

NORTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS
Norton, Massachusetts

NORTON SCHOOL COMMITTEE
MINUTES OF MEETING

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NORTON TOWN CLERK

2024 FEB -9 AM 9:02

Date of School Committee Meeting: Thursday, January 25, 2024

Location: Norton Middle School Library

Present: Committee Members: Chairperson Mrs. Sheri Cohen, Vice Chairperson Mr. Deniz Savas, Mr. Nick Schleicher (6:20), Mrs. Justine Callanan, and Mr. Dan Sheedy ***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.

Project 351 and Playbook – Mr. Ronnie Goldstein and Students

Mr. Ronnie Goldstein, NMS Assistant Principal, addressed the Committee regarding Project 351, the largest organization of its kind in the country. Its goal is to train a new generation of service leaders. All 351 communities in the Commonwealth chose an 8th grade ambassador each year.

Mr. Goldstein was joined by previous ambassadors, Vanessa Lee and Benson Chang, who discussed The Playbook Initiative. Project 351, in partnership with the Boston Celtics, created a “social playbook” to inspire a dialogue on discrimination, race, ethnicity, religion, gender, orientation and identity and ultimately equip kids with the social skills to intervene in challenging social situations. Thirty middle school student leaders participated in a workshop at NMS last week. The next workshop is February 15th, and the Day of Action is in March. These students have also been invited to visit the Auerbach Center on February 12th to participate in activities with the Celtics and students from one other school.

Mr. Goldstein introduced this year’s Project 351 ambassador, Courtney Bailey, who presented her experiences with the program so far. The annual spring service project she will spearhead is a clothing drive which will benefit Cradles to Crayons. The Committee commented on how great it is to see students continue to be involved in this program and to grow as leaders and thanked the students for their participation.

Principal Vincent Hayward addressed the Committee to recognize Mr. Goldstein and congratulate him on his selection as a project 351 2024 Service Hero. This award was given in recognition of his years of service and dedication to Project 351. He has been deeply involved for 13 of the organization’s 14 years of existence, modeling service and leadership qualities for students. Mr. Hayward read the nomination letter submitted by Benson Chang. The Committee and Dr. O’Neill thanked and congratulated Mr. Goldstein.

Vote to Approve Minutes of January 11, 2024 Open Session Meeting:

MOTION: by Mr. Savas to approve Minutes of January 11, 2024 Open Session Meeting

SECOND: by Mr. Sheedy

VOTE: 4 - 0 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:

January 11, 2024 \$ 652,481.52

School Payroll Warrant:

January 11, 2024 \$1,249,809.99

Student Representatives Update:

Gabriela Kenaan and Antonio Romano shared updates with the Committee on school activities as follows:

HAY – The Boosterthon is happening January 24 through February 2, with the Glow Fun Run in the gym on Friday, February 2 throughout the day. The Boosterthon on-campus personnel have been working with staff and going into classrooms with incentives for students to help fundraise for the playground and review the Character trait of the day. Students watch a video which incorporates excellent messages about Character and shows them how they too might be able to be a World Changer for good. This is the big fundraiser the HAY PTO does for the year, which will help pay off the new playground structures purchased last year.

LGN - Students and staff have been enjoying the Wellness Committee's addition of Tasty Tidbits to the morning video announcements. Twice a week a special guest star shares the benefits of eating fruits and vegetables to increase energy and focus, and to help live a healthy life. Guests so far include Nurse Courtney, PE Wellness teacher Mrs. Kenney, and Mr. Higgins' dad, Tim. Third graders are recording the latest Tasty Tidbits to be included in the future. LGN has seen an increase in the interest of fruits and vegetables during lunch each day, with some students trying healthy snacks for the first time.

