



SCHOOL COMMITTEE

Goal-Setting Workshop
11 a.m., August 20, 2021
Room 28, Rodman Building

Participating: Kristian Merenda, Chair
Maureen Moran, Clerk
Kendall O'Halloran, Member
Jennifer-Fischer Mueller, Superintendent of Schools (retired)
Derek Folan, Interim Superintendent of Schools
Debbie Rooney, Director of Teaching and Learning
Dorothy Presser, Massachusetts Association of School Committees (MASC)

Vice Chair Nichola Gallagher and Member Chuck Rae were absent from the meeting.

Chair Merenda opened the meeting at 11:04 a.m.

Moved: Maureen Moran

Second: Kendall O'Halloran

Vote 3-0

Superintendent Folan opened the workshop with an update concerning the K-12 mask mandate issued by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE). He informed the committee that the mandate could be extended after Oct. 1, 2021. However, if an 80 percent vaccination threshold was met, then vaccinated staff and students could potentially unmask. Members discussed what current vaccination rates were; that 15-year-olds were not yet vaccinated; monitoring other states' infection rates following unmasking; including CPS vaccination status on the district's COVID dashboard; and the CDC recommendation that full masking remain in areas considered COVID hotspots.

School Committee members expressed concern about potential violence against members in School Committee meetings because of upticks in violence across the country around masking in schools. Superintendent Folan said he had spoken with Police Chief Berkowitz about having an officer present at an upcoming School Committee meeting.

Chair Merenda opened the discussion of the district goals and strategic plan development process with the statement that no plan is perfect; the need to be realistic what can be done and/or changed; the goal of capturing the School Committee's point of view; and the desire to establish a template for future goal-setting processes.

Superintendent Folan stated that CPS' current strategic framework is considered an exemplar. Indicators of excellence need to be linked to outcomes. Equity and rigor are paired together, and in the education world, there's no value in placement of one over the other. The goal is to be responsive and tailor an approach to what each child needs, either acceleration or support.

During discussion of CPS pursuing an equity audit, Ms. Moran asked what an equity audit involves. Superintendent Folan said an equity audit looks at structures within a school district that inhibit students from fully accessing their education. An equity audit involves a deep analysis of student performance, particularly of subgroups.

Superintendent Folan discussed an earlier study CPS had done around race, equity and access. Focus groups included teachers, parents and community members. Canton Families Embracing Diversity (CFED) formed following the study.

Members encouraged Superintendent Folan to help the community understand the need for an equity audit, specifically, to bring along stakeholders and educate them about an equity audit.

Superintendent Folan said that accommodating the needs of all students in the district is important, as is hearing diverse voices. Chair Merenda supported identifying underperforming groups, and recommended keeping an eye on who could achieve more, if given the opportunity.

School Committee members discussed ways to help families better understand school curriculum. Chair Merenda referenced Dedham Country Day School as an example of an accessible, family-friendly online curriculum resource. Ms. Moran recommended CPS look at parents “as partners” and provide greater transparency around curriculum so families can have a clearer sense of what their children are learning. Ms. O’Halloran referenced the online GMS open house and in-person math workshops for parents.

During a discussion of making CHS graduations requirements MassCore compliant, Ms. Moran said that with 95 percent of CHS graduating seniors currently achieving MassCore compliance, the next step was a School Committee vote to formalize MassCore-compliant CHS graduation requirements. Chair Merenda asked where gaps existed.

Superintendent Folan said he has spoken with CHS Principal Jeff Sperling, who would do a study of where gaps exist, as well as the waiver process that exists. He said some high-achieving school districts don’t have MassCore-compliant graduation requirements.

Ms. Moran said she’d like a free-standing civics class at CHS, not just a civics project. MASC’s Dorothy Presser reminded those present that graduation requirement changes also require a change in district policy.

During a discussion of Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS), Director of Teaching and Learning Debbie Rooney said that MTSS is a general education initiative that provides support to students through differentiated access to the curriculum. Superintendent Folan said that students are to be educated in the least restrictive learning environment. Ms. Rooney said that technology, such as the STAR Assessment, can help with differentiated instruction and student support, as can teacher-led instruction.

Superintendent Folan discussed the best learning environment for students is one where students having a sense of belonging; feel ownership over their learning; and feel physically and emotionally safe.

In setting district goals, Ms. Presser reminded those present to keep in mind doing what is reasonable, feasible and achievable. Seeking to do too much can result in failure.

