

THE GLOUCESTER PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Our mission is for all students to be successful, engaged, lifelong learners.

School Committee Meeting Minutes

Wednesday, February 28, 2018

District Office Conference Room

2 Blackburn Drive, Gloucester, MA 01930

7:00 p.m.

Members Present

Jonathan Pope, Chairman
Kathy Clancy, Vice Chairperson
Tony Gross, Secretary
Melissa Teixeira
Michelle Sweet
Joel Favazza
Mayor Sefatia Romeo Theken

Administration Present

Dr. Richard Safier, Superintendent
Gregg Bach, Asst. Superintendent
Tom Lafleur, Director of Finance
and Operations
James Cook, GHS Principal
Debra Lucey, O'Maley Principal
Jeff Strong, O'Maley Asst. Principal
Jeff Destino, O'Maley Asst. Principal

Also Present

City Councilor Jen Holmgren

Recorded by Cape Ann TV

- I. **CALL TO ORDER** – Chairman Pope called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. and stated the mission of the Gloucester Public Schools.
- II. **SALUTE TO THE FLAG**
- III. **ORAL COMMUNICATIONS** – Dave Buchanan read a prepared statement regarding guns in schools (see attached).
- IV. **COMMENTS FROM THE CHAIRPERSON** – Chairman Pope noted that there will be a presentation on school safety at tonight's meeting and stated that the committee will do everything it can to try to keep our children safe. He stated, however, that the power to prevent school shootings rests with federal and state legislators and he encouraged people to do everything they can to keep the pressure on legislators to try to solve the problem.
- V. **RECOGNITIONS** – Dr. Safier recognized the GHS Cheerleaders, who won the Northeast Conference Competition this past weekend (Grand Champions). Kathy Clancy reported that she attended the West Parish play, *101 Dalmatians*, and noted that there will be additional performances tonight and tomorrow night. Mayor Theken stated that O'Maley's performance of *Shrek, Jr.* starts this weekend. Finally, Chairman Pope recognized Austin Monell, a student of Kurt Lichtenwald, who was interviewed by a professor at MIT this week, who was very impressed with the GHS engineering program.

VI. GHS STUDENT ADVISORY COUNCIL – Caroline Enos, Samantha Gross and Henry Hardy updated the committee on the following events at Gloucester High School: College Fair, surprise teacher lunch, sophomore dance, JROTC Rifle National Competition in Alabama, blood drive, NHS inductions, and the Docksiders’ wine-tasting fundraiser.

VII. CONSENT AGENDA

A. Approval of Minutes

1. Building & Finance Subcommittee of January 16, 2018
2. Building & Finance Subcommittee of January 17, 2018
3. School Committee of January 18, 2018

B. Approval of Warrants – Cover Sheets

C. Approval of Transfers – January 10 to January 30, 2018

D. Referrals

E. Acceptance of Gifts

1. \$100.00 from Jessica C.E. Gienow-Hecht and Heiki Hecht to O’Maley Innovation Middle School
2. Seven (7) large whiteboards from Generous Growers
3. \$700.00 from Cfca Llc DBA Crossfit Cape Ann to the GHS Athletic Department for students in need
4. Six (6) gallons of black paint from the Building Center to the Theater Department for use on stage

F. Approval of Scholarship – Avis R. Murray Scholarship in the amount of \$500.00

On a motion by Ms. Teixeira, seconded by Ms. Sweet, it was unanimously

VOTED: 7 in favor, 0 opposed to approve the Consent Agenda as noted above.

VIII. DELIBERATIONS ON EDUCATIONAL ISSUES/SUPERINTENDENT’S REPORT

A. Report on Vaping – Officer Scola distributed and Principal Cook reviewed a report on vaping, and Officer Scola displayed a collection of dozens of vaping devices and related products (vape juice) that were confiscated at GHS over the last couple of months, which often look like legitimate electronic devices such as flash drives. Mr. Cook talked about the names of popular brands of vaping products and the definition of electronic smoking devices in Massachusetts and pointed out that some products that claim to have 0% nicotine also contain fine print on the label stating “may contain nicotine.”