NHS – Mid-term assessments were this week, and the high school appreciated the recent addition of early releases to the schedule for two of those days. First semester closes this week, and students are looking forward to new classes next semester. One of the things that students most look forward to are field trips that classes take as part of their curriculum, career exploration opportunities, or club activities. The high school has upcoming field trips planned to iRobot, a Sports Marketing Conference, the North Atlantic States Carpenters' Union, Beacon Hill, LGN and JCS Science Days, and Bridgewater State University's CityLab. Thank you to the teachers and club leaders that plan for these experiences for the students.

JCS - This year's artist in residence, Joshua Winer, began his work with students, staff, and parents yesterday. Students are having an amazing time putting together what should be a beautiful mosaic mural, and other mosaic pieces for the JCS library which should be done just before February break. The JCS would welcome the School Committee to the unveiling sometime in late February. Additionally, just before the break, the JCS SPO is collaborating with the Norton Outdoor Center to try out a Starry Night program on February 14th where students and families will meet on the big field and see the stars with guidance from Wheaton faculty.

Presentation and Vote on Global Education Trips to Costa Rica and Ireland/Scotland – Dr. Todd Kefor

The Committee was provided proposed itineraries for the two upcoming trips. Dr. Kefor reviewed the trips already planned for NHS, Thailand in April 2024, and Greece in April 2025, and was joined by Mr. Vincent Cerce who will be the Administrator chaperone on the Thailand trip. Seventeen students will participate in the Thailand service trip, and over fifty students have signed up for the tour of Greece.

The proposed trip to Costa Rica is being planned for the summer as traditionally NHS sees lower enrollment for the service trips. Running the trip in the summer will potentially allow for more opportunities to pair with another school if the numbers do not support running the trip. The combined trip to Ireland and Scotland will take place during either February or April break of 2026. Dr. O'Neill noted that for this trip there is an option on the itinerary to extend the trip to 10 days, which they are proposing to do. This is a new location that has not been offered before. She clarified that a Central Office administrator always travels with the tours to provide support, and that EF also provides service and support while students are traveling.

The Committee discussed the merit of these experiences for students. Dr. O'Neill noted that the reason approval is sought so far in advance is to allow time for students and families to raise money or budget to fund their travel.

MOTION: by Mr. Savas to approve the Global Education Trips to Costa Rica in 2025 and to Ireland/Scotland in 2026

SECOND: by Mr. Sheedy

VOTE: 4 - 0 - 1 Motion Carries

Award Notification and Vote to Accept Math Acceleration Academies Grant – Dr. Jennifer O'Neill:

Dr. O'Neill presented the Math Acceleration Academies Grant awarding Norton with \$194,792 to run math programming for students. This grant proposal was written by Dr. Ackerman who provided the Committee with the details of the programs the grant will fund.

In previous years, Norton has run summer Acceleration Academies to help close gaps caused by the irregular learning cycles of the last few years. DESE also offers grants for programs to run during February and April vacations. The grant awarded this year will fund two programs running during the vacation weeks and will specifically target math. The Acceleration Academies will be held at the LGN, and as of the meeting, ninety students have already been signed up to participate. Students will receive individualized intensive math instruction during a five-hour day. Dr. Ackerman thanked the teachers and administrators who worked to put together the data to help drive the program. Interviews have been conducted for the teacher and paraprofessional positions. The program will support students in grades three through ten. The grant covers transportation, breakfast, and lunch for students as well as a program coordinator, school adjustment counselor, nurse, and a specialist teacher. He clarified for the Committee the hours for the program, the selection process for students, and the budgeting process for the grant.

MOTION: by Mr. Savas to Accept the Math Accelerations Academies Grant

SECOND: by Mr. Schleicher

VOTE: 5 – 0 Motion Carries

Review and Vote on Capital Improvement Plan – Mrs. Kristine Hadfield:

Mrs. Hadfield addressed the Committee noting that no changes have been made to the Capital Improvement Plan since the previous meeting.

