLO/HHR(continued):**

Vice Chair Boynton believes adjusting the district line to ensure a balance in the number of students in the two schools and offer flexibility for those families who live on the district line will address the issue of fairness and equity. She stated that she is not in favor of the non-geographic placement. Even with the inequities between the two schools, these students are well prepared for middle school, which results in this unnecessary major initiative. She did not see significant advantages which were identified at the Public Forum, i.e. enhance students emotionally and socially. Having a classroom with a student from the other side of Easton will not enhance their development any more than with a child from down the street. It was also identified that non-geographic placement would allow for optimal placement. She went on to say that the majority of special education and remedial reading students are not indentified until grades 3, 4 and 5, therefore optimizing placement after 2nd grade does not ensure equity resources for the next three years. As was just articulated, Vice Chair Boynton reiterated that the implementation process is complex and time consuming.

In closing, Vice Chair Boynton expressed that our focus as a Committee should be elsewhere. In her opinion, our district's time and resources should be focused on minimizing the effect of the fiscal crisis that is unfolding before us. She quoted our town administrator who described the economic climate as "the likes of which have not been experienced since the Great Depression of the 1930's". The fiscal changes for next year and possibly the following year should be the center of our attention. Adjusting the district line is less invasive, simpler to implement, effective in achieving fairness and balance, and will not monopolize valuable time and resources.

Dr. Braun expressed his appreciation for all the time given to this project. He has listened to it all and does not feel this would inhibit the learning of a student. He is fully supportive of the recommendations presently on the table.

Mrs. Turley thanked Dr. Green, Mr. Duarte and the Elementary Principals for all their work in developing the recommendations described earlier. She feels non-geographic placement is the best for the students, i.e. educationally and social ability. Mrs. Turley supports the change to the new process of non-geographic placement for grade 2 to grade 3 students.

Placement Recommendations for Grade 2 Students

Entering FLO/HHR(continued):

After Mrs. Martin made the original motion, which was seconded by Dr. Braun, the Committee voted 4-1 in favor with Vice Chair Boynton in opposition of approving the non-geographic based Grade 2 to Grade 3 placement process as defined in the 10 components outlined herein.

Drama Club Trip Request:

Mrs. Martin read the letter submitted by Ben Karol, Advisor of the OAHS Drama Club, to request permission to take the Drama Club to New York City to see the *Phantom of the Opera* on Broadway. This is a one-day trip, April 11th, and, in addition, the students will have an opportunity to partake in an audition skills course at the Times Square rehearsal studio taught by professional actors. The advisor commented in his letter that this is a wonderful opportunity for students interested in dramatic arts to experience a professional production.

Dr. Simmons commented that this is not a new trip for the Drama Club.

On a motion by Mrs. Martin, seconded by Dr. Braun, and with a 5-0 vote, the Committee approved the Drama Club Trip to New York City on April 11th.

School Committee Meeting Dates:

Dr. Simmons included this as an agenda item, as the Committee had expressed changing a couple of meetings to Wednesday nights to accommodate one member of the Board.

The Committee discussed changing the March 5th meeting to Wednesday, March 11th, and to change the April 2nd meeting to Wednesday, April 1st.

Dr. Simmons said these dates will work as he will have more detail and information on the budget to report.

On a motion by Mrs. Martin, seconded by Vice Chair Boynton, and with a 5-0 vote, the Committee approved changing the March 5th to March 11th and April 2nd to April 1st.

ADMINISTRATIVE REPORTS:

2009-2010 Preliminary Budget Discussion:

Dr. Simmons stated that at the School Committee Workshop on January 22, he outlined some of the variables that are on the table relative to the development of next year's budget. He also indicated that we were waiting at that time for the public release of the Governor's proposed budget for next year and his State Aid cuts next year for each city and town.

This past Monday, at the meeting of the Board of Selectmen, Dr. Simmons said David Colton, Town Administrator, outlined the budget deficit currently anticipated for next year. Mr. Colton also detailed some of the avenues that he would be exploring on the Municipal side to help close the budget deficit.

Relative to the school system budget as part of the total town budget for next year, Dr. Simmons conveyed that they have identified at this very early stage a 3% increase request, which would still necessitate the elimination of at least a half dozen positions from our current operating budget. As we reduce our budget from this 3% request, he announced that additional positions will be vulnerable. However, differently from the Municipal Side, Dr. Simmons pointed out that we have a number of factors not yet decided that will directly impact our own ability to close the budget deficit. The four factors are as follows:

- 1) Whereas the town has contracts with its various unions that have negotiated increases for next year, 2009-2010, all six of our unions have contracts that expire at the end of this school year, or in August. Therefore, the Superintendent will begin contract negotiations in March with the largest of our unions, the teachers' union, for a successor agreement that would begin in September.
- 2) As in the past, Dr. Simmons will attempt to cover certain position eliminations through attrition, namely retirements. As of the present, it does not appear that we will have enough retirements to cover the anticipated budget gap. As a result, the Superintendent will be working with the principals to identify other situations or positions that can help close the budget gap.

ADMINISTRATIVE REPORTS:

2009-2010 Preliminary Budget Discussion(continued):

3. All expense budgets will either be level funded or slightly reduced for next year. The only exception to this will be the Transportation budget which Dr. Green will present the low bid recommendation to the Committee at its March meeting. Having a firm number in March will greatly help in the budget planning.

4. Finally, over the next couple of weeks we will receive word about any assistance that will be provided to local school systems through the President's Stimulus Bill package. Dr. Simmons added that the preliminary numbers from the House were encouraging. Any monies that is received by the school department could help to reduce the number of position reductions for next year.

In closing, Dr. Simmons said there will be a further, detailed update at the March and April School Committee meetings, as more answers are received for some of the questions that he has articulated. He asked the members if they had any questions tonight relative to this overview.

Chair O'Neill commented that there is so much coverage about the gloomy picture that everyone faces. She doesn't feel as optimistic.

Dr. Simmons said we need to move forward because of the School Councils needing this information. He said there are still many questions that need to be answered. Dr. Simmons remarked that the Town is in a unique position. The Superintendent and the Town Administrator speak frequently, and the Budget Sub-Committee works together on problem solving.

Unanticipated Expenses:

Dr. Simmons reported that the budgets have been frozen and that we are in appropriate shape budget wise.

SUPERINTENDENT'S NOTES:

None.

SCHOOL COMMITTEE ISSUES:

None.

EXECUTIVE SESSION:

On a motion by Mrs. Martin, seconded by Dr. Braun, and with a 5-0 vote, the Committee entered into Executive Session at 7:45 p.m. for the purpose of reviewing the Minutes of 1/8/09 and to discuss contract negotiations through collective bargaining.

OPEN SESSION:

The Committee returned to Open Session at 7:50 p.m.

EXECUTIVE SESSION MINUTES:

On a motion by Dr. Braun, seconded by Mrs. Martin, and with a 5-0 vote, the Committee approved the Executive Session Minutes of 1/8/09.

ADJOURNMENT:

On a motion by Mrs. Martin, seconded by Dr. Braun, and with all members in agreement, the meeting was adjourned at 7:52 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

William J. Simmons, Ed.D., J.D.
Recording Secretary