

Salem School Committee
Meeting Minutes
Monday, February 26, 2018

A regular meeting of the Salem School Committee was held on Monday, February 26, 2018 at 7:04 p.m. in the School Committee Chambers at Collins Middle School, 29 Highland Avenue, Salem, MA.

Members Present: Ms. Mary Manning, Mr. James Fleming, Ms. Kristine Wilson, Ms. Ana Nuncio, Mr. Manny Cruz, Ms. Amanda Campbell, and Mayor Kimberley Driscoll

Members Absent: None

Others Present: Margarita Ruiz, Superintendent, Kate Carbone, Assistant Superintendent for Teaching and Learning, Margaret Marotta, Assistant Superintendent for Pupil Personnel Services, Kristin Shaver, Business Manager, Jill Conrad, Chief of Systems Strategy, and Kelley Rice, Chief of Communications

Call to Order

Mayor Driscoll called the regular meeting of the Salem School Committee to order at 7:04 p.m.

Approval of the Agenda

Mr. Fleming moved to approve the Agenda as presented. Ms. Manning seconded the motion. The Motion carried.

Approval of Minutes

Deliberation and Vote on the Minutes of the Regular School Committee Meeting Held February 5, 2018

Ms. Nuncio motioned to approve the Minutes of the Regular School Committee meeting held on February 5, 2018. Ms. Wilson seconded the Motion. The Motion carried.

Deliberation and Vote on the Minutes of the School Committee Meeting and Public Hearing Held February 12, 2018

Discussion

Ms. Nuncio notified of minor corrections that need be made.

Ms. Campbell motioned to approve the Minutes of the Special School Committee meeting and Public Hearing held on February 12, 2018, as amended. Ms. Wilson seconded the Motion. The Motion carried.

Deliberation and Vote on the Minutes of the Committee of the Whole (COW) Meeting Held February 12, 2018

Discussion

Mayor Driscoll asked to table the Minutes of the Committee of the Whole (COW) meeting to allow additional time to review.

Mr. Fleming motioned to table the Minutes of the Committee of the Whole (COW) meeting held February 12, 2018. Ms. Manning seconded the Motion. The Minutes of the Committee of the Whole (COW) meeting is tabled for March 8, 2018.

Questions and Comments From the Audience

Diana Vargas, 79 Willson Street, referred to a document that Superintendent Ruiz handed out at the last School Committee meeting and addressed specific items that was listed on the document that outlines supports that the district implemented at the Nathaniel Bowditch School as an intervention plan to turn the school around from 2015 through 2018. Ms. Vargas contrasted points that were listed as part of the new intervention plan, explained what they are, and provided details of each. Ms. Vargas concluded that the newly implemented supports listed on the Superintendent's handout were not intentional to improve the Nathaniel Bowditch School, because they were district initiative supports where every school received the same. Ms. Vargas continued that it is hard for her to believe that the list on the Superintendent's handout is a reflection of any hard work that was put into the Bowditch School to make it a better school. Ms. Vargas asked Superintendent Ruiz how did she exactly support the Nathaniel Bowditch to turn it into a successful school, how are the needs of their population exactly supported, and how is the promise to increase equity and access in all Salem Schools kept?

Ms. Vargas asked School Committee members to consider that the Superintendent's current proposal to close the Nathaniel Bowditch School would not work, gaps would widen further with time, students would get lost in the shuffle of the transition, and the plan would create additional problems for the other schools that are receiving the Bowditch School students. Ms. Vargas asked of other alternatives to the proposal they have not received an answer for and ask action be taken to explore every possibility other than the mere response that the state would otherwise have to take over. Ms. Vargas continued that she cannot help but feel there are other motives to the Superintendent's proposal; that promises have been made behind closed doors for an Early Childhood Center or other they do not know of. What are they planning to do with the additional space that would be left at the Nathaniel Bowditch School after such a transition is made and how would this be explained to the community? Ms. Vargas read a letter aloud, on behalf of Victoria Shams, on the comparison of a Superintendent versus a teacher. Victoria Shams was not able to attend this evening and asked Ms. Vargas to please read the letter for her. Victoria Shams was an intern principal and reading specialist at the Nathaniel Bowditch School.

