

THE GLOUCESTER PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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

Amended Program Subcommittee Meeting Minutes

Thursday, May 3, 2012

Superintendent's Conference Room – District Office

6:00 p.m.

Members Present

Val Gilman, Chairperson
Kathy Clancy
Melissa Teixeira, Second Alternate*
Roger Garberg (6:33 p.m.)

Administration Present

Dr. Richard Safier, Superintendent
Dr. Shayne Trubisz, Assistant Superintendent
Principal Gregg Bach
Principal Cheryl Ann Parker
Principal Ellen Sibley
Principal Jean Perry

Also Present

Melissa Teixeira
Lisa Groleau, West Parish PTO (6:26 p.m.)
Sherry Lewis, West Parish PTO (6:26 p.m.)

*Ms. Teixeira acted as a member of the subcommittee until Mr. Garberg's arrival at 6:33 p.m.

I. CALL TO ORDER

Chairperson Gilman called the meeting to order at 6:01 p.m., stated the mission of the Gloucester Public Schools, and welcomed the principals to the meeting. She noted that once Mr. Garberg arrives, there will be a quorum of the full School Committee due to Ms. Teixeira's presence.

II. REPORTS/DELIBERATIONS/DISCUSSION

A. Elementary School Attendance Policy – First Reading – Chairperson Gilman stated that the first reading of this policy has not yet been recommended to the full School Committee. Dr. Safier indicated that the policy has been brought forward by the principals in good faith in an attempt to increase the capacity for our teachers to instruct their students.

Mr. Bach reviewed the background of the policy and indicated that much of it already exists in the student handbooks but it has no "teeth." He indicated that there is a growing and substantial problem with attendance and tardiness and stated that this new draft policy was brought about by years of teachers indicating that absences and tardiness are out of control.

Mr. Bach stated that there are several students who have missed almost 180 days in their six years of elementary school, meaning they have lost a year of education, and that in many cases, we are spending a lot of money on special education, Title I and intervention to assist students who are simply not there for the instruction. He also pointed out that we are spending an enormous amount of money on reading programs and coaches. In addition, he stated that there is a body of research about a linkage between attendance and behavioral issues.

Mr. Bach indicated that the policy is grounded in research that states there is a statistically significant difference in student achievement when they miss more than 10-15 days of school per year and that it is measurable much earlier than that (5-10 days). He stated that the principals will have some kind of recognition each marking period for students who have achieved a certain level of attendance, which has been shown to be effective.

Mrs. Sibley presented recent data indicating that out of 304 students at Beeman, 82 have been absent more than ten times this year, 23 have been absent more than 20 times, 32 have been tardy more than ten times, and 16 have been tardy more than 20 times. One particular student has been tardy 72 times this year. This data is similar in all of the elementary schools and is the reason for trying to come up with a policy that has more “teeth.”

Ms. Parker discussed the disruption that occurs in the classroom when a student comes in late or after an extended absence, which takes away from the other students, also.

Mrs. Sibley indicated that four students at Beeman missed all but two days of the window for MCAS because they were on vacation in Florida. Mr. Bach stated that if a student misses MCAS for a non-medical reason, it is counted as a zero.

A discussion was held on the cost benefit of hiring a truant officer, which was very successful in the past. Dr. Safier stated that if the policy is approved, it would be a consideration for FY14. Mr. Bach indicated that even if there are only a couple of district-wide who have to repeat a grade because of attendance, the cost of that extra year of education and perhaps additional services will pay for a truant officer. Dr. Safier suggested contacting the police department to see if there are grants for such a position. Ms. Teixeira pointed out that the law states that the district **shall** hire a truant officer and that the district can join with other school districts to hire a truant officer.

Lisa Groleau and Sherry Lewis joined the meeting at 6:26 p.m.

Dr. Safier briefly reviewed the attendance policies at O’Maley and the high school.

Mr. Garberg joined the meeting at 6:33 p.m.

The subcommittee read the proposed policy and discussed the following:

- Provisions of MGL, Chapter 76 with respect to attendance at school
- Using the terms “standard” and “urgent/medical” instead of “excused” and “unexcused” with respect to absences from school
- Implementing a basic sickness (involuntary illness) allowance for students who do not have a habit of being absent from school
- Discretion of principals for long-term illness, braces, medication visits, etc.
- Consequences of a parent not attending a conference or training
- Including the definition of a CHINS petition in the policy
- Considerations for repeating a grade

Ms. Teixeira stated that she is adamantly against including the threat of a CHINS action in the policy and that she will not support any policy that includes intervention by DCF. Mr. Garberg believes the policy should be more focused towards the families to which this intervention would potentially apply according to their past history.

