

THE GLOUCESTER PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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

Program Subcommittee Meeting Minutes

Thursday, December 7, 2017

District Office Conference Room

2 Blackburn Drive, Gloucester, MA 01930

5:00 p.m.

Members Present

Kathy Clancy, Chairperson

Joel Favazza

Administration Present

Gregg Bach, Asst. Superintendent

Matt Fusco, Veterans Principal

I. CALL TO ORDER – Chairperson Clancy called the meeting to order at 5:20 p.m. and stated the mission of the Gloucester Public Schools.

II. REPORTS/DELIBERATIONS/DISCUSSION

A. Therapy Dog Policy – Mr. Fusco reported that he was able to find several different policies regarding therapy animals (included in the packet) and distributed a guide from Charlotte’s Litter entitled “Bringing Therapy Dogs to Your School.” He indicated that his speech and language therapist got her dog trained as a certified therapy dog and they are waiting to find out what the policy will look like, at which time they will decide how to introduce the dog to the kids, identify the students with which the dog will be working, when the dog should be at school, etc. Mr. Fusco noted that the other elementary schools are extremely interested in finding out how this will work.

Mr. Bach stated that he believes the Manchester policy is very thorough and well-done but noted that it continually refers to “the handler,” with the assumption that the handler is treated as an entity separate from the school and assumes full responsibility and liability for any damage to school property and injuries caused by the dog. The Manchester policy also references evaluation of the therapy dog and registration at least every two years, as well as an insurance requirement.

Mr. Bach believes that the companies that train and certify therapy dogs and their handlers have liability insurance that covers the dog and handler. He suggested that we specify in our policy the amount of the insurance and what it covers. He also indicated that we need to address whether we should accept proposals from outside therapy dog handlers. Chairperson Clancy stated that if the other elementary schools are interested, they probably do not have a staff member with a certified therapy dog, so we will need to consider outside handlers.

Mr. Fusco pointed out that the service animal section of the Animals in School policy, File IMG, states that the service animal is the responsibility of the owner or handler.

Mr. Favazza noted that if someone gets hurt, the school is going to get sued even if the handler has insurance. Mr. Bach suggested that Tom Lafleur research whether the district's insurance covers therapy dogs. He noted that the guide from Charlotte's Litter states that dog handlers carry coverage in \$1-2 million to cover risks and liabilities.

Mr. Fusco reported that Riverside School in Danvers has a therapy dog and stated that he will check in with the principal about their policy. Chairperson Clancy requested a draft policy for review at the next meeting, as well as information about insurance coverage.

Finally, there was a discussion about having a trial period at Veterans before allowing other schools to request a therapy dog.

- B. Consolidation of O'Maley Innovation Middle School and Gloucester High School** – Chairperson Clancy indicated that Tony Gross provided FEMA maps of Gloucester High School at the last Budget and Finance Subcommittee meeting showing that all but the school itself is in a flood zone. Mr. Favazza believes the second and third floors of the science wing are not in the flood zone and stated that we could have parking on the first floor and then two floors of classrooms above it.

Chairperson Clancy asked whether the consolidation makes sense from an educational perspective. Mr. Favazza responded that he wants to start thinking about how to deal with the dwindling population and noted that consolidation with Rockport may address the problem. He understands that there is no support on the School Committee right now to continue looking at this issue, which is fine, but he would like to explore it in the near future.

Chairperson Clancy stated that if a major rebuild was necessary, she does not believe it would make sense to do it at the high school. She agrees that the number of students has declined but does not believe it is continuing to decline. Mr. Favazza noted that the MSBA enrollment projection for the EGS/Veterans project shows the district trending downwards, and based on what he sees in the real estate field, Gloucester is getting less and less affordable for young families, which he does not believe will change in the future. Chairperson Clancy stated that as the district continues to improve and we replace elementary schools, families will want to be here.

Mr. Favazza stated that he would like to explore potential options for the future of the middle and high school before it becomes a crisis, such as the current situation with the preschool. Mr. Bach agreed that it is important to think about it and noted that he made a suggestion two years ago that Rockport and Gloucester start talking about regionalization because it is going to take a minimum of five years to make it happen.

Mr. Bach indicated that Rockport has the same or a steeper decline in their 10-year projections and even if their school choice numbers stay where they are, they will not be able to sustain the district. He recommended that if nothing happens this spring with respect to regionalization and Rockport clearly signals that they are not interested, we should start looking into the five- to ten-year plan for ourselves and stated that we may want to consider different grade level configurations of the schools.

Finally, there was a discussion about not confusing issues for the City Council while we are working on the EGS/Veterans building project. It was the consensus of the committee to table this matter and revisit it in a year, if necessary.

III. ACTION – None.

IV. ADJOURNMENT – On a motion by Mr. Favazza, seconded by Chairperson Clancy, it was unanimously

VOTED: 2 in favor, 0 opposed to adjourn the Program Subcommittee Meeting of December 7, 2017 at 6:03 p.m.

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

*Maria Puglisi
Recording Secretary*