Daniel Charis, 7 Surrey Road, Construction Project Executive, spoke on behalf of the Horace Mann Laboratory School and letter he provided School Committee members with yesterday. Mr. Charis shared his concerns on safety and infrastructure. The Horace Mann School should share the same safety standards as the other schools in the community. Mr. Charis continued that it is not about closing a school or relocating another but a safer and improved experience for the entire Salem Public School community.

Fawaz Abusharkh, 4 Harrison Road, said that the Horace Mann School deserved a new school for a very long time and shared his views as to why it was not done. Mr. Abusharkh stated that both the Nathaniel Bowditch and the Horace Mann Laboratory School could be combined but that it should be done without having to pay the high cost that comes with changing the Bowditch School name. Mr. Abusharkh said the Nathaniel Bowditch School had very good teachers before but ineffective administration and still do. Mr. Abusharkh asks the Committee to maintain equal balance by allowing all Bowditch School teachers apply for their jobs, all students be distributed, and work together to resolve the issues. Mr. Abusharkh addressed School Committee members by name and asked they please save the Nathaniel Bowditch School and refuse approval of the Superintendent's recommendation to dissolving it. Mr. Abusharkh asked School Committee members why they plan to change the name of the Nathaniel Bowditch School, which would serve as an added and unnecessary expense that comes with changing a school name.

Nadia Nieves, student, 2 Sophia Road, shared that she has not seen any positive change in support of the Nathaniel Bowditch School. There are rumors at the school that it will be closing and everyone would be separated. Ms. Nieves asked School Committee members for another alternative to closing the school.

Gabriely Payano, 12 First Street, shared that she had to explain to her younger sister of the possible change of school and separation of her friends. They have embodied their experience in each classroom and hallway where their work is displayed with much pride at the Nathaniel Bowditch School. Ms. Payano shared further positive details about the Bowditch school. She wants to graduate from there and asked School Committee members to please consider an alternative plan and not close the school.

Joseph Cambone, Dean of the School of Education at Salem State University, 41 West Newton Street, Boston, MA expressed his support for the Superintendent's recommendation. Mr. Cambone based his support in his professional experience and research. Mr. Cambone said the School of Education at Salem State University wishes to work beside the Superintendent's as they increase district capacity teaching students for whom English is a second language and will prepare new guidance counselors, adjustment councilors, and reading specialists along with them. They'll expand their work together in the area of teacher leadership. They look forward to their journey ahead together.

Anya Dokanau, 260 Washington, shared a brief history of her educational journey, views in the eyes of students, and asked School Committee members to consider the students and their needs first in their decision-making.

Mohammed, student at the Nathaniel Bowditch School, shared that it is not fair for the Nathaniel Bowditch School students to have to separate from their friends. He hopes the School Committee would rather allow the Horace Mann Laboratory School be moved into their school building, because there is much space at the Bowditch School for them.

Peggy Fucillo, 4 Cedar Hill Road, Former Teacher at the Nathaniel Bowditch School, shared that she has a hard time with what has been said, the Nathaniel Bowditch School has struggled to meet state performance standards for years due to the large percentage of Hispanic students and low-income families at the school. Ms. Fucillo said her opinion is that this speaks to the lack of resources, teacher preparation, and the impact of the biases that turn community resources, language, cultures, multiple perspectives into deficits or problems, blaming students, etc. Ms. Fucillo detailed what is lacking at the Nathaniel Bowditch School. What the Nathaniel Bowditch School needs is an experienced competent administration with appropriate and explicit learning and behavioral expectations, coupled with knowledge of the community and cultures being served, staff professional development, and immediate new staff hire to fill all the gaps. Ms. Fucillo focused on the students, their resource and on the psychological impact that the news of the Bowditch school closing has on them. They have received news as something related to their low performance that carries a negative effect. Students have withstood the many changes that have taken place at the Bowditch school and news of the school closing is not going to make it better. This will be in the student's minds and hearts. How will this be internalized? Ms. Fucillo continued by asking about the consequences to the Superintendent's proposal. Ms. Fucillo continued that she believes they owe it to their students to fully consider what the psychological impact will be and how it could be manifested. Ms. Fucillo stated that the choice is clear to her and recalled that money from the state, to end segregation, built the Collins Middle and the Nathaniel Bowditch Schools. The Superintendent's proposal is to displace all the Latino students, which would disgrace, discredit, and dishonor all that the Bowditch School has stood for. Ms. Fucillo asks why the decision is rushed and urgent, they were notified four weeks ago.

