

MINUTES OF THE REGULAR SESSION  
OF THE MALDEN SCHOOL COMMITTEE

Monday, October 2, 2023

Herbert L. Jackson Council Chamber Room #106 - 215 Pleasant Street  
And Virtual Meeting

Mayor Christenson called the meeting to order at 6:03 p.m. Mayor Christenson read the docket items for the meeting.

Mayor Christenson led the committee in the Pledge of Allegiance followed by a moment of silence for those who have served our country and for those who continue to do so.

**Roll Call**

The following attendance was taken:

Mayor Christenson	Present
Mr. Drummey	Present
Mr. McCarthy	Present
Ms. Spadafora	Present
Ms. Macklin	Present
Mr. Gray	Present
Mr. Bernard	Present
Ms. Rose-Zeiberg	Present
Superintendent Noriega-Murphy	Present
Clerk	Present

Mayor Christenson invited Ms. Spadafora to provide details about joining the language access channels for the meeting.

**Approval of Minutes**

Mayor Christenson brought forth the matter of the adoption of minutes for the September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2023 Regular Session of the School Committee. Mr. Drummey made the motion to adopt the minutes. Mr. Bernard seconded. A roll call vote was taken.

Mr. Drummey voted YES

Mr. McCarthy voted YES

Ms. Spadafora voted YES

Ms. Macklin voted YES

Mr. Gray voted YES

Mr. Bernard voted YES

Ms. Rose-Zeiberg voted YES

Mayor Christenson voted YES

Motion passed unanimously.

**Public Comment**

Mr. Jamaal Hedrington, 36 Dartmouth Street, Malden

Mr. Hedrington, a parent, thanked the School Committee for preemptively sending a letter to 8<sup>th</sup> grade families. Mr. Hedrington said that the issue was brought up last year on several occasions but was ignored. He added that this is not a BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Color) issue as indicated in the email received the previous night because it affects all children regardless of race. Mr. Hedrington said that necessary reevaluation and thoughtful examination of the entire Amplify curriculum needs to take place. This month, the 8<sup>th</sup> graders are scheduled to read, analyze and discuss content that is considered disturbing, provocative and hateful speech. Mr. Hedrington asked the Mayor as well as Superintendent who had the final say on the curriculum to take a moment to demonstrate to the teachers, students, families and community how a passage written by Frederick Douglass should be read in a classroom full of teens. Mr. Hedrington said that the words are uncomfortable, harmful, racially charged and serves no positive value to the children except to cause shame and the continuation of racial divide in the country. Mr. Hedrington said the passage will be read aloud as a sample of the discomfort imposed on children, educators and families.

Ms. Jennifer Hedrington, 36 Dartmouth Street, Malden

Ms. Hedrington, a parent, former Malden Public Schools (MPS) educator and 2021 Massachusetts Teacher of the Year, read aloud an excerpt from the narrative of Frederick Douglass where the n-word appears 4 times. Ms. Hedrington said that she will not remain silent as students face this unnecessary racial discomfort and confusion. Ms. Hedrington continued that the district administrator's response which aligned with the district's message the previous night was that kids need to be exposed to this language repeatedly so that they know how bad it is. The district administrator was told that children hear this language all the time except for children from affluent black families. Ms. Hedrington said that teachers of younger students had contacted her about other problematic content material in younger grades as the harm from exposing children to triggering language far outweighs the benefits. Ms. Hedrington added that this is not the first time that the matter had been raised and that it affects all children. Ms. Hedrington asked the Mayor, School Committee and Superintendent to contemplate the matter that was raised to make necessary changes as well as to not retaliate against any educator.

Ms. Shannon Dellasanta, MPS Educator

Ms. Dellasanta who has been an educator in Malden for 19 years was advocating for the best interests of all MPS students. Ms. Dellasanta said that MPS educators first interaction with the new administration was during the annual back to school staff meeting where old footage of Salemwood students addressing the School Committee regarding the racism they faced from staff members with the message that racism should not be tolerated. Ms. Dellasanta continued that apparently racism should be tolerated when children are exposed to curriculum that was bought and paid for by the district. Ms. Dellasanta said that the Amplify curriculum is riddled with racism, sexism and cultural bias. Ms. Dellasanta continued that although she did everything she could to prepare her students for what they were going to read, nothing prepared her for the looks on their faces, gasps, deep sighs and watery eyes when they saw the illustrations and the n-word being used over and over again. Ms. Dellasanta said that the Amplify curriculum is harmful because it makes it extremely difficult to create a culturally responsive classroom and it takes away teaching the whole child as well as making them feel safe, seen and heard at school. Ms. Dellasanta added that it is time to listen to the teachers who teach students everyday and know them best.

