

NORTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS
Norton, Massachusetts

RECEIVED
NORTON TOWN CLERK

NORTON SCHOOL COMMITTEE
MINUTES OF MEETING

2024 JAN 18 AM 8:49

Date of School Committee Meeting: Thursday, December 14, 2023

Location: Norton Middle School Library

Present: Committee Members: Chairperson Mrs. Sheri Cohen, Mr. Nick Schleicher, Mrs. Justine Callanan, and Mr. Dan Sheedy ***Not present:*** Vice Chairperson Mr. Deniz Savas ***Also present:*** Superintendent of Schools Dr. Jennifer O'Neill, Assistant Superintendent for Teaching and Learning Dr. Brian Ackerman, and School Business Administrator Mrs. Kristine Hadfield

Call to Order: Chairperson Cohen called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m.

Pledge of Allegiance

Chairperson Cohen announced that the meeting was being recorded by Norton Media and asked if anyone was recording to let the Committee know.

NEED Grants Announcement

Kate Conway, President and Gina Heaney, Treasurer, along with several board members of the Norton Embracing Educational Development (NEED) Organization announced the recipients of NEED Grants. NEED awards provide funding for classroom enrichment programs and clubs and activities. Grant recipients present at the meeting discussed their grant projects and expressed their gratitude and appreciation to NEED for all they do. NEED also thanked the community as well as other partners who will partially support some of the grants awarded. The grants were disbursed to:

JCS	\$1,430.00	Purchase of books aligned with SEL curriculum to create grade level libraries
JCS	\$1,500.00	Partial funding to bring mosaic artist, Joshua Winer, to work with students completing a mural. Funding from the SPO and Mass Cultural Council will also support this project.
JCS/LGN/HAY	\$1,056.96	<i>Ultimate SLP</i> platform access for use with students
JCS/LGN	\$428.26	Playground Communication Stations – NEED funding will support the board at JCS, and the Flutie Foundation will provide funding for the board at LGN
HAY	\$2,506.37	Percussion instruments for 5 th grade band
NMS	\$2,326.74	Transport equipment to move chairs and music stands
NMS	\$1,840.00	Explore Learning <i>Gizmos</i> subscription 7 th grade science
NHS	\$3,800.00	Partial funding for music field trip to New York City Heritage Music Festival
NHS	\$1,613.40	Equipment and supplies to investigate the oxygen cycle
NHS	\$3,500.00	Innovative construction project aimed at impacting a societal problem

In total, NEED granted just over \$20,000. The committee and Dr. O'Neill thanked NEED and recognized them for their contributions to the district and the difference they make in classrooms through their generous funding.

Vote to Approve Minutes of October 23, 2023 Open Session Meeting:

MOTION: by Mr. Sheedy to approve Minutes of October 23, 2023 Open Session Meeting

SECOND: by Mr. Schleicher

VOTE: 3 - 0 - 1 Motion Carries

Vote to Approve Minutes of November 16, 2023 Open Session Meeting:

It was noted on page 4, Other Business, to correct the spelling of "Justin" to "Justine."

MOTION: by Mr. Sheedy to approve Minutes of November 16, 2023 Open Session Meeting with change as noted

SECOND: by Mr. Schleicher

VOTE: 3 - 0 - 1 Motion Carries

Warrants:

Mrs. Cohen reported that the following School Expense Warrants and School Payroll Warrants were reviewed and approved and are to be entered into the public record:

School Expense Warrant:

November 16, 2023	\$ 709,875.64
December 7, 2023	\$ 643,435.22

School Payroll Warrant:

November 2, 2023	\$1,170,934.02
November 16, 2023	\$1,214,533.02
November 30, 2023	\$1,181,100.73

Student Representatives Update:

Gabriela Kenaan and Antonio Romano were both performing at the High School Winter Concert. Dr. O'Neill shared their update with the Committee on school activities as follows:

HAY - Students have been participating in Winter Festive Spirit Days, and participation has been excellent. They have already had Flannel Day, Crazy Sock Day, and College or Team Jersey Day. Next week will have more spirit days such as Decades, Concert Band T-shirt, and Ugly Sweater Days. Next Thursday the HAY PTO will again host Holiday Bingo Games with Mr. Geoghegan calling out the numbers. Two winners from each class for each BINGO game will win prizes in this fun event. NHS National English Honor Society students will be coming over reading to HAY students. This is a yearly tradition like "Read Across America Day" in March. Next Friday will feature the annual Students v. Staff Volleyball games.

