

THE GLOUCESTER PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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

Program Subcommittee Meeting Minutes

Thursday, March 8, 2012

Superintendent's Conference Room – District Office

6:00 p.m.

Members Present

Val Gilman, Chairperson
Roger Garberg, Vice Chairman
Kathy Clancy

Administration Present

Dr. Richard Safier, Superintendent
Dr. Shayne Trubisz, Assistant Superintendent

Also Present

Tony Gross

I. CALL TO ORDER

Chairperson Gilman called the meeting to order at 6:05 p.m. and stated the mission of the Gloucester Public Schools. Mr. Garberg noted for the record that he will be recording the meeting, and Chairperson Gilman noted that there is a quorum of the full School Committee present at the meeting.

II. REPORTS/DELIBERATIONS/DISCUSSION

- A. FY2012/2013 District Improvement Plan Draft** – Dr. Safier reviewed the draft District Improvement Plan (DIP), which he stated is designed to bring coherence to the district, to unify our efforts so that there is a clear understanding of our priorities, and to align the school improvement plans (SIPs) with district-wide goals. He indicated that he met with the middle school administrative staff yesterday, and he distributed an updated section of the DIP as a result of that meeting. He will be meeting with the high school administrative staff and program leaders tomorrow to identify fundamental goals, both district-wide and school-wide, and to ensure that the program leaders' goals for their departments are part of their SIP.

Dr. Safier stated that the evidence of effectiveness in the DIP increasingly should become measurable SMART goals, which will be driven by the new evaluation system. He also stated that all schools are responsible for establishing strategies and action steps as to how they will address the goals listed in the DIP. The District Technology Committee has not yet provided a full outline of strategies and action steps, partly due to the loss of two data people. That committee is working on data management and focus questions.

Dr. Trubisz reviewed the Professional Development section of the DIP, including several goals that are driven by grants (Race to the Top).

With respect to art and PE, Dr. Safier stated that he is leaving it to the schools in their SIPS to measure specificity with respect to actual subject area content knowledge. By the end of the school year, we can see what elevates to the level of a district-wide initiative. Once the schools present their SIPs, we can see where the common areas are and make sure that the DIP is refined.

Mr. Garberg made a push again for the idea of dwelling on the measurement piece. He believes there is a lot of value to conversations about measurement at this time and wonders if we have a restricted notion of what measurement looks like and how we make progress visible to the public. He gave an example of showing progress in writing with a contest in which winners have their work posted online.

Dr. Safier stated that he has been cautious about placing measurement of progress in the DIP because he does not want to overwhelm teachers. Mr. Garberg suggested that there is a difference between specificity and a statement of what we are talking about, such as a reference to MCAS results which is clearly not spelled out. He stated that we might suggest, for example, that we intend to see enhanced rates of advanced and proficient percentages from third to fourth grade, which is a measurement that is not terribly specific.

Dr. Safier stated that the DIP is a work in progress and that we can become more definitive without creating the intimidation factor. He indicated that the DIP has not been reviewed since the determination was made by the leadership team to obtain BSRI for the entire district. Having that in place next year will enable us to use their data as opposed to waiting for MCAS. Using the district data team, we can begin to look at results district-wide and put them into the DIP.

Mr. Garberg stated that he was alarmed by the statement of goals until he realized it is referring to an activity. When he sees a goal written, he is expecting to see a statement of why we are doing it, and the DIP does not always reflect that. Rather, the goals are a statement of what we are doing and the goal is implicit. Mr. Garberg expressed concern that he is not seeing a statement of what the goal is, stated in terms of a vision of the future. He would like that vision spelled out in terms of a goal or objective.

Dr. Safier stated that the DIP is the product of the collective thinking of a group of people and that, as they articulated it, the DIP spells out what they want to accomplish over time. The DIP needs to be clarified, and the SIPs are where that level of specificity will take place.

Dr. Trubisz stated that from her perspective, the vision was that we would see data at various levels on a consistent basis across the district at a classroom, school and district level. However, we no longer collect data consistently. The district data team is now being inundated with the details of collecting data, which is a huge undertaking.

Chairperson Gilman stated that as we are putting forward the new evaluation process, this is the opportune time to talk about measurable results in a collaborative manner. Dr. Safier noted that we will not get an advisory from the DESE on how to do that until July. Having the time to get everybody together and the amount of time it takes to think these things through is also an issue. Dr. Safier agreed that by July or August, he plans to modify the DIP to put in specific academic goals. There was a discussion about using other assessments in addition to MCAS, such as periodic assessments.

Chairperson Gilman noted that there is no category in the DIP for parent satisfaction. She suggested that if the district plans on doing a survey every year, improvements in response and satisfaction could be measured. Dr. Safier indicated that finding ways of having the school community feel valued will come under “Family and Community Engagement” in the DIP.

A discussion was held on including school choice data and goals of reducing school choice out and increasing school choice in. Dr. Safier stated that there are several reasons why parents choice out of the district, and Mr. Gross believes we should not put school choice under the spotlight at this time.

