

BROOKLINE SCHOOL BOARD
MARCH 29, 2023
MEETING MINUTES

A regular meeting of the Brookline School Board was conducted on Wednesday, March 29, 2023 at 5:30 p.m. at the Richard Maghakian Memorial School.

Kenneth Haag, Chairman, presided:

Members of the Board Present: Colleen Micavich
 Kelly Zakar
 Alyson Manion, Board Member-Elect
 Tracy Perry, Board Member-Elect

Members of the Board Absent:

Also in Attendance: Andrew Corey, Superintendent
 Gina Bergskaug, Asst. Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction
 Daniel Molinari, Principal, Richard Maghakian Memorial School
 Patricia Bouley, Principal, Captain Samuel Douglass Academy

Chairman Haag spoke of the various Board positions for which elections would be conducted at the next meeting as well as the committees/sub-committees Board members would be appointed to. Members were asked to consider those which they have an interest in serving on and to make those interests known.

Brookline School District Policy Committee
 Brookline Finance Committee
 Teacher Luncheon
 SAU41 Governing Board Policy Committee
 SAU41 Governing Board Budget Committee
 Superintendent Performance Evaluation Committee (SPEC)
 Signers of Manifests

NON-PUBLIC SESSION

MOTION BY MEMBER HAAG THAT THE BOARD, BY ROLL CALL, GO INTO NON-PUBLIC SESSION PURSUANT TO RSA 91-A:3, II (a) THE DISMISSAL, PROMOTION OR COMPENSATION OF ANY PUBLIC EMPLOYEE AND RSA 91-A:3, II (c) TO DISCUSS A MATTER, WHICH IF DISCUSSED IN PUBLIC, WOULD LIKELY AFFECT ADVERSELY THE REPUTATION OF A PERSON, OTHER THAN A MEMBER OF THE BODY OR AGENCY ITSELF
MOTION SECONDED BY MEMBER ZAKAR

A Viva Voce Roll Call was conducted, which resulted as follows:

Yea: Colleen Micavich, Kelly Zakar, Kenneth Haag	3
Nay:	0

MOTION CARRIED

*The Board went into non-public session at 5:35 p.m.
The Board came out of non-public session at 6:05 p.m.*

AGENDA ADJUSTMENTS

Superintendent Corey recommended, in addition to the election of officers and committee appointments, that Board action on policies BCA and DFA be postponed until the April 19, 2023 meeting when the full contingent of the Board is able to participate.

There being no objection, the items were postponed as recommended.

CORRESPONDENCE / RESIGNATIONS / RETIREMENTS / NOMINATIONS

Superintendent Corey informed the Board of receipt of a Letter of Intent to Retire from Lauren Arruda. In her letter, she states “After much thought and deliberation, I will be retiring from teaching. The reason for taking this year off was due to a family situation. I have decided to continue to support my family even though I will greatly miss teaching. My teaching experience at RMMS has been rewarding and gratifying. Over the 24 years that I have been teaching at RMMS, I have been able to watch the kindergarten program grow and change to meet the needs of the community. It has been a pleasure to be part of the RMMS staff.”

**MOTION BY MEMBER ZAKAR TO ACCEPT, WITH REGRET, THE LETTER OF INTENT TO RETIRE RECEIVED FROM LAUREN ARRUDA WITH AN EFFECTIVE DATE OF JUNE 30, 2023
MOTION SECONDED BY MEMBER MICAVICH**

ON THE QUESTION

Chairman Haag expressed gratitude for her years of service to the students of Brookline and community-at-large.

MOTION CARRIED

3-0-0

Superintendent Corey noted the district would welcome Jonathan Verity to the District next Monday. Jonathan comes to the District from SAU39. He will take over as the Special Education Administrator for the Brookline School District. He has his Advanced Degree in Educational Leadership from Plymouth State University, Master of Education in General Special Education from Southern New Hampshire University, and Bachelor of Arts in Psychology from the University of New Hampshire. The SAU is very excited to bring him on board.

PUBLIC INPUT

Chairman Haag noted language captured in Policy BEDH – Public Participation at Board Meetings: The Board will provide a maximum of thirty minutes to hear public comments from residents at the beginning of each regular Board meeting. This period may be extended by a majority vote of the Board. Individual speakers will be allotted three minutes per person. Speakers may not relinquish allotted time to another speaker. The Chair will recognize speakers on a first come basis. Speakers shall identify themselves and their home address clearly for the record. Except as otherwise provided in this policy, members of the public may offer comments on agenda items.

Kacie Petrin-Ellis, 7 Smith Road

Earlier this month she received a call from the Captain Samuel Douglass Academy (CSDA) regarding a deeply concerning incident targeting one of her children. As a mother of biracial children she knew the day would come when they would experience racism firsthand but had not anticipated it would occur in elementary school.