Ms. Marcia Manong

Ms. Manong said that she only recently became aware of the extremely offensive content with the n-word being used in the MPS 8<sup>th</sup> grade regarding American slavery. Ms. Manong asked the Mayor, Superintendent and School Committee whether their intent is to educate or humiliate and dehumanize

descendents of American slavery or glorify the slave master because those are the words heard in the content. Ms. Manong said Frederick Douglass, one of the greatest American orators, can speak for himself and does not need a slave master to explain what education can do. Ms. Manong added that education can also harm and said that when the topic of the holocaust is taught in schools, one did not go to the Nazis to elevate their voice but rather to the Jews to allow their voice to educate on the holocaust. Ms. Manong asked why the voice of the slave master is used to provide education on the history of American slavery when the slave and former slaves as well as their descendents are quite capable of lifting their own voices and speaking for themselves. Ms. Manong concluded that there is no rational for this content to be in MPS at this time.

Ms. Melissa Ma, Salemwood School Educator

Ms. Ma raised concerns to the School Committee about the mandated Amplify curriculum that educators have been tasked to implement for middle school students. When Ms. Ma started teaching in MPS 5 years ago, she was grateful for the autonomy that educators had and the trust given to them to select some of their own teaching materials because they are professionals in the field. Ms. Ma participated in the curriculum design team in the summer of 2021 and spent weeks with her colleagues to create a scope and sequence of a unit which provided windows and mirrors to engage students with lessons that reflected the student population as well as relatable and age appropriate content. In November 2021, she found that all the units they had created were no longer going to be used as the new administration had a new vision for the humanities department. An opportunity was provided for families and educators to be part of the curriculum adoption selection committee that met weekly in the evening to review different curricula for grade level engaging affirming texts that are reflective of the students and community. Ms. Ma and other members of the subcommittee comprised of parents, caregivers and educators reviewed many units from Amplify and had noted that it was not reflective. Ms. Ma continued that for Grade 6 alone, most texts were outdated and had eurocentric viewpoints. Ms. Ma said that many educators and her found some texts to be not age appropriate as well as being challenging to keep students engaged as students find it difficult to relate. Ms. Ma read out aloud an excerpt from the Grade 6 lesson about a student being spanked. Ms. Ma said that this chapter alone could trigger previous traumatic experiences for some students. In conclusion, Ms. Ma urged the district to reconsider this decision and investigate other options such as content from CommonLit and Newsela which are free.

Ms. Jessica Gold Boots, Malden Education Association (MEA) Vice-President and MPS Educator

Ms. Gold Boots supported everyone who spoke about their concerns regarding the Amplify curriculum during the meeting. Ms. Gold Boots said that when parents and caregivers from historically marginalized backgrounds as well as educational professionals have concerns about a text, it is our responsibility as a community to respond to these concerns rapidly with sensitivity and a plan, not just rhetoric. Ms. Gold Boots continued that there are issues with diversity, equity and inclusion in the Amplify curriculum. During the 2020-2021 school year, Ms. Gold Boots was invited by the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) to rate Amplify as a CURriculum RATings by TEachers (CURATE) panelist. Ms. Gold Boots said that although the Amplify curriculum did attain high marks in terms of rigor, nearly every panelist in her group rated the Amplify curriculum in every single Massachusetts framework category that touches on diversity, equity and inclusion, as needs improvement. Ms. Gold Boots commented that the texts were complex but many were very dry and the topics had very little hope of engaging students. Ms. Gold Boots added that some texts were included with blatant disregard for the cultural sensitivity needed in the community to navigate the difficult topics. Ms. Gold Boots mentioned that she would share the panel ratings with School Committee members at the conclusion of the meeting. Ms. Gold Boots said that newcomer multi-lingual learners

are deprived of opportunities to develop and acquire language when EL educators are instructed to only use the Amplify curriculum and not provide supplements. Ms. Gold Boots believed that fidelity to the Amplify curriculum alone is a potential civil rights issue for multi-lingual learners.

Ms. Suzanne Millett, Forestdale School Educator

Ms. Millett teaches special education and has 7 students on Individualized Educational Plans (IEPs) out of 17 students. Ms. Millette said that she tries to differentiate lessons for her students but she is not allowed to show slides which are different from Amplify. Ms. Millette continued that teachers need to reach the students in front of them in different ways because students have different circumstances such as special education, integrated, inclusion or Individual Learning Plan (ILP). Ms. Millette said she could adjust the text but yet is unable to reach all the students at the same time.