Mr. Garberg finds the policy on tardiness confusing and believes that absences and tardiness should be combined and treated the same way. He believes the community will consider a student being five minutes late as quite different from missing a whole day of school. Mrs. Sibley explained that being five minutes late is much more disruptive than being absent and she believes it is important to treat them separately. Ms. Teixeira suggested including the disruption caused by tardiness in the policy. She also stated that tardiness could be an indicator of something going on at home.

The committee agreed that TA (tardy-absent) will be noted in the section regarding absences, as well, and the actions to address tardiness will be the same as those for absences.

Ms. Parker left the meeting at 7:39 p.m.

The committee discussed the following with respect to dismissal and unauthorized vacation:

- Parents going directly to their child’s classroom
- Requests for changes in after-school and dismissal plans
- Student use of the office telephone – will be removed; does not apply to absence and tardiness
- Approval for extended absences

Chairperson Gilman stated that the subcommittee is still not yet ready to vote a first reading. She recommended that after the first reading, a public hearing be held on the policy with the principals discussing the data and the effect on student achievement. Kathy Clancy and Mr. Garberg supported the idea of having a public hearing. Dr. Safier

asked the School Committee to take into account the fact that the policy involves change and accountability, which will shade the nature of the public hearing. Mr. Bach recommended sharing the information with the PTOs, as well.

Kathy Clancy expressed concern with the timing of trying to have the policy in place and in the student handbooks on September 1st. Mr. Bach indicated that it would be acceptable to have it in place within the first couple of weeks of school. There was a discussion about showing parents the draft policy at PTO meetings.

Mr. Bach will make the revisions to the policy, and Dr. Safier will then send it to Naomi Stonberg for review. Another meeting was scheduled for Wednesday, May 23, 2012 at 5:30 p.m. in the City Hall conference room for the first reading of the policy.

Mr. Bach and Mrs. Sibley left the meeting at 8:22 p.m.

- B. Community Outreach Discussion/Brainstorming/West Parish MSBA Process** – Lisa Groleau, president of the West Parish PTO, presented a “help document” that she drafted to ask the West Parish community to speak in favor of the feasibility study at the public hearing on May 22nd. She stated that the Mayor is also hosting an informational meeting about the feasibility study at West Parish on May 15th. The subcommittee reviewed the “help document” and made some revisions to it. The subcommittee also discussed the following:

- Including the FAQ information at the beginning of the document
- Writing an article for the newspaper on the value of smaller schools and requesting support for the feasibility study (Kathy or Jonathan)

Ms. Teixeira left the meeting at 8:36 p.m.

The subcommittee also reviewed the timeline drafted by Mrs. Groleau and made revisions to it. (See attached.) Kathy Clancy believes it is important for the other principals to communicate with their own PTOs about the value of supporting the feasibility study. There was a discussion about how the other elementary schools will benefit from a new West Parish School.

Dr. Safier provided documents about the feasibility study from MSBA, which he will provide to all of the School Committee members electronically.

The following matters were also discussed:

- Asking parents to call relatives in Gloucester to attend the public hearing
- Posting “help document” on West Parish website
- Submission of comments to City Council

- C. Further Discussion of School Committee Program Subcommittee Responsibilities, Policy File: BDE – Tabled.**

III. ACTION – None

IV. ADJOURNMENT

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

VOTED: 3 in favor zero opposed, to adjourn the Program Subcommittee Meeting of May 3, 2012 at 9:06 p.m.

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

*Maria Puglisi
Recording Secretary*

Timeline for Feasibility Study Advocacy

Thursday, May 3	Sit with Greg Verga
Monday, May 7	Send “Help Document” home to WP parents and put on WP website
Thursday, May 10	Send paper reminder home to WP parents re: informational meeting
Monday, May 14	“All call” reminder re: information meeting
Tuesday, May 15	Informational meeting at West Parish
Thursday, May 17	Send paper reminder home to WP parents re: public hearing
Date?	Send informational document to other PTOs
Date?	“My View” column by Kathy or Jonathan
Date?	School Committee members meet with City Councilors
Monday, May 21	“All call” reminder to WP parents re: public hearing
Tuesday, May 22	City Council public hearing