

**THE GLOUCESTER PUBLIC SCHOOLS**

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

**Minutes of the School Committee Public Hearing  
On the After School Policy**

Monday, August 22, 2011

Kyrouz Auditorium – City Hall

7:00 p.m.

**Members Present**

Val Gilman, Chairperson  
Melissa Teixeira, Vice Chairperson  
Kathleen Clancy, Secretary  
Roger Garberg  
Michelle Sweet  
Tony Gross

**Administration Present**

Superintendent Dr. Richard Safier  
Assistant Superintendent Brian Tarr  
CFO Tom Markham

**Also Present**

City Council President Jackie Hardy  
Councilor Steve Curcuru  
Maggie Rosa, GEF Executive Director  
Jonathan Pope, GFAA Co-Chair

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Recorded by Cape Ann TV

**I. SALUTE TO THE FLAG**

Chairperson Gilman called the public hearing to order at 7:03 p.m., stated the mission of the Gloucester Public Schools, and indicated that Mayor Kirk will not be attending the public hearing. She then recognized Steve Curcuru, Jackie Hardy, Brian Tarr, Maggie Rosa, and Jonathan Pope.

**II. INTRODUCTION** – Chairperson Gilman reviewed the following information with respect to the history of the After School Policy:

In the fall of 2010, the Program Subcommittee began working on amendments to the After School Policy. Discussions and subcommittee votes, noted in minutes, excluded students who attend out-of-district public schools due to the financial impact of Chapter 70 loss for those students who choice out.

Prior to subcommittee amendments being forwarded to the full committee for first reading, Interim Superintendent Connelly made a recommendation in his November 10, 2010 superintendent's report, "Due to the fact that the School Committee is fully involved in several major issues at this time and the harmful financial impact of the GCACS does not impact Gloucester until the end of the 2011/2012 school year, I recommend tabling this matter until the spring and allowing the existing policy to continue to provide the needed direction on this matter." He attached the existing 2005 policy.

In the spring of 2011, several Program Subcommittee meetings were conducted, and the subcommittee presented a first reading draft of an amended After School Policy at the June 8, 2011 School Committee meeting. It stated, "After school programs shall be open to all

students at the appropriate grade level who are enrolled in the GPSD. For a student to practice, the student must be duly enrolled in the district where required by law (i.e. home schooled).” Two additional legal facts were noted.

1. Massachusetts is silent on after school programs for charter schools and their districts; and
2. MIAA restricts out-of-district high school participation in any sport.

It further stated, “Any non-Gloucester Public School District student currently participating in any after school activity at the middle school as of the date of the adoption of this policy may continue to participate in that activity until they graduate from eighth grade.”

The committee voted 4-3 to support the first reading, and the policy was deferred back to subcommittee for changes and updates. The policy was modified as noted on the “new policy” draft and was approved 5-2 on June 27, 2011 (Teixeira and Kirk opposed).

Due to public feedback, largely from parents with students attending private schools in Gloucester, the School Committee held a special summer meeting on July 20, 2011. Chairperson Gilman encouraged those who did not watch the School Committee meetings on cable TV to review the July 20<sup>th</sup> School Committee packet online so they can view the extensive and heartfelt deliberations of all members of the committee at both program and full committee meetings.

At the July 20, 2011 meeting, the School Committee voted unanimously 6-0 to hold a public hearing on the amended after school policy. The committee voted 5-1 (Garberg opposed) to defer the implementation of the after school policy adopted on June 29, 2011 until the committee receives additional community feedback.

Chairperson Gilman provided a brief explanation of the use of this policy in past years. Approximately four to six out of district students participated in after school programs in Gloucester Public Schools, specifically band and no cut sports (i.e. cross country and track). There was one person that participated in field hockey last year at O’Maley.