Ms. Fucillo implored, to the School Committee, "does not this decision that would impact hundreds of students and their families warrant more thought, evaluation, exploration, and deliberation?"

Dr. Nate Bryant, 22 Puritan Road, shared that he supports the Superintendent's plan. The first thing he learned as a previous School Committee member was that his job was to make decisions in the best interest of all students. He vividly remembers being concerned about the revolving door of principals at the Nathaniel Bowditch School. Dr. Bryant continued that he thought that the decisions he made while serving as School Committee member were in the best interest of the students which included listening to some parents acknowledge that while there were issues at Bowditch spoke very favorably about the Bowditch community – sentiments that meant a lot to him and gave him hope of improvement. Dr. Bryant continued that the Bowditch School is underperforming. They have two choices: take the approach that things will get better by trying harder or make a decision, grounded in research, which shows that integrated schools have more positive impact in student learning than segregated schools. Dr. Bryant continued that he also believes in Superintendent Ruiz, in her many years of working districts not so different from theirs. Dr. Bryant quoted Horace Mann, who was credited for being the first American advocate for free public education.

Nestor Grullon, resident of Salem, shared that he does not think that closing the Nathaniel Bowditch School would solve the problem and hopes the right decision is made. Mr. Grullon said that the closing of the Bowditch School only serves to provoke families against families and the questioned why this decision was not made before or during the time of the Superintendent's election. There is plenty of room at the Nathaniel Bowditch School for the Horace Mann Laboratory School. Mr. Grullon said that closing the Bowditch School would not solve issues of segregation and asked that politics not be practiced in education.

A member of the audience, 80-year-old Boston resident, shared that no other school compared to the Horace Mann School, which educated teachers in a very rich environment. The gentleman countered mention of teachers having only 3 years teaching experience. He does not think that means anything; it is about who has the passion to teach that matters. He cringes at the word segregation in Salem, Massachusetts, said they are all Americans, and wondered why that word 'segregation' is mentioned in this educational forum. It is ridiculous, unheard of, and a by-product of the last election. He pleads the state needs to be re-approached at the Secretary of State in Massachusetts. He walked around the Horace Mann School and observed there is no room. He thinks they should incorporate it into the Salem State University and returned to its original tenets of why it was there. It should be a pilot school as it was before. It should be a place of inspiration. He requests a rebirth of the Horace Mann School on the same Salem State University campus location. The Nathaniel Bowditch School also has a distinction as did the Pickering and many other schools in Salem. Salem was the lighthouse for the rest of the United States, for many years. The gentleman emphasized the need to eliminate the mention of segregation as everyone is an American regardless of the language they speak. He hopes to have inspired others to believe in what is best and not be afraid to express their concerns and shared that the value of every person is in their passion for what they do.

Beth Kontos, President of Salem Teachers Union, 237 Centre Street, Danvers, shared that what has happened at the Nathaniel Bowditch School has been a series of mistakes and events, part of it has been a choice process from the past where families have chosen where their child would go to school without regard to the needs of the students. Ms. Kontos continued that she feels it needs to stop. The goal of the Superintendent's plan is desegregation. They can faithfully watch that the demographics and socio-economics are watch every year, if this proposal is approved, to make sure it does not reoccur. Ms. Kontos continued that she thinks desegregation would slowly happen but it has to begin some place. She feels they need to make sure they have the supports in place and appropriate number of English Language Learners (ELL) and Special Education reading teachers. They need to make sure that they can attract and keep their teachers to prevent from having to seek teachers every year. They want to ensure this is the

place they want to work in, and students want to return to, every day. Ms. Kontos stated that teachers are far better when they are together.