NHS - Two high ranking military officers - Lieutenant General Jonathan Braga and Colonel Michael Wagner, an alumnus of NHS, recently visited the high school. Both officers met with students and shared their experiences in the military. As part of the build-up to the break,

teachers have been doing themed, dress-up days such as Slipper Day and Channel Your Flannel Day. Student Council has been helping to make the school feel festive by decorating the teachers' doors. The Norton Chorus and Band are putting on a Winter Concert tonight. There will also be a Coffee House on Thursday, December 21st.

NMS - Winter sports are underway, and teams are looking forward to successful seasons. The NMS Winter Concert took place last night with both the band and chorus performing several excellent pieces under the direction of Dr. Bianca and Ms. McAuliffe. NMS recently hosted representatives from the Andover public school system yesterday. Andover educators came to NMS to learn about how the school is run and what goes into making the school a NELMS Spotlight School. They came away very impressed by our students, staff, culture, and infrastructure. Next week NMS will be celebrating a modified version of Festivus with fun activities, decorating and various dress down days leading up to the December break.

Announcement of Class of 2024 Adams Scholarship Recipients – Dr. Jennifer O'Neill:

Dr. O'Neill congratulated the Class of 2024 Adams Scholarship recipients. The list of recipients was furnished to the Committee members prior to the meeting. The John and Abigail Adams Scholarship is a merit-based program that provides a credit toward tuition for up to eight semesters of undergraduate education at a Massachusetts state college or university. The Committee discussed how and when students may use the scholarship as well as how Norton matches up against other districts and congratulated the 47 students who received the scholarship.

Norton High School Items:

Dr. Ethan Dolleman was present to address the School Committee on NHS items.

New Course Proposal: Dr. Dolleman and Dr. Katherine Rego, NHS Science Academic Coordinator, provided detailed information on a new course for approval by the Committee for the 2024-2025 school year: Principles of Human Disease.

Discussion ensued regarding the process of introducing new courses to the course catalog, how the catalog is reviewed, and the determination of which courses will run annually.

MOTION: by Mr. Sheedy to Approve the Principles of Human Disease Course

SECOND: by Mr. Schleicher

VOTE: 4 – 0 Motion Carries

Mid-Year and Final Assessments: Prior to the start of the meeting, the Committee was presented a letter from the Educators of Norton High School in support of continuing mid-year and final assessments including half days in the calendar for assessment analysis. Dr. Dolleman presented the Committee with a proposal to amend the school calendar by adding early dismissal days to the high school for the purpose of mid-year and final assessments, specifically, January 24th and 25th, and June 10th and 11th. These dates would move if the calendar were impacted by school closures extending the school year. He addressed how the assessments offer data on student performance and skill mastery and the intent to align assessments with school and district priorities including Integrated Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (IMTSS) and Portrait of a Graduate. NHS has worked to develop more portfolio-based assessments and has moved away

from the traditional exam format. Additionally, the grading structure has been modified to reduce the impact of mid-year and final assessments on students' overall grades.

The Committee discussed with Dr. Dolleman how common assessments are developed and how the results are analyzed. Dr. O'Neill commented that the district's IMTSS process has created the opportunity with common assessments to use the results as another data point to identify strengths and weaknesses and give the opportunity for timely intervention. The Committee also discussed with Dr. Dolleman how Norton High School compares to other districts for the practice of administering mid-year and final assessments. It was clarified for the Committee that NHS does not formally survey past students regarding how they viewed their preparation for college. Mr. Eric Grasso, NHS Math teacher and Norton resident, addressed the committee, expressing his support for these assessments to ensure a rigorous academic experience and prepare students for success beyond high school.

The Committee thanked the High School for the work that has been done to address concerns about the weight of assessment grades and developing meaningful assessments while maintaining high academic expectations. It was recommended that going forward mid-year and final assessments be embedded in the initial academic calendar with disclosure that the dates will move if the calendar is impacted by school closures. Dr. O'Neill stated that the 2024-2025 academic calendar will be presented at the next meeting and confirmed that the half days are for students only. NHS educators will be engaged in assessment grading and analysis. The third half day on the calendar in January on the 26th is districtwide, and all educators will be participating in professional development.

MOTION: by Mr. Sheedy to Change the School Calendar for NHS to Include Two Additional Half Days in January and June 2024

SECOND: by Mr. Schleicher

VOTE: 4 – 0 Motion Carries

Discussion on Virtual Meeting Options – Mrs. Karen Winsper:

Returning to this topic from the November 16th meeting, Mrs. Winsper presented options to the Committee for providing remote access to School Committee meetings including associated constraints and costs. The Committee discussed the options and will resume offering remote access to meetings via a Zoom webinar link using existing equipment. No additional funds will be used to upgrade equipment, and no changes will be made to the existing meeting schedule for the purpose of providing remote access. Audio quality remains the biggest concern for remote access to meetings. The Committee will explore options to hold meetings at offsite locations for the upcoming school year to address this concern. Remote access to meetings will be limited to viewing/listening to the webinar. Public comment on agenda items will be restricted to in-person attendance. Open Meeting Law regulations were discussed, and Dr. O'Neill will confirm with legal counsel that this plan would comply. Information will be shared with families and the community at large regarding how to request accommodations if necessary.