Finally, Chairperson Gilman reviewed the purpose of the hearing and the ground rules. She then asked Kathy Clancy to summarize the letters that have been circulated to all members of the committee by members of the public, as follows:

**Not supportive of the newly amended policy:** Steve Celentano, Daren Donovan, Christina Kennedy, and Amanda Kesterson.

**Not supportive of the newly amended policy because they want private and parochial schools to attend:** Brendhan and Jo Zubricki

**Supportive of the policy for some aspects but not all:** Amy Cole

**In support of the newly amended policy:** Thomas Hooper, Sinikka Nogelo, Peter Dolan, and Martin DeVecchio

### **III. THE AFTER SCHOOL POLICY**

Chairperson Gilman pointed out that two policies are included in the packet distributed at the public hearing: (1) the After School Policy that was recently amended, and (2) the old policy that was adopted by the School Committee on January 12, 2005. She stated that the committee has deferred back to the old policy until the School Committee makes a decision upon hearing from the public and referring the matter back to Program Subcommittee.

Chairperson Gilman also thanked Cape Ann TV for recording the public hearing.

### **IV. PUBLIC COMMENTS AND SUGGESTIONS**

Chairperson Gilman invited the audience to speak, and the following individuals made the following comments:

**Amanda Kesterson** thanked the School Committee for agreeing to meet with the public and hear their views on the topic. She lives at 293 Washington Street and also owns two other homes in Gloucester. She was born here, but she was raised in Manchester, and she graduated from Manchester High School, a very, very small school with very few students. After she graduated from college, she began her teaching career at Manchester Essex Regional High School, a school with far more students who had decided that it was important to include as many possible activities in order to give the students the best opportunity that they could. To that end, Manchester and Rockport, two communities who vie for school choice students and are competitive in sports, decided to allow Rockport students to play on the Manchester football team and Manchester students to play on the Rockport hockey team, thereby allowing both communities to have these activities for the purpose of providing the best possible situation for the students of both communities. It was mutually beneficial, and it was a situation in which two communities which normally compete were working together. She thinks this is very instructive here. Right now in Gloucester, we have a competitive situation – a budgetary issue with the charter school, private schools drawing, school choice students coming away from the system – and she knows it spurred this decision by the School Committee. “But behind you on the wall, it says, ‘Build not for today alone but for tomorrow as well,’” and she believes that that’s important here. Inclusion should be the order of the day. To that end, she circulated a petition among acquaintances of hers, which was signed by 98 members of the Gloucester community. She believes there are far more who actually support it who she may not know or have had contact with, but she thinks it’s important to read aloud the viewpoint of these people:

We write to petition the Gloucester School Committee to overturn the recently adopted After School Program Policy adopted by the School Committee at its June 29, 2011 meeting, which allows only those students attending Gloucester Public Schools to participate in after school programs and sports previously available to all Gloucester school children. By voting to exclude St. Ann’s School, Eastern Point Day School, and the Gloucester Community Arts Charter School Gloucester students from after school programs and sports, the Gloucester School Committee has punished children for the educational choices of their parents on their behalf. The policy unfairly targets those seeking an alternative educational experience, including religious education.

Additionally, the residents of Gloucester, whose tax dollars pay for the maintenance of the municipal buildings, fields, and contribute to the salaries of teachers and coaches who run these programs, have a monetary claim to the programs on behalf of their children. We believe that Gloucester is unique in the plethora of educational choices available to the residents here and that there should be a spirit of cooperation and inclusion among all schools in Gloucester to provide the best possible educational experience for the students of this community.

Chairperson Gilman thanked Ms. Kesterson for setting up a session with St. Ann's parents to discuss the After School Policy.