School Committee members discussed the need for twice-yearly stakeholder surveys, to allow for the collection of longitudinal data. They discussed ways School Committee could access the data and recommended that district leadership “overcommunicate” to stakeholders that privacy is protected and results are anonymous.

Ms. Presser said a late fall survey that is repeated in spring allows for growth and course correction.

When discussing a district professional development goal, Superintendent Folan said that Readers' and Writers' Workshop was moving from introduction to implementation. The district was moving to deeper learning and project-based learning, which is less superficial and involves more critical thinking. Deeper learning was the basis of the statement of interest for the Massachusetts School Building Authority (MSBA) GMS application. The pandemic prompted a positive change in how CPS is doing student assessments. In five years, CPS will not be a traditional school district but a cutting-edge one. He referenced a new technology teacher at GMS; Project Lead the Way; and multiple 3-D printers in the district. He said CPS will be known as a progressive, innovative teaching and learning district.

In discussing what opportunities exist for students who are "ready to launch," Chair Merenda asked what systems are in place to allow them to achieve. Superintendent Folan said a number of factors are involved: infrastructure, program design, and budget requests. He recommended trusting the process. Ms. Rooney said that Journeys, the former ELA program, lost kids who were above or below grade level. She wanted to see how Readers' and Writer's Workshop would engage kids in class.

Chair Merenda asked that students who didn't require intervention during WIN blocks be engaged with activities other than a logic puzzle. She asked that CPS be thoughtful about what is done with those students' time. Ms. Rooney said she would see what's in place and what needs work.

While discussing a district goal for a new student information system (SIS), School Committee members heard that Rediker, the district's current SIS, is out of date. Members supported moving toward an updated and upgraded SIS.

Superintendent Folan informed members that he'd like to present his proposed district goals on Sept. 2, with a presentation of his proposed superintendent goals on Sept. 23. This schedule would allow him to solicit input from Vice Chair Gallagher and Mr. Rae, who were not at the workshop.

Members endorsed Superintendent Folan's timeline as reasonable. Chair Merenda encouraged him to efficient and transformational with his goals.

Ms. Presser presented an overview of the DESE Superintendent Evaluation process. It's a five-step process, although as a new superintendent, Superintendent Folan would not do the self-assessment. She said the process would involve understanding the goals mean and what's going to happen this year. In late winter, the School Committee would conduct Superintendent Folan's formative assessment. The formal summative assessment would occur during the summer.

Ms. Presser informed the group that DESE has four standards a superintendent is to be evaluated upon. She recommended Superintendent Folan pick six to eight indicators – out of 20 – on which to be evaluated. At the end-of-the-year cycle, Superintendent Folan would present an end-of-the-year report. Each School Committee member prepares his or her own evaluation of the superintendent. All evaluations would be submitted to the chair for compilation into a composite document.

During a discussion of the School Committee meeting agenda process, Ms. Presser and School Committee members addressed the need for planning; receiving documents in a timely fashion to allow members time to prepare for meetings; and reporting on progress related to meeting district goals in the meeting. Chair Merenda discussed categories for regular agenda items, including school spotlights, rather than just hearing about individual schools during the handbook and School Improvement Plan (SIP) reviews; highlighting key school organizations; curriculum spotlights; inviting CPS retirees to School Committee meetings to be recognized as a way to be equitable to recognizing all retirees, rather than members attending only the retirement parties they hear about; recognizing CPS staff receiving awards,

such as achieving professional teaching status; and expanding the student groups and activities recognized.

During a discussion of adding curriculum spotlights to the School Committee meeting agenda, Ms. Rooney asked if parents would be asking question during the spotlights, recommending that curriculum conversation happen at the school level. Chair Merenda agreed, and explained a curriculum report should be from a director's perspective. Ms. O'Halloran recommended that core, guiding questions should be the same for each subject.

Superintendent Folan recommended guidelines for presentation length, as well as input/questions ahead of time. Ms. Presser recommended developing a pathway for parents to ask questions.

While discussing School Committee goals, Ms. Presser recommended setting goals within School Committee's purview, including student achievement, financial management, and community engagement. She expressed surprise at the list of CPS, town and regional committees that involve School Committee representation. The group discussed whether some roles are better described as "liaisons."

Chair Merenda closed the workshop at 4:44 p.m.

Moved: Maureen Moran

Second: Kendall O'Halloran

Vote 3-0