Discussion on Capital Requests – Mrs. Kristine Hadfield:

Mrs. Hadfield reviewed the FY25 Capital Requests for Spring Town Meeting. For the first request which is the topcoat for the NMS second access road, the hope is that the cost for asphalt will go down in the spring, but as of now it has not. The second item is the final lease payment on one of the mini-buses, and the final request is for a new K-5 ELA curriculum program. Two

programs will be field-tested prior to the end of February. There is an opportunity for grant funding to offset 50% of the cost through DESE, but those competitive grants have not been awarded yet. The Committee discussed the curriculum evaluation process for the new ELA program.

Warrant changes can be made up to one week prior to Town Meeting, but the requests are due to the town by December 20th. In the previous ten years or so, the School Department has been able to use School Choice funds to cover the cost of adopting new curriculum. Since those funds are now being used to pay for staffing and general supplies, the curriculum costs are included as a capital request. The Committee discussed balancing requests and projecting out future requests, as well as planning future discussions for two meetings prior to the submission deadline. Dr. O'Neill will reach out to other town departments regarding any projects or requests such as the paving for the NMS access that should be collaborative in nature.

Acknowledgement and Vote to Accept Cash Donation – Dr. Jennifer O'Neill:

Dr. O'Neill acknowledged and thanked the Stern family for their generosity in donating funds to the schools. The donation will be used to purchase crayons and other art supplies for each school. The Committee expressed their gratitude for the continued support of the Stern family. The Committee would be interested in receiving follow-up from the schools regarding what was purchased with the funds.

MOTION: by Mr. Schleicher to Accept the Cash Donation

SECOND: by Mr. Sheedy

VOTE: 4 – 0 Motion Carries

FY 2025 Budget Process Update – Mrs. Kristine Hadfield:

Mrs. Hadfield provided an update on the progress of budget planning for FY25. Each department has submitted level-services requests, and Dr. O'Neill, Dr. Ackerman, and Mrs. Hadfield are in the process of meeting with each department to review their requests. Additional staffing requests have not been considered at this point except for a Kindergarten position at JCS as a placeholder which was replaced after being removed during previous budget cuts. There are still many variables, but the potential is for a double-digit increase.

The Committee discussed factors such as the significant increases in special education costs, contractual salary increases, and increases in operational costs. The outside revenue category should be an ongoing conversation. Since FY20, the School Department has been bringing up the idea of a fiscal cliff. Federal grant funding and School Choice have been used to supplement the budget rather than for one-time purchases. This has kept the schools from facing deeper cuts. Those grant funds will not be available for FY25.

The discussion moved to data from comparable districts in terms of teacher salaries, per pupil expenditures, and MCAS performance. Dr. O'Neill will share data looking at surrounding communities, comparable districts, and districts in our athletic conference. The Committee discussed how soon potential cuts should be shared with families, staff, and the community. The administrative team will be working to identify areas of flexibility and to prioritize how to reduce the impact of any potential cuts, and the Committee will continue to have difficult conversations about how to realistically plan for budget cuts. Dr. O'Neill and Mrs. Hadfield are

meeting with the Town Manager and Accountant and will continue to be transparent in outlining the needs of the district.

Other Business:

Wreaths Across America will be placing wreaths on Saturday, December 14th, at noon at the Norton Common Cemetery.

The SEPAC Penguin Patch will be also be held on Saturday from 10:00 to 1:00 at the LGN. Students can purchase trinkets for gift giving.

Adjourn:

MOTION: by Mr. Sheedy to adjourn meeting

SECOND: by Mr. Schleicher

VOTE: 4 - 0 Motion Carries

The meeting adjourned at 8:14 p.m.


Next Meeting Dates:

- Thursday, January 11, 2024, at 6:00 p.m., in the NMS Library

Documents and Other Exhibits Used at Meeting:

- Class of 2024 Adams Scholarship Recipients
- Principles of Human Disease Course Proposal
- Curriculum Map Template – Principles of Human Disease
- School Committee Virtual Meetings – Considerations and Pricing
- FY25 Capital Request Spring Town Meeting
- Donation Letter

Respectfully Submitted,
Jennifer O'Neill, Ed.D.
Secretary Pro Tem



Sheri Cohen, Chairperson

Deniz Savas, Vice-Chairman



Justine Callanan

Nick Schleicher



Dan Sheedy