**Grace Scola** spoke to the committee in December about this policy, and she and her husband sent emails about it. They had an issue with hockey and a student wanting to play on the O'Maley hockey team that didn't attend Gloucester Public Schools. She is here speaking as a parent, not as a staff member. As a parent, she is tired of the public, the paper, the bloggers, and some city officials saying we are shunning innovation and then turning around and wanting something that we have (i.e. after school activities, sports). "We've been told to compete, and now that we're competing, people aren't happy. Do you realize the field hockey team had 30 players on their team this year? Would it be right for more players to be on that team?" She doesn't think so. "Do you feel it's right to add more students to this program? What happens if a student from outside of school gets onto the O'Maley hockey team and is better than one of our hockey players and beats him out for a starting position or gets more playing time than a student who attends our school?" People have made the choice to leave, and she's okay with that. She thinks a lot of people are okay with that. She is not shunning anybody because they've done that, but they shouldn't turn around and want something from us. "Have you asked your staff and administration what it wants? More so, have you asked the students of our schools how they feel about this? What message are these choice parents sending our students as well as to their students? The message I'm getting is, 'Your school isn't good enough for us academically or socially, but it's good enough for your enrichment or after school sports.' What message does a GPS student get when a student from another school gets a better role than them? Are we going to ensure that the GPS student gets as much playing time as the other? What is the message to parents who are trying to do right by GPS and watching people have their cake and eat it too on the backs of our students? It may send more people choosing to choose out." She thinks to participate in any school activity, you should be an outstanding member of that school. Doesn't that make sense?

**Joseph Orlando** lives at 5 Western Avenue in Gloucester. He is a lifelong resident of Cape Ann, 40+ of those years in Gloucester. He was at the meeting that Amanda Kesterson put together to discuss this issue. As an attorney and as someone who cares about this community very much, he warned the committee that while he was personally upset that his grandchildren, who attend St. Ann's School and whose parents and grandparents pay taxes to this community which help support these schools, have been excluded by this policy. At the same time, you have to recognize that when people make educational choices for their children, the kind of choices that affluent people can make freely – they can send their children anywhere. Now that there are choices for working class people in our community, people who struggle to come up with the tuition for private schools while still paying their tax dollars to the City of Gloucester, to exclude

those children is not only wrong, it may very well be illegal. When someone makes an educational choice based on their religious beliefs and then the City of Gloucester attempts to punish those children for those beliefs, the city may very well be opening itself up to a difficult legal situation and a great deal of cost defending something that he thinks may not have been thought out as well as it should have been. He doesn't know a lot about the charter school. He knows that there are a lot of issues surrounding it. Those issues are mostly financial. And he understands the difficulty the committee has finding a way to educate all the children that go to school in Gloucester while money is being taken out of the system for the charter school and for those people who choose their children to other schools. His own personal feeling is that educational options are a good thing, as hard as it may be; that when people make a choice, people who never had a choice before – and again, we're not talking about the affluent. We're talking about working class Gloucesterites who finally have a choice, and when they exercise that choice, that really sends us all a message. We should really look at what we are doing and ask ourselves why people want to choose their students to other schools. None of us are perfect. They're not perfect in Manchester; they're not perfect in Rockport; they're not perfect at Hamilton-Wenham. But we all have to consistently be better at what we do. Whether in our jobs or in our family life or anywhere else, we have to constantly analyze why things are happening, and it is his belief that before there was a choice student who left this school and took money with them, and before the charter school came to Gloucester, there were issues with the public schools that were not properly addressed. Those issues are not with our fine teachers. He believes GPS has excellent teachers. In short, this policy should be rethought. He would hate to see a situation where the parents of the children at St. Ann's and other private schools who are both paying taxes and paying tuition are forced to litigate against this community. That would be unfortunate, expensive and unnecessary, and he hopes the School Committee rethinks the policy.

**Maria Zervos** lives at 153 Western Avenue in Gloucester. She is here just to voice her support for the difficult choices that the School Committee has to make in this increasingly competitive environment, educationally speaking, that we find ourselves in. She has a daughter at West Parish School, and she has been very surprised by a lot of the discussion over this issue. Her experience growing up in Pennsylvania and New York and working in some schools, as well, was that if you didn't go to a school district, you didn't participate in their activities. So, she was surprised by a lot of the issues that were raised by this. She also said that in this competitive environment where our schools are having to fight tooth and nail for every single budget dollar – and we're talking about 3,200 public school students who are in the district – for those very challenging issues that were being dealt with, the talk of other people saying, “Well, you know, we pay taxes, so our children deserve this, too.” Right, but what about the 3,200 students who are in the district? They should be prioritized. She commends the School Committee for the budget work they did last year. The situation is so much better this year than everybody projected it to be. So, that's been a big success. And she's also just concerned that the School Committee shouldn't be persuaded to do something that's not in the best interests of the GPS students. Just like the private schools and the charter school have boards of directors, the School Committee is essentially the board of directors for the public school for our district. So, she thinks what they're trying to do is what's in the best interests of the school district children. She appreciates other people's concerns, and she understands that people pay taxes. However, just because we pay taxes, we're not entitled to every service that our taxes pay for. “If I'm not a