Alex Pacheco, Salem resident, shared that the issues of the Nathaniel Bowditch School is not a coincidence, it is a shame, and what happens in Massachusetts has repercussions nationwide. Mr. Pacheco stated that the message that is presented this evening will have nationwide effect and asked School Committee members not to hang the students with their decisions - students should not pay for adult mistakes.

Yoleny Ynoa, Salem resident, asked each School Committee member, by name, not to close the Nathaniel Bowditch School.

Superintendent Report – Margarita Ruiz

Pillar #1: Create a Vibrant K-12 Teaching & Learning Ecosystem

Keeping Our Promise: Increasing Equity and Access in Salem Public Schools

Superintendent Ruiz reported that the data of the Nathaniel Bowditch School is striking and underscored that the district is academically failing the Bowditch School students and families. Ms. Ruiz clarified that this has been a systemic failure that occurred over many years and does not reflect the abilities of the students and the hard work of teachers and leaders of the Nathaniel Bowditch School. This most recent MCAS data has created a heightened sense of urgency for herself and entire management team to urge School Committee members to act decisively about the Bowditch School. They have invested in many different interventions at the school. It is fair to say that they are on plan D at this point as they have undergone through several plans at the school. Superintendent Ruiz stated that she is proud to say that they have worked hand-in-hand with the Salem Teacher's Union in collaboration to make some of those interventions happen and reminded that the School Committee used the Department of Education's framework for school turnaround to affect some of these interventions. Superintendent Ruiz reported that they have increased learning time at the school through an extended learning grant and said they have invested in leadership. There was a budget request, for the 2015 fiscal year, of an additional Assistant Principal, in addition to the current principal and dean of student success. They have invested in additional curriculum, for specific populations at the Bowditch School, such as REACH for reading and English as a Second Language (ESL). They have added other staffing including three full time substitutes to support the learning on the social emotional needs of its students.

Ms. Ruiz explained that it is often times difficult to fill positions during the middle of the school year. They have supported teacher practice and invested in the bilingual capacity of the Bowditch School. The Nathaniel Bowditch School is the only school in the district that has a Bilingual Secretary. The situation at the Nathaniel Bowditch School was not a result of deterioration that happened in one year but over the course of many years. Superintendent Ruiz continued that it has been 10 years, there has been a clear downward trajectory in the percentile ranking of the school compared to other K-8 schools in the state of Massachusetts, and the state may likely intervene if they do not act now.

Superintendent Ruiz reported they have considered moving the Nathaniel Bowditch School middle school grades over to the Collins Middle School as it has ample space and is able to welcome the students and keeping the Bowditch School as a K-5 elementary school. The problem with that is that it would address the issue of the middle school while leaving a failing K-5 school in place, because the issues seen on the trends (shown on the Superintendent's presentation slide) are not exclusive to middle or elementary but the entire Bowditch school. They could not consider the possibility of merging the Horace Mann and the Bowditch Schools, with the recognition that each school was facing its own inequity, because they would be merging the two lowest performing schools in the district. The model that the Carlton School has in place is predicated on the promotion of students each trimester as they are ready and master the standards.

The Carlton School has three trimester periods throughout the year where students are transitioned from one grade to the next. Another aspect of the Carlton School's model to keep in mind is predicated on a staffing structure and teacher training that is key to the execution model. Highly effective teachers primarily give instructions in small groups. Assigning close to 220 students all at once to the Carlton School would swamp their model all at one time and make it difficult to execute that model effectively. They also looked into the possibility of creating another in-district Horace Mann Charter School similar to the Bentley Academy Charter School. Given the controversy that arose with the Bentley, this did not seem like a viable or desirable option, either.