She spoke of being grateful to have learned that the incident was not only witnessed but also firsthand accounts were reported to an adult. As she received more details, she learned of the widespread use of the N word by upper elementary students at CSDA. This is a word that should never be used and certainly not in the presence of children.

Three families have come forward to share that their children had also been present when other students have used the N word at school and on the bus. She has also learned that bullying, in general, has increased significantly at CSDA and become more problematic and trending issues of our teachers, staff, and administrators to deal with.

She finds it extremely troublesome that there are a number of children that do not feel safe speaking up to report this behavior. She believes it important for parents to be made aware of these issues including the steps taken in school to address them; those which are not considered private and specific to individual(s).

We need to empower the students, teachers, and administration to fully challenge bullying and racism when it occurs or the message that gets sent to the offenders that it is not condoned.

She pleaded with fellow parents to talk to their children to stress that they must, at the very least, be kind not cruel or offensive.

She believes, together, parents, teachers, administrators along with the School Board and SAU can partner to ensure everyone, especially the students, feel safe, welcomed and valued in Brookline and Hollis because issues that start in early elementary school often follow the offenders and their targets into middle and high school.

She questioned how CSDA and ultimately the SAU will be addressing these issues. Every student deserves to feel safe and included at school.

Katherine Leavitt, 2 Birch Hill Road

Spoke of having reviewed the SAU website earlier in the evening and the inability to locate policies or procedures concerning hate speech and racial slurs at school. She did find the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Committee page, which reads "In progress".

The fourth line of the Mission and Vision statement reads: "The staff, services, and culture enhance student self-esteem and employ a variety of strategies to meet the academic, social, emotional, and safety needs of all students."

Every time we lose a student to death by suicide because of bullying and discrimination, every time a student drops out of school because of bullying and discrimination, every time a parent pulls their child from our school and enrolls them elsewhere, we are failing to meet the mission and vision values. Our silence implies consent, our failure to condemn racism and bigotry on our campuses ultimately condones it.

There is no such thing as “It was just a joke” in these situations. We are no longer allowed to ignore this in the hope that it will go away. We are no longer allowed to pretend there is no racism in Brookline. Students bring to school the family values they are raised with and repeat the racial slurs and hate speech they hear at home.

She implored school administrators, Board members, and community members to do better and asked administrators and Board members to demonstrate their commitment to the Mission and Vision; demonstrate loud and clear the commitment to ensuring strategies meet the needs of the students.

Chairman Haag thanked the speakers for their input. He noted the Policy Committee would be formed at the next meeting and suggested this topic would be discussed as part of policy moving forward.

Member Micavich remarked she believes there to be an issue that needs to be addressed. The roadmap for addressing this is really social emotional learning to start with and DEI. We cannot be afraid of people who are coming at this through bigoted views. We have to help our students.

Member Zakar thanked the speakers for coming forward. She commented on a student who spoke to the Board at a recent meeting concerning what was referred to as being dress coded. Her perception of that student’s testimony was that they did not feel safe at school. In addition to policy, it gives us pause that we need to look at the Superintendent’s DEI Task Force and see where we are going with that. The Board has made moves to look at a climate survey for faculty and staff in our buildings. We need to figure out a way to identify how our students are feeling. Last year there were parents who came forward with concerns over bullying. She is concerned our students are not feeling safe and if they are not feeling safe at school, they will not be open to learning. She is hopeful that the Board can identify actionable ways to identify what is occurring in the schools and to address any areas of concern.

Member Micavich added we are starting to use data more in non-academic settings with the climate survey for teachers. Given what she has heard as a mother and what others have shared, some students do not feel safe. We need to determine how many there are and how large of a problem there is. She would like to see a student survey (with parental permission). She has learned of parents of students attending a doctor appointment where the student is filling out a survey and indicating they do not feel safe. It is nobody’s fault. It is a societal issue, but it has to be addressed.

Member-Elect Manion commented on the desire to ensure the Board looks at how students feel in terms of reporting issues. There should be multiple means for students to report issues/concerns so that there is a comfortable way for each student to do so. Those mechanism may become known through a student survey.

Chairman Haag stated agreement with the comments made by his colleagues noting a lot of the ideas expressed strike him as policy related. The Choose Love campaign is one that can continue to be utilized. The DEI committee work can continue to be utilized. There is also the Curriculum Coordinator position that can now be put in place, which will help with these efforts. There are steps ahead. They will not be immediate, but brainstorming and hearing community feedback is extremely valuable.

DELIBERATIONS

- To see what action the Board will take regarding the teacher nomination list recommended by the Superintendent

**MOTION BY MEMBER HAAG TO ACCEPT THE SUPERINTENDENT'S RECOMMENDATION
FOR TEACHER NOMINATIONS, AS PRESENTED
MOTION SECONDED BY MEMBER ZAKAR
MOTION CARRIED
3-0-0**

INFORMATIONAL

- Fiscal 2023 Revenue and Expense Update

Significant progress is being made in a positive direction. As of 3-13-23, the Unreserved Fund Balance (UFB) is \$53,091. That was a negative number when reported in December. The district utilizes an encumbrance system of accounting; as money frees up month to month (is not expended as anticipated), there is the expectation the UFB will increase.