veteran, if I'm not a senior citizen, I'm not entitled to the services that are offered to those people." There are rules and regulations, and she thinks that given the difficult budgetary issues in Gloucester, as well as issues of principle and of focus, we really need to focus as a district on our students. She thinks as long as the School Committee does the really good job that they have done, especially this past difficult year, she thinks it's commendable, and she encourages them, whatever decision they decide to do, whether they amend the policy, whether they stay with it, whatever they decide she is sure will be in the best interests of the GPS students, and she hopes that they understand that.

**Damon Cummings** lives at 1063 Washington Street in Gloucester. He thinks this is a very sad subject for Gloucester, and he's sorry it ever came up. He doesn't have anything against any member of the School Committee. He's sure they are doing their best, but he considers this to be a very, very unfortunate decision, and he's very upset by it. It's hard to believe that we're debating the merits of excluding some children from school extracurricular activities. The thought never crossed his mind, and he doubts if it crossed any of their minds before this sticky subject of the charter school came up. Certainly, no one objected to private school students participating in Gloucester extracurricular activities before the charter school, and now, all of a sudden, the subject has come up. We're taking action not only against the charter school children but against any other children who live here but do not go to the Gloucester Public Schools, which includes private school children and all others outside the public schools, except home-schooled children. Home-schooled children are specifically excluded from this new proposed policy because there's a federal law against discriminating against home-schooled children. He's sure that law was passed explicitly for the purpose of not allowing local school officials to exclude students, and we're doing it. He doesn't think that that's right at all. If he were a school student considering going to Gloucester or going somewhere else and he saw this policy being enacted, his reaction would be very, very negative. His reaction would be, "I don't want anything to do with this." And he's very disappointed, and he certainly hopes that the School Committee will decide not to go through with this.

**Joseph Parisi** lives at 74 Wheeler Street in Gloucester and is the president of the St. Ann's School board of trustees. He wanted to clarify a few things. Most of the students at St. Ann's don't choose to leave the public school. They come in pre-K or kindergarten, and they stay for nine or ten years for a Catholic education. They then mostly go on to GHS, as he did himself and his children did, and they participate in all the high school things. Most of them are usually on the honor roll, and they do very well. They feel a part of the community. He knows they are in other aspects of their lives. And for years and decades, they participated in after school programs, like O'Maley cross-country and the band and things like that, and it's gone on and on and on for a long time, and no one ever got hurt by it. There was a fire at the Babson School on Pleasant Street many years ago, which was a neighborhood school at the time. The GPS kids were displaced, and St. Ann's School children gave up some of their extracurricular rooms and activities, like the art room, and they squeezed together in classrooms so that the Babson School kids could use a couple of their classrooms for nine months of the year while the city, people before you on the School Committee, found a way to relocate them in other areas. St. Ann's

School opened its door to the public school children. There was no, “We’re going to charge you,” or “Oh, no. Those are public school kids. We can’t have them in our building.” There was a spirit of cooperation that he would like to see continue for our children in Gloucester.

**Peter Dolan** noted that he submitted comments in writing, but a change in schedule allowed him to be here this evening. He is the parent of a student at O’Maley. He congratulated the reelected School Committee members and asked them to use their mandate wisely. He also thanked Mrs. Sweet for her service and hopes she will continue to be an active supporter of public education after her current term expires.