MOTION: by Mr. Savas to Approve the Capital Improvement Plan as presented

SECOND: by Mr. Sheedy

VOTE: 5 – 0 Motion Carries

Discussion on FY2025 Budget Process – Dr. Jennifer O'Neill:

Dr. O'Neill reviewed updated FY25 budget documents that would be shared at the joint meeting following the School Committee meeting. The Committee discussed current and projected state funding. The documents include a breakdown of costs for mandated services in comparison to the costs for general education. Mandated services include all components of special education – personnel, staff, out of district placements, and transportation. Services for students who are English Language Learners are also mandated including student supports and translation services for families. General education covers all other costs for the district including facilities and maintenance, administration, and extracurriculars. In the proposed FY25 budget, the mandated services are \$15,049,963, a 15.61% increase, and general education expenses are \$23,823,467, a 9.84% increase.

The Committee discussed current and projected state funding. Dr. O'Neill and Vincent Cerce, Director of Pupil Personnel, elaborated on how costs fluctuate through the year with out of district placements. General education and special education budget lines were broken down further in the documents showing FY22, FY23, FY24 and projected FY25 costs.

\$1.9 million in school choice funds has been included in the proposed budget to offset costs. The original intent for the use of School Choice funds was to provide extras like technology, curriculum, improvement of our schools - not to cover recurring budget costs. The Committee discussed the School Choice program and the current use of those funds as well as the sustainability of using School Choice to cover recurring costs. \$1.6 million in Circuit Breaker reimbursement funds will be used to offset the costs. The ESSER Grant is currently covering about \$500,000 in the FY24 budget. That funding ends this year.

Dr. O'Neill clarified that the salary line includes the 2.75% contractual increase but also takes into account movement on the salary scale. Staff move steps on the scale for years of service and can move columns for furthering their education. Staff must notify the district of an anticipated move by December 15th, and those pending moves have been factored into the proposed budget. The current contract is in place through FY25.

The budget proposal includes funding for the new elementary ELA curriculum. This cost is also in the Capital Improvement plan that was voted on this evening. Additionally, a grant proposal has been submitted which could potentially cover up to 50% of the cost. Notification on the grant is anticipated soon. The budget would be adjusted should the curriculum cost be covered partially or in full by either the grant or capital funds. The budget documents also showed projected deficits from level services with 3%, 4%, and 5% increases over the FY24 budget.

Other Business:

Dr. O'Neill advised the Committee that DESE released their annual Special Education Determination for Norton which looks at criteria in terms of performance and compliance in the

area of special education such as dropout rate, graduation rate, and academic performance for students with disabilities. Norton was placed in the highest category of meeting requirements. She commended Vincent Cerce, Director of Pupil Personnel Services, and Cassandra Russo, Coordinator of Special Education, for their work. This is one measure of their work; a more formal review is also taking place through a Tiered Focus Monitoring visit taking place this spring.

Adjourn:

MOTION: by Mr. Savas to adjourn meeting

SECOND: by Mr. Schleicher

VOTE: 5 - 0 Motion Carries

The meeting adjourned at 6:53 p.m.

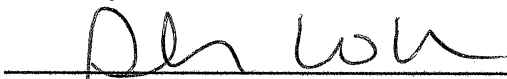
Next Meeting Dates:

- Thursday, February 6, 2024, at 6:00 p.m., in the NMS Library (Budget Workshop)
- Thursday, February 8, 2024, at 6:00 p.m., in the NMS Library

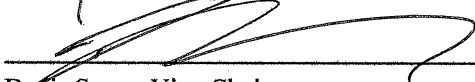
Documents and Other Exhibits Used at Meeting:

- Global Education Proposed Trips Jan. 2024
- FY24 FC125 Math Academies Award Letter
- FY25 Capital request TM
- FY25 Proposed Budget Information 01.25.2024
- FY25 Line-Item Proposed Budget General Education
- FY25 Line-Item Proposed Budget Special Education

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



Sheri Cohen, Chairperson



Deniz Savas, Vice-Chairman



Justine Callanan



Nick Schleicher



Dan Sheedy