

**THE GLOUCESTER PUBLIC SCHOOLS**

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

**Program Subcommittee Meeting Minutes**

Wednesday, January 29, 2020

District Office Conference Room

2 Blackburn Drive, Gloucester, MA 01930

7:00 p.m.

**Members Present**

Joel Favazza, Chairman  
Samantha Verga Watson, Vice Chairperson  
Laura Wiessen

**Administration Present**

Dr. Richard Safier, Superintendent  
Gregg Bach, Asst. Superintendent

**Also Present**

Melissa Teixeira Prince

---

**I. CALL TO ORDER** – Chairman Favazza called the meeting to order at 7:12 p.m.

**II. REPORTS/DELIBERATIONS/DISCUSSION**

- A. Goal Setting for Program Subcommittee for 2020-2021** – In response to a question by Ms. Watson, Mr. Favazza reported that over the past four years, not much of substance has come out of the Program Subcommittee to the full School Committee. Dr. Safier indicated that there are a number of policies the subcommittee may want to consider refining and stated that the administration is more than happy to provide any necessary information.

Ms. Watson asked whether the committee would be following up on information provided by the Health Department on the Youth Risk Behavior Survey.

Mr. Bach reported that he recently met with the Police Department about the grant they received for a program that would notify schools about children who have witnessed trauma. He also stated that the district has many trauma-informed practices and professional development in place. Ms. Watson stated that she is very interested in this subject and asked whether she could be involved, and Dr. Safier cautioned her about working within School Committee protocols.

Mr. Bach proposed that the subcommittee discuss the issue of chronic absenteeism, noting that 30% of GHS students and 27% of O'Maley students miss more than 18 days of school per year. He stated that the district needs to work hard on relevant, engaging, high-quality instruction AND students need to be in the classroom. In his opinion, when a student misses a day, it impacts everyone in the class.

Mr. Bach indicated that the attendance issue merits a systematic approach. He believes there is a community aspect to the issue, and he thinks School Committee

members, city councilors and healthcare professionals can provide a connection to the community. Ms. Watson stressed the importance involving pediatricians.

Mr. Bach indicated he would also like to have an educational forum with a psychologist who talks about school avoidance and anxiety. Ms. Wiessen indicated that there may be models in other districts that have high absenteeism that we can use.

Ms. Wiessen indicated that she would like to look into any policies regarding holiday celebrations in the schools. She stated that public schools are supposed to be non-denominational and her observation as a parent is that they are not, which is very isolating for students who are not of the dominant culture.

Ms. Watson asked about the protocol for trying to reengage families who are thinking about choosing out to reengage them and address their needs. There was a discussion about reaching out to families who have already choiced out with information on what the district has to offer.

Chairman Favazza noted the importance of effective communication, public relations, and marketing, and the committee discussed the hiring of a public relations employee. Ms. Wiessen stated that this is a top priority and suggested hiring a professional and having GHS students work with that person.

Chairman Favazza indicated that he is interested to hear how the GHS vocational students are given real-life opportunities to fix things in the district.

There was a discussion about the \$229,000 that will be coming to the city from the Student Opportunity Act and whether all of that money will go to the School Department. Dr. Safier reported that Jonathan Pope has been discussing that matter with Jim Destino.

Chairman Favazza would also like the subcommittee to discuss a later start time for GHS. Ms. Wiessen noted that California has implemented a later school start time so there will be a new data set coming out. Dr. Safier indicated that there is no hard evidence yet that it is beneficial. Chairman Favazza suggested that there may be evidence of absenteeism going down, social/emotional issues decreasing, etc. and he believes it is worth exploring. Ms. Watson suggested looking at Beverly's model for later start times and how they deal with the sports issue.

The list of items to be discussed by the Program Subcommittee next year are:

- Chronic absenteeism
- Crowdfunding
- Three-year turnaround plans

- Policies around holiday celebrations
- Choice out avoidance or diversion
- Public relations
- Use of vocational students
- School start times

Dr. Safier requested that these items be prioritized, and Chairman Favazza indicated that the priorities are chronic absenteeism and public relations.

Ms. Wiessen noted that Grant Harris is looking at rebuilding the GPS website and stated that she would like to meet with him as the technology liaison about the design. Chairman Favazza indicated that the city just paid to have its website redone and it would be great if the School Department could tie into that.

Ms. Wiessen reported that she called James Pope to find out what the city was doing because she wants him to work with Mr. Harris, and Mr. Pope appeared to be open to that. She stated that her understanding is that Mr. Harris is a tech guy, not a designer, and she wants to have some input on the web design. Dr. Safier suggested that the subcommittee come up with a proposal for the web design, which would then go the Building & Finance Subcommittee, and indicated that he can ask Mr. Harris to pause while the subcommittees consider it. Mr. Bach expressed the importance of hearing from Mr. Harris first before Mr. Pope gets involved.

**III. ADJOURNMENT** – On a motion by Ms. Wiessen, seconded by Ms. Watson, it was unanimously

**VOTED:** 3 in favor, 0 opposed to adjourn the Program Subcommittee Meeting of January 29, 2020 at 8:18 p.m.

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

*Maria Puglisi  
Recording Secretary*