He doesn’t know what the correct answers are to the questions the School Committee faces concerning participation in district activities by students who don’t attend the district schools. We elected you to grapple with these questions, and he’ll support their decision. He offered some of his thoughts and hopes they may help them make those decisions. The debate about after school participation stirs passions, to say the least. The decisions we make about public education affect the futures of our children. In recent years, he’s noticed that people love to tout the benefits of choice and competition in public education up until they have to face the reality of choice and competition meaning that they can’t have something that they want. These two notions are also very popular when people don’t have to look too hard at the price tag. This debate is sure to bring out something less than the best in some of us. There may be good reasons for allowing students from other districts, including commonwealth charter schools and private schools, to participate in GPS activities. It may make sense to allow spots not taken by GPS students to be filled by out-of-district students who pay some kind of full fare. If that’s where this ends up, the School Committee should at least be aware that somewhere down that road, a student from Rockport may want to pay to take an AP course at GHS. He asked the committee to think through very carefully the implications of any fee-for-service models they consider. Doing what’s right for children or “because I pay taxes” are reasons that can support just about any position anyone has on this issue. When they are the only rationale given, they tend to make for arguments that show a lack of understanding of both how things work in a democracy and that children, other than some spoiled ones, are denied things on a routine basis. In his editorial today, Mr. Lamont delicately refers to a botched approval process in an effort to whitewash the history of the GCACS. There will be a trial in January in a lawsuit that looks to address the corrupt approval of that school’s charter. He suggests the School Committee develop a policy that makes sense if the GCACS no longer exists. A policy that only addresses the anomaly of this charter school and its corrupt approval may have unintended consequences that may not make sense in the future. Families who live in Gloucester but attend schools in other districts or attend commonwealth charters are benefiting directly from the public education system. Their choices cause significant amounts of public funds to move from one district to another. It would be entirely reasonable to expect students and those families to participate in the programs offered where they attend school. Choices have consequences, and it seems impossible to administer or pay for a public system on an ala carte basis. On the other hand, the School Committee could also reasonably conclude that all non-district students should be treated the same way. Families who attend private schools are wrong to assert that simply because they pay taxes, their children should be allowed to use public programs. This is a simplistic argument that flies in the face of

reality and ignores what it means to be a citizen in a democracy. We pay taxes with the understanding that not all things the government does will benefit us each individually directly. In fact, the government may do things with our money which we sometimes disagree with. That said, if the School Committee determines after considering all the evidence in front of them that there are benefits to a partnership with families who are taking advantage of private school education, he certainly would not object. He thanked the School Committee for their time and effort devoted to providing educational opportunity to the children of Gloucester.

**Sandy Santos** lives on Derby Street. Her son goes to the GCACS and is by no means spoiled. He doesn't play any sports, so this will not directly affect him, although it may affect her youngest down the line, who will be coming into the charter school next year. She is confused because it seems like the way that everybody talks, that this is going to affect hundreds of children. Last year from the charter school, this affected one child. She doesn't know how many from St. Ann's or the other private schools that this affected. She knows the charter school next year is doubling this coming fall, but she can't imagine that it would be much more than a handful of children that this would affect. So, she's confused as to how this is all coming about, why we're even having a discussion, why it was even brought up. She asked the committee to carefully think this over. It's not affecting hundreds of children. It is only affecting maybe a handful of children, and she doesn't think that they should be punished for the actions of where their parents chose to put them into school.

**Leonard Gyllenhal** lives at 32 Rockport Road in Gloucester. He pays school taxes every year. He sends no students to any school here. He would like to propose that the School Committee allow us to pay taxes to designate which schools the money goes to.