Superintendent Ruiz shared that she thinks they can be successful with this recommendation based on the progress that the Salem schools have made over the past 3 years and her personal observations. They have physical and seating space, district and school level structures, and they will do this right. All elementary and K-8 Salem schools have space to receive students from the Nathaniel Bowditch School. The Witchcraft Heights, Bates, and Collins Middle Schools have been highlighted because those are the schools where they would be adding more classroom space to increase their capacity. These schools have the physical space and they do not want to significantly alter the district's class sizes. Superintendent Ruiz invited three principals to share their experiences, what they know about students who have transferred over to their attending schools, and how they are preparing for possible transition. Leanne Smith, Principal of Witchcraft Heights Elementary School shared her thoughts on Superintendent Ruiz's plan and willingness to prepare to receive and welcome transferring students from the Nathaniel Bowditch School. Thomas Milaschewski, Principal of Bates Elementary School emphasized that they are ready, prepared, and excited to welcome new students and families to their community if the School Committee votes in support of the Superintendent's recommendations. They understand how difficult transition is for any student and confirmed they would work extremely hard to ensure the students feel academically, behaviorally, and socially comfortable. They look forward to welcoming the Nathaniel Bowditch School students and families into the Bates community. Glenn Burns, Principal of Collins Middle School, shared they have a world class STEM program at the Collins school that has two classes, at each grade level, that scholars go through and pointed out other available technologies and resources that the Nathaniel Bowditch School students can use. The Collins School is happy to welcome the students and ready to offer them all that they have available to helping them achieve their dreams.

Superintendent Ruiz reported that all teachers who have professional status will be able to obtain a new position in the district as there are enough new positions to guarantee a spot to those who have earned professional status as teachers. Additional vacancies will be posted and teachers with non-professional status will have the opportunity to apply and interview for these spots. Ms. Ruiz talked about anticipated additional resources, special education services, referred members to a handout that contained a list of some of the infrastructures in the district, and continued the presentation walking members through each slide of the presentation. Members asked questions and shared discussion. Superintendent Ruiz asked School Committee members permission to address families of the Nathaniel Bowditch School students in Spanish. Ms. Ruiz addressed the families in Spanish and explained her statement in English for the School Committee members.

Discussion

School Committee members asked questions, further discussed the proposal, and requested further information from Superintendent Ruiz. Ms. Ruiz agreed to provide responses and further information.

Action Item

Deliberation and Vote on the Approval of the Superintendent's Recommendation to Close the Nathaniel Bowditch School and Transfer Students to the Other Schools in the District and to

Relocate the Horace Mann Laboratory School to the Building Located at 79 Willson Street in Salem

Discussion

School Committee members agreed to table the deliberation and vote on the Superintendent's proposal for the next School Committee meeting on March 8, 2018.

The action item is tabled for 3/8/18

Finance Report

a. Approval of Warrants

February 22, 2018 in the amount of \$359, 339.37

March 1, 2018 in the amount of \$388, 302.51

Mr. Fleming motioned to approve both warrants in the amounts listed on the Agenda. Ms. Wilson seconded the motion. The Motion was approved.

b. Budget Transfers - There were no budget transfers

Subcommittee Reports - There were no Subcommittee reports

School Committee Concerns and Resolutions

Mr. Fleming said there was a report today from a constituent of a regarding that a MBTA bus has been seen dropping a bus load of kids at the High School from Lynn and asked Superintendent Ruiz to please look into it. Ms. Ruiz said she would. Mayor Driscoll wanted to confirm in advance with School Committee members if they feel they have everything they need to feel prepared to vote on the Superintendent's proposal. Members questioned the name issue and understand that the proposal does not include the topic of the name. Mayor Driscoll commented they have a policy regarding name changes and that would be a separate deliberation and vote, a separate process. Ms. Campbell asked for the average access SGP that she had previously requested. Mr. Fleming reminded they would receive the split data between the MCAS scores and K-6 grades. Ms. Nuncio shared that a Salem resident suggested instituting community service between students of Salem High School and other schools who are willing to participate in the Home for the Ages residence. Ms. Nuncio asked if that can be formalized and offered to send this suggestion to each School Committee member for review. Mayor Driscoll commented that she can circulate it from the COA. They organize students to help with everything from shoveling to other services that seniors sometimes need within their homes. Ms. Driscoll said that it sounds like something they could explore and help formalizes a pipeline. Ms. Manning shared concern that someone should be vigilant to watch over these services to ensure proper safety for the seniors. Mayor Driscoll commented that perhaps the COA can be involved in that.