Mr. Garberg expressed concern that during implementation of a new initiative, we should be questioning whether it is a good initiative in terms of some measurement, how well it has been implemented, whether it has been properly resourced, whether people have taken up the initiative, and whether there have been any kind of problems such that we know the difference between an ineffective program and an effective initiative that was not properly implemented. He stated that those questions of assessing the implementation are something that can only be measured at the point at which they are beginning, in some ways, or at least that is a great opportunity to do it. Dr. Safier indicated that we are looking to become more systemic in that particular regard.

There was a brief discussion about Dr. Safier’s entry plan. He indicated that preparation of the DIP and the entry plan are going on simultaneously and that the priority is the DIP. Most of the entry plan is written in terms of findings, and he is continuing to work on it when he can.

- B. Consideration of Annual Timetable for Program Subcommittee Topics in Support of FY2012/2013 District Improvement Plan** – The subcommittee reviewed policy File BDE entitled “Subcommittees of the School Committee” which outlines areas that the Program Subcommittee is responsible for. Chairperson Gilman sees this as a new opportunity for the subcommittee to begin conversations about what the annual calendar should look like.

Dr. Safier stated that he is not sure of the scope of what is being asked for or how to go about the process. He stated that he will continue to focus on the most important areas and report on them throughout the year, but he does not know how to do that according to a timetable at this point. Chairperson Gilman indicated that she is sensitive to not creating more work for Dr. Safier but that the subcommittee is accountable for those areas. There was a discussion about how that could be accomplished.

Mr. Garberg noted that the subcommittee would be updated regularly on developments on data and strategic initiatives, so he is less concerned about a timetable. He sees it as being at Dr. Safier's convenience.

Chairperson Gilman stated that there may be times when the subcommittee has to do some activities to support Dr. Safier in making the goals successful. She suggested that the governance subcommittee ask Dorothy Presser how the School Committee can support the DIP in terms of a meaningful agenda without creating more work for the superintendent.

Kathy Clancy noted that some of the items on the list are things the subcommittee never talks about, such as after school programs. She suggested having informal conversations about some of the items so that they are more informed. Dr. Trubisz also suggested that they think about who else besides the superintendent could be reporting on some of these things, like the data district team as a group or one of the high school departments coming and talking about who they are as a Professional Learning Community.

Mr. Gross believes that the School Committee's role in the DIP is just advisory and that the way to address what needs to be accomplished over the first six months of the next year is through the evaluation of the superintendent and the setting of goals. The best assistance that the School Committee can give the superintendent is what the committee's expectation is of his next year's accomplishments.

Chairperson Gilman suggested that the agenda for the next meeting contain a discussion of items that should be added/modified that may be missing from Policy File BDE. Mr. Gross suggested that all subcommittees perform a similar review.

- C. Update on K12 Insight Survey Process/Your Voice Website Section and Timeline Survey Completion, including Communication Plans** – Dr. Safier indicated that the contract with K12 Insight has been signed and that he has spoken with them to identify what the issues are and to develop a questionnaire. They have sent a preliminary document for review and have asked for a response by Monday. Dr. Safier expects that the survey instrument will be completed by the end of next week, and we should be in a position to launch the survey hopefully the following week. He believes there will be up to a two-week window for the survey to be completed, after which the results will be analyzed and reported.

Mr. Garberg expressed concern about ensuring that we undertake cognitive interviews of people in the community (i.e. a test group) to validate the survey before it goes out. Chairperson Gilman asked Dr. Safier to mention this to K12 Insight to find out what their thoughts are. She also requested that when he receives a draft of the survey, he let members of the committee know that they can talk to him about it.

There was a discussion about the School Committee having final approval of the questions in the survey. Mr. Garberg would like to know that we are asking the right questions, that we are distinguishing between members of the school community and the community at large, and that we are ready to stand by the results. Kathy Clancy noted that the survey results are one point of information to be used to make a decision.

Chairperson Gilman stated that she is still concerned about the lack of email addresses that we have for parents and guardians. She indicated that she has had trouble submitting her own email address and requested that Dr. Safier encourage the principals to continue to mention how to provide their email addresses on any “all calls” they make. A discussion was held on soliciting email addresses through the survey.

Mr. Gross commented that “Your Voice” on the website is inappropriately named. Dr. Safier stated that right now it is being used as a way to collect email addresses and that if we stay with K12 Insight, it will become a continual stream of interaction with the public. Chairperson Gilman suggested that Grant Harris could write a paragraph at the top of the webpage explaining that the survey is coming and that this website will become the place for the public to view updates in the future. There was a discussion about continuing with K12 Insight after the survey is completed.

D. Educational Merit of Smaller vs. Larger Class Sizes/Preliminary Discussions –

Dr. Safier reviewed a report entitled “Argument for Community Schools,” including background on the city’s interest in Fuller School and the full cost of Fuller, a review of the Plan for Effective Learning Communities and class size, and an argument for staying the course. The report also contains a summary of the research reviewed by Dr. Safier, all of which speaks to the value of small class sizes. He also noted that smaller schools make better connections with their families, and Kathy Clancy suggested including a quote that students do much better if their families are engaged with the schools.