**Christy DaSilva** lives on Liberty Street in Gloucester and is a parent of three children. One of her children graduated two years ago from St. Ann's School, and she is now an honor student at GHS and an active basketball player and lacrosse player. These are things that she did with her friends throughout the years in her activities at St. Ann's. Although this doesn't directly affect her because she doesn't have any children playing band or track or anything like that, she would like to know that that's an option for her because she plans on sending her children to GHS when they graduate. One of her children is at East Gloucester Elementary. So, for different reasons, her children go to different schools, and she feels like she's not a public school parent and she's not a private school parent. She's both, and that's her problem here. We shouldn't be pitting against each other. We're one community. We have all these wonderful kids. They shouldn't have, "Well, you can do this, and you can do that," because once elementary school is over, a lot of these kids are going to school together. She thinks that they should have the same opportunities that the other kids that they will be going to school with have. She does pay taxes. Does that make her feel like she's entitled? No, but her daughter is entitled. She doesn't feel entitled, but she also feels like once it's this, what's going to be next and what's going to be next? So, hopefully, the School Committee will reconsider this. Just because she chose Catholic education for her children, a faith-based education, that shouldn't limit her children from doing what other public school kids do because, ultimately, they will be in public school. She hopes the School Committee reconsiders.

**Cliff Alves** lives on Liberty Street in Gloucester. He has a student at St. Ann's, and he feels that if you look at the old policy, the School Committee had established a past practice of allowing the Catholic students to attend after school activities. His concern is, under that practice, it seems like all of a sudden, the charter school gets thrown into play and everybody's against the charter school, and this is a way to punish all the students. If you read the last sentence on the agenda, "Our mission is for all students to be successful." He would like to add, "If you can read that, thank your teacher." And it doesn't matter what school your teacher is, private or public. He just wants the best for his son, and he thinks that if his son wants to play band, he should have that option. We're real quick with pulling the trigger on bad decisions in the city. All you've got to do is read the paper and see the financial implications of that. Please put it under consideration and do the right thing.

**Clyde Gillard** lives at 22 Eastern Point. He is new to this public forum on education, but it's been refreshing to hear some of these conversation points and arguments about paying taxes or about legal exposure. He thinks what really made sense was just a sense of community. The School Committee are the advocates for education in Gloucester – not this section of Gloucester, not that part of Gloucester, but for Gloucester. It seems to him that if it's a statement that they want to make, the statement ought to be not for discrimination but for inclusion. The number of kids that we're talking about is fairly small. He doesn't know if this is a financial issue in the end. It's a statement, and if there's a statement to be made, he asked that the School Committee work it out as the elected officials that they are with the people in the community that have this affect on the financial side, but leave the kids out of it. This is a community, and he thinks we should be focusing on and advocating for inclusion and being part of a community. So, he thinks that separation or discrimination or making different camps fighting for the same resources just seems wrong. The decisions that the School Committee is making are about the future, as well, not just about today. To him, it seems the best answer would be to rethink this policy, let every kid in Gloucester benefit from all that we provide, and let's sort out the rest and make this an opportunity for all kids in the future.

**Kristin Michel** lives at 864 Washington Street in Gloucester. She came tonight just to listen to what people had to say, and she's talked to some of the committee members about how she feels on some of the topics. She asked them to do what she did before she came here tonight to help them make their decision – Google "Can parochial students participate in public school activities" and "Can charter school children participate?" You'll get a list that shows what every state does. She will forward it to the committee. It will help them make up their mind and consider what other states have done legally and what they have allowed their School Committees to do as autonomous decision-makers. She's also asking the School Committee to look at their policies in different categories because the sports is different than the after school programs is different than the co-curricular components of education. She asked the committee to look at them differently and not consider them as one policy. She has a son at O'Maley School. Should he decide to play hockey, she would want him, because there is a limit to the number of children that are allowed to participate in that sport, to have every opportunity to do that with his classmates from his school. If there are opportunities where you can provide students to participate in individual sports like cross-country, look at that. She's going to ask the committee to look at the co-curricular components in that way.

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

**VOTED:** 6 in favor zero opposed, that the current After School Activities Policy adopted by the School Committee on January 12, 2005 and the After School Activities Policy approved by the School Committee on June 27, 2011 be referred back to Program Subcommittee for consideration.

**V. ADJOURNMENT**

On a motion by Kathy Clancy, seconded by Mrs. Sweet, it was unanimously

**VOTED:** 6 in favor zero opposed, to adjourn the School Committee Public Hearing of August 22, 2011 at 7:50 p.m.

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

*Maria Puglisi  
Recording Secretary*