Mr. Cook reviewed the School Committee policies regarding smoking and vaping and noted that the high school administration applies the policies related to drugs to the use of dab pens with THC oil. He reported that there have been 39 students disciplined for possession and/or use of electronic smoking devices and related products and indicated that the administration has made it more difficult for students to find places to vape.

Mr. Cook reported that the high school uses progressive discipline to maximize the use of school-based consequences in order to keep kids at school and minimize academic failures and dropouts. The consequence for a first vaping offense is four office detentions, with subsequent offenses resulting in out-of-school suspensions. The consequence for possession of an electronic smoking device includes confiscation and detentions for the first and second offense and suspension for subsequent offenses.

Mr. Cook reported that GHS administrators have met with O'Maley administration to review their respective discipline policies. He stated that the high school has developed some revisions that push up detentions and short suspensions earlier in the progression of discipline and will be presenting those revisions to the School Committee for approval at a future meeting.

Mr. Cook reported that MIAA rules prohibit the use, consumption, possession, buying or selling of vape pens, e-cigarettes and similar devices by athletes at any point in the athletic year. The first violation is a minimum 25% loss of the athletic season and a subsequent violation is a minimum 60% loss of the athletic season.

Mr. Cook stated that the administration realizes this problem cannot be “disciplined away” because some students are already addicted, the vape smoke is difficult to detect, devices are easy to hide and evolve quickly, and the products are being marketed to teenagers. He reported that they are addressing the subject in school assemblies and health classes and are looking at partnering with Lahey Behavioral Health to provide interventions during detention sessions.

Finally, Mr. Cook challenged everyone to commit to talking to at least one young person about the dangers of vaping and to stay engaged in the issue.

Chief McCarthy stated that vaping devices are legal to buy and sell and that it is what kids put in them that makes them illegal. He believes the problem will get worse with the new marijuana laws coming into play.

Principal Lucey reported that there have been 16 instances of vaping at the middle school this year, with no repeat offenders. She stated that there are teachers and cameras in the hallways, and if they see groups of students going into a bathroom, a staff member will go in as a deterrent. She reported that Dr. Ruth Potee is coming to speak to parents and students about vaping on Friday. Finally, she noted that students are unaware that vaping is dangerous and see it as less harmful than smoking.

Chief McCarthy highly recommended Dr. Potee's presentation and Ms. Teixeira requested that the recording of the presentation be posted on the district website.

Mr. Destino stated that there were no instances of students vaping last year and it is a Level 3 infraction, which is an automatic out-of-school suspension. He indicated that parents have been supportive of the policy and consequences.

Ms. Teixeira expressed concern that marijuana is being used in school in "dab pens," which is supposed to be reported to the DA. Mr. Cook indicated that only two or three students have been caught with dab pens and they were disciplined under the School Committee's drug policy (minimum five-day suspension). Officer Scola stated that students are not bringing dab pens to school anymore because they are too expensive to be confiscated.

Caroline Enos stated that there is a broad spectrum of students vaping at the high school, and Henry Hardy believes that teachers should be better informed about what to look for.

Ms. Teixeira indicated that students under 21 who are cited for possession of marijuana must attend a drug prevention program. She stated that DCF runs such a program and suggested reaching out to them to bring it to Gloucester.

- B. Safety Measures in the Gloucester Public Schools** – Dr. Safier discussed the components of school safety, including collaboration with the police and fire departments, detailed school emergency management plans that are updated annually, ongoing planning with respect to crisis intervention, drill practice and preparedness, addressing student mental health issues, and daily security (cameras, locked doors, etc.).

Mayor Theken indicated that she is going to ask the City Council to appropriate some money for additional training from the U.S. Marshal Service.

Lt. Mike Gossom reported that there are plans that will be implemented very soon, the details of which he cannot discuss. He indicated that every school has been mapped by a professional organization for school safety and that every member of the police department has been trained and will be re-trained during the next school year. The next step is to have some type of drill at every school before the end of the school year and then an enhanced drill next year.

