

QUINCY SCHOOL COMMITTEE

TEACHING AND LEARNING SUBCOMMITTEE MEETING

Monday, April 2, 2013

A meeting of the Teaching and Learning Subcommittee was held on Monday, April 2, 2013 at 5:00 pm in the Superintendent's Conference Room at the NAGE Building. Present were Mrs. Kathryn Hubley, Ms. Barbara Isola, Mr. Dave McCarthy, and Mrs. Emily Lebo, Teaching and Learning Subcommittee Chair. Also attending were Superintendent Richard DeCristofaro, Mrs. Mary Fredrickson, Mr. Daniel Gilbert, Ms. Beth Hallett, Mr. James Hennessy, Mrs. Renee Malvesti, Mrs. Paula McGeady, Mrs. Maura Papile, Ms. Madeline Roy, Mr. Frank Santoro, Mr. Keith Segalla, Mr. Robert Shaw, Mrs. Helena Skinner, Mr. Stephen Sylvia, Ms. Judy Todd, Mrs. Ruth Witmer; Ms. Allison Cox, President, Quincy Education Association; Mrs. Tracey Christello, Citywide Parents' Council Representative to School Committee, and Ms. Laura Owens, Clerk.

Ms. Isola called the meeting to order at 5:10 pm; Mrs. Lebo was delayed.

North Quincy High School Principal Robert Shaw explained the background of the current grading system. Currently, 63 is the final grade that must be earned at the end of the course in order to earn credit for the course. Mrs. Skinner presented a proposal to change the minimum passing grade and update the weighted GPA scale. Of thirteen local communities and private schools, ten use 60 as the minimum passing grade and three use 65. Mrs. Skinner and Mrs. McGeady noted that they see transferring student transcripts from all over the country with 60 as a minimum passing grade. Mr. McCarthy agreed that 60 as a passing grade is a universal concept. Mrs. Hubley asked for clarification as to why it is confusing that we have a different threshold. Mrs. Skinner said that Braintree High School may allow a student to pass Algebra II with a 62 and meet a minimum requirement of the state college system. A Quincy or North Quincy High School student receiving that grade would have failed the course and not meet the state college admissions requirement.

Ms. Isola asked if students with grades that low would get accepted to college and both guidance department heads noted that this grade may be an exception on an otherwise acceptable transcript. Transfer students are given credit for a passing grade of 60 from other school systems. Ms. Isola asked if there was any way to quantify students who have had an adverse result from this issue. Mrs. Skinner said 2 or 3 per year that she is aware of; Mrs. McGeady said that part of the concern is the general perception that Quincy does things differently, noting that DESE has 60 as a standard for passing grades. Ms. Isola asked if we raise the passing grade to 65, would we adversely affect our students. Mrs. Skinner said yes,

because students from virtually every other district would be given credit for passing courses with a grade of 60 and our students in this range would be considered as having failed.

Mr. McCarthy outlined the options for consideration: keeping the policy as is, raising the threshold to 65, or moving it to 60. Mr. McCarthy made a motion to move the issue out of Subcommittee to be discussed with the School Committee. Mrs. Hubley seconded the motion, noting that she would rather see the standard raised. Ms. Isola agreed and noted that she appreciated the work that went into preparing the proposal. On a voice vote, the ayes have it.

At the April 3, 2013 School Committee Meeting, Mrs. Lebo amended the motion to move the High School Grading issue to the Policy Subcommittee. Mr. McCarthy seconded the motion and on a voice vote, the ayes have it.

Mrs. Lebo arrived at 5:30 pm.

Dr. DeCristofaro introduced the next item on the agenda, the Elementary Support Teachers. In response to a request for information from the School Committee, Ms. Owens shared research on Elementary School libraries in surrounding communities, in the Gateway Cities, for the cities and towns that DESE considers comparable to Quincy, and MSBA model school communities. There are a variety of options being employed at elementary schools, ranging from the traditional librarian at each building to library teachers or other staff shared between buildings or paraprofessional support. Dr. DeCristofaro noted that for the newly created Elementary School Library Support positions, we will be looking at licensure and will consider those with Library Teacher licenses, among other qualifications. He outlined the initiative and the goals developed with a group of the elementary principals: increasing the use of libraries, creating opportunities for extended day library hours, supporting summer reading/open library opportunities, providing preparatory time for elementary staff, and increased technology support.

Mr. Gilbert said that he is excited about the technology support and the ability to target specific supports to individual students. Adding technology access for Kindergarten through Grade 2 students is a bonus. Mr. Sylvia echoed that both the library and technology support will allow for additional curriculum connections. Mrs. Witmer is looking forward to scheduling more collaborative time for grade level teams and time with her staff as a group. For the new Educator Evaluation system implementation, the support position will provide flexibility for observations. Mrs. Malvesti said that the library support is key since students do not always have outside access to library time after school. She feels that the continued parent involvement in the library is important. Mr. Hennessy agreed that parent volunteers are

important to the schools and libraries; he is looking forward to the professional support and consistency that the support teacher will provide.

Ms. Isola asked the principals if the lack of Media Specialists has negatively impacted students in terms of the students missing that professional relationship cited by the petitioning parents. Mrs. Witmer said that in any school, there are many adults who connect with the students, including classroom teachers, specialists, student support, and parent volunteers. Lincoln Hancock's parent volunteers have been wonderful in getting to know the students and their interests. Mrs. Malvesti said that Literacy is embedded in every curriculum area and that students have connections with all of their teachers and specialists.

Mrs. Lebo asked about the responsibility for updating and maintaining the library collections. Dr. DeCristofaro said this is still to be worked out, perhaps the high school librarians will be utilized. Mrs. Lebo said that the equity issue around parent volunteering has been a concern. Mr. Gilbert noted that this has consistently been an issue with Snug Harbor. Snug Harbor's approach was to hold after school library hours with teacher support and Grade 5 student volunteers. Mrs. Lebo asked about the complexity of scheduling at the larger schools and whether they might require more than one support teacher. Dr. DeCristofaro said that would be monitored as scheduling is finalized.

Mrs. Lebo noted that this solution is not creating a media program equivalent to what existed previously. Ms. Isola said she sees this as a rebuilding step, part of the recovery from the budget cuts imposed several years ago. She would like to focus on developing a new position for the middle schools and after evaluation, reevaluate the elementary schools at a later date. Ms. Isola complimented the principals for the creative stretching of resources they do every day. Mrs. Lebo said that the most important goal of this support teacher is to give the elementary teachers their prep time back. Dr. DeCristofaro thanked the negotiating team, pointed to the library research as a roadmap for planning for future roles, and stressed that this support teacher will be a way to connect the library and the classroom more closely, in a way they were not done in the past.

Mrs. Christello is very interested to see how these support teachers will be scheduled. She reiterated that library support is more than getting books into children's hands. Mrs. Christello suggested that parents from other schools would be willing to assist the schools that don't have parent volunteers and urged the principals to ensure their PTO sends a representative to the Citywide meetings. Mrs. Malvesti said that she has drafted a schedule for next year and each teacher would have two 20-minute blocks weekly, one for the library and one for technology.

Mr. Sylvia said that ensuring the consistency of student access to the library and technology is a critical benefit of this support teacher at every school.

Ms. Isola made a motion to adjourn the Teaching and Learning Subcommittee meeting at 6:00 pm. Mrs. Hubley seconded the motion and on a voice vote, the ayes have it.