At the next regularly schedule meeting, discussions will occur around ADA compliance projects that have been completed as well as special education expenses and whether the desire is to look to either of those trust funds to address balances.

The voter approved amount that will be funded through the UFB is \$55,000. The fire alarm system was taxpayer funded. The Retained Fund Balance needs to be funded; however, it has been funded and not utilized so from a mathematical standpoint, it is a wash. In August of each year the Board is asked to approve a retained fund balance.

- 2023-2024 Draft School Calendar

Assistant Superintendent Bergskaug stated the draft calendar is similar to those of prior years with teachers returning the Monday prior to Labor Day and students the Thursday prior to Labor Day (August 31st). October 9th is the Columbus Day holiday. The calendar includes four (4) early release dates (utilized for professional development). The October 5th early release day includes Suicide Prevention Planning, which is mandatory for all staff. October 9th is Columbus Day. November 1st is a professional development day and the 10th Veterans Day. An early release is scheduled for November 21st leading into the Thanksgiving holiday November 22nd through the 24th. The December holiday is the 25th through January 1st. January has Martin Luther King Jr. Day on the 15th and an early release on the 29th.

Noted was that the budget includes literacy and math training. There will be very intensive math instructional training and literacy pieces (intensive literacy training in the following year) during professional development days. The early release dates were scheduled early in the year so that these efforts can be frontloaded, and student data reviewed along the way.

February has an early release on the 7th and winter vacation from the 26th through March 1st. March has a professional day on the 12th (voting day). April vacation is the 22nd through the 26th. Memorial Day is May 27th.

The last day for preschool is June 6th and the last day for students June 18th (includes 5 snow days). June 19th is the last day for teachers.

Member Zakar spoke of being pleased that March 12th is a full day off having heard from parents who were concerned with sending their children to school on voting day. She spoke with the Supervisor of the Checklist in Brookline. The other election day that will fall in the school year calendar will likely be in January or February (Presidential Primary). The DNC has stated New Hampshire cannot be first in the nation and the RNC has stated it will be. A date is not yet known. She feels strongly that school should not be in session on voting day or that voting not occur in the schools. She questioned if the date(s) could be considered snow dates, etc.

Member-Elect Manion expressed agreement with the concerns stated. She spoke of the culture in the nation at this moment and the need to do everything possible to be proactive in securing the safety of our students.

Assistant Superintendent Bergskaug responded this topic is one that is always discussed. She continues to request the March date and to receive pushback from the other two districts as that is not a concern for them. She continues to bring it forward, and we try to compromise every year. If looking to make a suggestion to move voting, especially for a relatively smaller election, that is where the conversation needs to start as it is really about the location and what can manage voting.

Chairman Haag stated agreement and spoke of being hopeful that the March 12th professional development date can be held this year. Last year it was the Lawrence Barn that drove that. It is nice to get ahead of the schedule now before it is voted on in the other two districts. In the past there has been talk of using the convention center. That could be looked at again. One of the concerns that was raised was handicap accessibility.

Member Zakar questioned if there has ever been discussion of the safety complex in Brookline. Chairman Haag responded that is new and another option that could be considered.

Assistant Superintendent Bergskaug remarked the concern they have responded to in the past is parking. She reminded the Board that it is the Town that makes the decision on where voting occurs. The more conversations that can be brought to the Town the better.

Member Micavich commented she is hopeful the last day does not end up being June 19th (Juneteenth). Assistant Superintendent Bergskaug commented although that is a holiday, not all holidays are days off. For our full-year staff, Juneteenth was observed on an alternate date to support the financial aspect of the day off.

Superintendent Corey stated he would reach out to the Town as well as the Teachers' Union. He understands the concerns cited, and although not a huge fan of a remote day, if that gave people piece of mind it might be something that could be considered particularly if able to be included on the calendar well in advance. He is hopeful updates can be available for Board consideration at the next meeting.

Member-Elect Perry thanked those who provided public input. She is aware DEI topics, anti-racism topics, and anti-bullying topics are really difficult for adults to discuss in open and honest ways. She cannot imagine that it is easy for children to do that. It is important to lead by example. She questioned if Board members, administrators, and teachers can receive training so that they can speak open and honestly about what is occurring.

ADJOURNMENT

**MOTION BY MEMBER HAAG TO ADJOURN
MOTION SECONDED BY MEMBER ZAKAR
MOTION CARRIED
3-0-0**

The March 29, 2023 meeting of the Brookline School Board was adjourned at 6:40 p.m.

Date _____ Signed _____