Mr. Favazza stated that some students have expressed concern about someone calling in a bomb threat to get all of the students outside in one location. Lt. Gossom stated that the police response has to be fluid and on a case-by-case basis. Mr. Cook reported that they are changing the rally points and will run the drills with the new rally points.

Mayor Theken believes we need more resource officers at the high school and stated that she will work on that in next year's budget. She also expressed the importance of addressing students' mental health issues.

Ms. Teixeira expressed concern that ALICE drills have not been done with students yet. Lt. Gossom explained that it is constantly evolving and has been delayed in order to determine the best way to implement it. Dr. Safier reported that lockdown drills have been done and the transition to active shooter drills is in process and will take place when the police department indicates they are ready to go forward. Lt. Gossom indicated that there have been incidents that they have had to respond to, which are actually better than drills. There was a discussion about how to notify parents of when the drills will take place.

Mr. Cook, Ms. Lucey and Lt. Gossom discussed who is involved and what happens when mental health concerns about a student are reported, including emergency placement in an institution, interviews with parents, etc.

Finally, Lt. Gossom assured everyone that the police and school administration have a great working relationship, talk on a regular basis, and communicate extremely well.

C. FY19 Draft Budget Presentation – Mr. Gross stated that the budget that is being presented tonight is only the initial level service budget.

Dr. Safier presented a slide show on the proposed FY19 operating budget, including the budget calendar, and stated that it is designed to provide unification and coherence, meet individual student needs, support effective use of data, and maintain a professional culture and community. He discussed curriculum review and revision, examination of the preschool through Grade 8 literacy, special education, Next Generation MCAS preparation, strengthening higher order thinking skills, technology, intervention systems, social/emotion learning, and ELL students by school and by language.

Dr. Safier discussed increases to the budget, including cost of living adjustments, an increase in health insurance costs of \$118,755, an increase in special education costs of \$411,087, Step increases of \$396,614, and lane changes of \$235,748. He also discussed anticipated grant reductions and unanticipated expenses.

Dr. Safier reported that the proposed budget totals \$43,272,273, an increase of \$2,233,377 (5.44%) over this year's approved budget. He reviewed out-of-district tuitions and indicated that additional requests from principals and department heads of approximately \$385,000 are not included in the draft budget.

Dr. Safier reviewed the FY19 budget by department, noting that the Main Office budget no longer contains cost of living adjustments for staff. Mr. Lafleur stated that the Athletics budget is consistent with what was spent last year that had to be backfilled from other line items. He also pointed out that the individual salaries published last year are FY16 salaries because contracts had not been settled yet.

Finally, Dr. Safier reviewed salaries funded by grants and revolving accounts (i.e. not included in the operating budget) and cuts required to reach certain percentage increases.

D. Superintendent’s Report – Dr. Safier updated the committee on the following matters:

1. DESE and DCF: Educational Stability for Students in Foster Care
2. 2016-17 Dropout Data Summary Report for Gloucester
3. Joint Meeting with City Council
4. Response from Senator Tarr Re: Circuit Breaker Concerns
5. Website for East Gloucester/Veterans’ Memorial Building Project
6. Letter to Parents/Guardians and Staff Re: Parkland, Florida Tragedy –

Mr. Cook spoke about his discussions with students about the national student walkout on March 14th and appropriate consequences for participating, which will be to write a reflection paper on their experience. Ms. Teixeira expressed concern with students being punished for participating, and Mr. Cook assured her there will be no suspensions and that there have been no directives to teachers. There was a discussion about the consequences of participating and ensuring that students are safe while they are participating in the walkout.

Chairman Pope stated that the committee can discuss this topic tonight because it needs to set out some directives for the administration so that parents will know what is happening on March 14th. The committee discussed the difference between a school-sanctioned event and a walkout and giving students the choice. Mr. Cook confirmed that teachers will remain in their classrooms with students who choose not to participate in the walkout.

Dr. Safier will send out a letter to parents and students about this event.