Questions and Comments From the Audience

Jimmy, Boston resident, responded in reference to an earlier question that School Committee member Mr. Fleming asked Superintendent Ruiz on how they would be monitoring the progress of the Nathaniel Bowditch School students. Jimmy explained that student results can be monitored with today's technology. They can tag each student every semester or term and get a read out of how the Bowditch School students are doing, at different places of their assignment. That should provide proof as to what direction they are taking and whether they are improving or not. He thinks it is essential that they use a tracking system.

Peggy Fucillo, 4 Cedar Hill Road, Former Teacher at the Nathaniel Bowditch School said she has not heard about options and thinks it is critical that there are other options to choose from than just closing the

Nathaniel Bowditch School. They could incrementally look at other schools that have turned around. Ms. Fucillo stated she is willing to investigate, go to schools, and help out in any way she can. Turnaround is possible and has happened before. Students that attended the Nathaniel Bowditch School and have moved on to High School are doing very well. She knows this can happen when everyone works together to make it happen. Ms. Fucillo asks the School Committee to look at alternatives and into programs and establish them at the school to attract students throughout the city for a successful outcome.

Fawaz Abusharkh, 4 Harrison Road, stated that the proposal was poorly prepared and presented within a very short amount of time for review. Mr. Abusharkh said that he knows that Principals, leaders, and teachers do their job well and care for their students with no need to add additional supportive statements in favor of the Superintendent's proposal. Mr. Abusharkh addressed members of the School Committee individually, said they should honor the community, and that it should be the first thing to consider.

Andrea Hoffman, 3 Victory Road, thanked the Superintendent for principals to share details of how they plan to welcome the Nathaniel Bowditch School students, which is very important to her. She wanted to know this and said this information is very important to everyone. It is all about the students. Ms. Hoffman stated that Mr. Horace Mann wants to keep his name, said she thinks he should, and that it is not about keeping a name but the success of the students. She does not want to see the Horace Mann fail, set this all aside, and start thinking about the education of the students. She wants the supports in place, parents involved, and asked parents to please make sure their child do their homework. Ms. Hoffman continued that they all need to work together, they are all parents who care about their children, and emphasized that the school name is not what's important. She asked School Committee members not to let the issues continue and to fix it for both the Nathaniel Bowditch and the Horace Mann Schools as they deserve a better education and all the supports as does all of their other schools.

Farrah Wolfson, 25 Pickman Road, taught for more than 20 years, shared that she spoke to her mom, who has been an educational advocate for over 40 years, and who had strong concern as to whether the Nathaniel Bowditch School students would remain at the Bowditch school and whether the name would be kept. The other concern is of going back to haunted happenings; it has been a tense year at Salem. Ms. Wolfson stated that she and the people of Salem would like to think they trust the members of the School Committee with their experience, expertise, and community input to make a decision in the best interest of the students. Ms. Wolfson stated that she is excited that March 8 looks like a deadline.

Adjournment

There being no further business to come before the School Committee this evening, Mr. Fleming entertained the motion to adjourn. Ms. Wilson seconded the motion. The meeting was adjourned.

Respectfully submitted by:

Angelica Alayon, Secretary
Salem School Committee

Meeting Materials and Reports
School Committee Agenda February 26, 2018
Minutes of the February 5, 2018 Regular School Committee Meeting
Minutes of the February 12, 2018 Special School Committee Meeting and Public Hearing
Minutes of the February 12, 2018 Committee of the Whole (COW) Meeting
Presentation to School Committee
Excellent Language Learning for All Handout
District Infrastructure List Handout