Dr. Safier noted that there would be a disproportionate placement of low income students in a consolidated Fuller School, which would be counterproductive. Chairperson Gilman reiterated that there are currently moderate and consistent improvements in student achievement, and Kathy Clancy noted the disruption that would occur from a move of three schools to Fuller.

Mr. Gross indicated that there are community members who believe that West Parish students should be moved to Fuller, in which case we would not need to build a new school in West Gloucester. Dr. Safier stated that it does not make sense to leave a section of Gloucester that size without a school.

With respect to enrollment, Dr. Safier stated that the reality is that loss of students across the elementary schools does not justify the closing of schools. Kathy Clancy noted that the elementary level has been consistent over the past few years and that birth rates are down.

The subcommittee agreed that it should eventually take a position to support Dr. Safier's recommendation and bring it forward to the full committee. A discussion was held about the timing of such a vote.

- E. State of the Schools Education Forum/District Improvement Plan and SIP Presentations/Discussion of Format/Invitees** – Dr. Safier stated that the DIP and the SIPs will be presented at the forum. He also believes we should advocate for the school budget and give the principals an opportunity to speak on various issues. Dr. Safier suggested that the forum be held at the O'Maley School auditorium, and the subcommittee agreed to schedule it for Monday, April 30, 2012. Chairperson Gilman suggested inviting GPSD non-profits and community partners to set up information booths for a half hour social gathering before the forum.

Chairperson Gilman distributed and the subcommittee reviewed a draft list of the GPSD community partners and non-profits, to be used as an invitation list for the education forum. She suggested sending electronic invitations to all of the board chairs and asking them to send it to their members. Congressman John Tierney and seARTS were added to the invitation list. Chairperson Gilman recommended that Stephanie Delisi maintain and update this invitation list.

- F. School Committee Website/Discussion of Best Practices and Next Steps** –

Mr. Garberg reviewed his report illustrating goals, scenarios, tentative requirements, and next steps for website design. Chairperson Gilman suggested that he have a conversation with Grant Harris and Tylor Marquis, if allowed by Dr. Safier. She stated that she is very uncomfortable with the way the current School Committee website looks and would like someone on the committee to update it.

There was a discussion about management of the School Committee website.

Mr. Gross believes that if it is up to the School Committee to maintain it, it will be extremely difficult and probably disappointing to the public. Dr. Safier's understanding is that the School Committee has the opportunity to place whatever it wishes on its website. Dr. Safier agreed that Mr. Garberg should work with Mr. Harris on learning the process of updating and maintaining the website.

On a motion by Chairperson Gilman, seconded by Kathy Clancy, it was unanimously

VOTED: 3 in favor zero opposed, to recommend to the full School Committee that Roger Garberg be appointed as webmaster for the School Committee page of the GPSD website.

Mr. Gross indicated that he will probably bring up during a full School Committee meeting that we need to look at some form of policy on what information is posted on the website. Mr. Garberg agreed that there is a huge issue of process.

- G. Next Step GHS Student Council/School Committee Bimonthly Meetings and Process** – Chairperson Gilman reviewed an email she received from Mike Gilbert regarding collaboration between the School Committee and Student Council, which indicates that he is comfortable with the current process. Mr. Gross explained that he took issue with the minutes of the January 30th Student Council meeting attended by Chairperson Gilman and Dr. Safier in which Chairperson Gilman expressed her views as those of the School Committee.

Chairperson Gilman stated that she and Dr. Safier discussed with the Student Council their ability to stay for full School Committee meetings and have an opportunity to deliberate. Mr. Gross indicated that School Committee meetings with a representative of the Student Council present would satisfy the requirement of bimonthly meetings. Chairperson Gilman stated that the students enjoyed meeting at the high school and were excited about having a voice with the School Committee.

A discussion was held on meeting with the five-member Student Advisory Council versus the full Student Council body. Chairperson Gilman suggested that the next meeting should be held in 4-6 weeks at GHS with the five SAC members. She would like to continue attending the meetings herself for consistency and have another member of the committee join her on a rotational basis. Mrs. Gilman reminded the subcommittee that these meetings with the Student Council are held at GHS during the working day. Mr. Gross suggested that the School Committee liaisons for GHS could attend the meetings. Kathy Clancy suggested that it should be two members of the School Committee who are enthusiastic about this kind of meeting.

Dr. Safier would like to have the SAC report to the School Committee on what action steps they have taken since the last meeting. Chairperson Gilman stated that there may be a few referrals of issues to subcommittee for further discussion and that the SAC members could sit in on those subcommittee meetings.

III. ACTION – None

IV. ADJOURNMENT

On a motion by Kathy Clancy, seconded by Mr. Garberg, it was unanimously

VOTED: 3 in favor zero opposed, to adjourn the Program Subcommittee Meeting of March 8, 2012 at 8:51 p.m.

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

*Maria Puglisi
Recording Secretary*