7. West Parish Production of *101 Dalmatians, The Play*
8. O’Maley Production of *Shrek, Jr., The Musical*

On a motion by Mr. Gross, seconded by Ms. Teixeira, it was unanimously

VOTED: 7 in favor, 0 opposed to accept the Superintendent’s Report.

IX. SUBCOMMITTEE REPORTS

- A. Building & Finance Subcommittee of February 14, 2018** – Mr. Gross indicated that he reported on the Building & Finance Subcommittee meeting of February 14, 2018 at the last School Committee meeting.

X. ACTION

- A. Second Reading of Use of Therapy Dogs in Schools Policy** – On a motion by Chairman Pope, seconded by Kathy Clancy, it was unanimously

VOTED: 7 in favor, 0 opposed to waive the reading of the Use of Therapy Dogs in Schools policy.

After discussion, on a motion by Kathy Clancy, seconded by Ms. Sweet, it was unanimously

VOTED: 7 in favor, 0 opposed to approve the Use of Therapy Dogs in Schools policy.

XI. DISCUSSION/OTHER COMMUNICATION/OLD AND NEW BUSINESS

A. MSBA Project Updates

1. East Gloucester/Veterans School – Chairman Pope reported that the building committee will be meeting tomorrow to start the process of getting an Owner's Project Manager.

B. Letter (2/13/18) from Richard G. Weissman, Director of Endicott College Gloucester – FYI.

C. Email (2/19/18) from David Buchanan – FYI.

XII. ADJOURNMENT – On a motion by Ms. Sweet, seconded by Kathy Clancy, it was unanimously

VOTED: 7 in favor, 0 opposed to adjourn the School Committee Meeting of February 28, 2018 at 10:05 p.m.

All reference documents and reports are filed in the Superintendent's office.

*Maria Puglisi
Recording Secretary*

Guns in Schools
Dave Buchanan - Statement before Gloucester School Committee
February 28, 2018

Dear Mayor Romeo-Theken, Superintendent Safier, Chair Hope and other members of the Gloucester School Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you tonight. And thank you, Superintendent Safier, for your message to parents in the wake of the massacre in Parkland, FI.

My name is Dave Buchanan. I am the parent of two children who have long attended Gloucester Public Schools. I have worked in education for over 30 years.

As we all know, Parkland is the latest of eighteen shooting events that have taken place on school grounds in the U.S just since the turn of the year. I am here to ask for your support on the national call for action on guns in schools.

We have had enough of prayers and condolences by our national leaders. We need to act. Every year at this time, we celebrate the strides the previous generation made on civil rights, steps taken in times when those actions too were not politically expedient. Yet they acted. When it comes to gun violence in schools, this is our moment.

Following Parkland, we have seen students exercise the courage that we adults have not. They have staged dramatic protests. They have confronted our elected officials. They are planning other actions in the coming months, including a student walk out on March 14, a day of protest in Washington DC and other cities including Boston on March 24, and a school boycott on April 20, the anniversary of Columbine. I urge the City and Gloucester Public Schools to endorse these actions.

I won't pretend to understand the logic of why common-sense restrictions on the right to gun down our children in schools are so controversial but realize that a full endorsement may not be possible. If that is the case, at the very least, I strongly urge the City and the school system to make it crystal clear - in a public statement - that teachers and students may exercise their right to participate in these actions without fear of reprisal. Sadly, we already know of attempts in some states to silence student dissent. Some district leaders have made it clear that participation in walk outs or other protests will result in suspension from school.

Here in Massachusetts - here in Gloucester - we have an opportunity to set a smarter course. In the last few years, we have brought new attention to the principle that our schools are here to develop the citizens of tomorrow. We must stand by that commitment. Just yesterday, at the monthly meeting of the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education, Acting Commissioner Wulfson urged officials and educators to do just that, to make use of this "teachable moment," to support our young people in living out what it means to be an informed and engaged participant in our nation. Teachers and students should have our full support, not threats of discipline.

As the nation focuses so closely on the second amendment, we also must stand with the first.

Thank you for considering this request. I look forward to hearing what you recommend - and what role we parents and fellow citizens may play in supporting you.