Ms. Deb Gesualdo, Malden Education Association (MEA) President

Ms. Gesualdo believed that accurate history should be taught and the ugly parts of history should not be erased or hidden, but the voices of parents, caregivers and educators should be heard when they speak out about something which may be harmful, inappropriate or potentially trauma inducing for students. Ms. Gesualdo said that as a white educator with a significant amount of privilege, her responsibility is to listen when any students, educators and families from historically marginalized groups are being harmed. She heard from several grade level educators that many excerpts from Amplify is racially insensitive, age inappropriate and irrelevant due to the excerpts taken out of context. The Amplify curriculum widens the opportunity gap instead of closing it because it is completely excerpt based and does not allow students to complete a book.

Ms. Gesualdo added that this type of curriculum is designed to move districts to totally scripted instruction that strips educators of their creativity and professional autonomy in the classroom. Teaching and learning is more than preparing students to take a standardized test. Ms. Gesualdo said that student should be taught to be inquisitive life-long learners, not life-long test takers who have only had access to scripted curriculum which was originally funded by Rupert Murdoch. Since last year, English Language Level 1 teachers had been given directives from Central Office to teach the curriculum with fidelity but with no modifications or scaffolds whatsoever. Ms. Gesualdo continued that this is of concern because many people from Central Office came from Boston Public Schools which is party to an English Learners settlement agreement with the Federal Justice and Education Departments as a result of an investigation that found the district violating students' civil rights by failing to provide them with specialized instruction. Ms. Gesualdo said that the curriculum is so bad that even Rupert Murdoch ditched it and has bi-partisan criticism across the country. Ms. Gesualdo said thought should be given to good instruction, good curriculum, trauma informed teaching and maybe de-Amplify Amplify.

Mr. Michael Ziemba, Salemwood School Educator

Mr. Ziemba who is a RISE (Reaching Independence through Structured Education) teacher whose classroom is a behavioral intervention classroom as well as a therapeutic environment works with children whose behaviors can be unpredictable and is called unexpected behaviors. Mr. Ziemba previews everything that is put in front of the students in order to minimize unexpected reactions and keep the learning environment pushing forward. Mr. Ziemba said that some of the matters voiced earlier about the curriculum would not work in his classroom. Mr. Ziemba has had to stop lessons because of how students reacted to the content. Mr. Ziemba gave an example of an 8<sup>th</sup> grade learner practicing vocabulary in the vocabulary app, who learned the word "issue". The word was defined and given the synonym of "problem" which was used in a sentence that read, "You are an issue." Mr. Ziemba continued that another learner in 6<sup>th</sup> grade was reading from Roald Dahl about Mrs. Pratchett and the

candy shop. In response to the question about how would you characterize Mrs. Pratchett, the only thing the student could say was that Mrs. Pratchett was mean. Mr. Ziemba said that the curriculum has some very negative things that he is trying to get the students to not think about but rather to make them think more positively, to build their outlook so that they can be curious in the future which is the purpose of education. Mr. Ziemba continued that this is why DESE states that we are building our students to be life-long learners and curious.

Mayor Christenson called for a brief recess at 6:32 p.m. to address technical difficulties. The meeting resumed at 6:38 p.m.

## **Superintendent's Report**

### **1. District Updates and Highlights**

Superintendent Noriega-Murphy thanked everyone for their comments and noted that some of the issues raised will be addressed. Superintendent Noriega-Murphy continued to provide updates on district events; district enrollment; enrollment caps; and the cell phone policy.

Dr. Pamela Stazesky, Data Analyst, presented the district accountability report. Superintendent Noriega-Murphy elaborated further on how the data should be viewed. Assistant Superintendent for Multilingual Education and Title III, Ms. Ellen Kelleher-Rojas presented the ACCESS (Assessing Comprehension and Communication in English State-to-State for English Language Learners) data.

Superintendent Noriega-Murphy recognized Ms. Jeanne Marquardo, Administrative Assistant in the Athletics Department who has been working at Malden Public School for 50 years. Superintendent Noriega-Murphy concluded her report with a video featuring the Early Learning Center (ELC).

Ms. Macklin said that although there are improvements at the Malden High School (MHS) for absenteeism, it is still very high and concerning. Ms. Macklin asked for steps being taken to address the matter. Superintendent Noriega-Murphy said that last year, Mr. Julio Perez was hired at the Attendance Officer and he has been visiting the schools as well as also the students' homes. Superintendent Noriega-Murphy added that Mr. Perez and the schools have been making lots of effort to call families and students in order to encourage students to attend school. For the K-4 grade level, parents/caregivers are contacted because the students are not able to get to school by themselves. Superintendent Noriega-Murphy said that the absenteeism data for this year will be categorized into groups of 2 or 3 grade spans instead of the entire school so that the numbers can be further monitored.

Mr. Bernard commented that he would like to see a breakdown of average class sizes. Mr. Bernard also asked about comparisons between schools and districts for the accountability data. In response to Mr. Bernard, Dr. Pam Stazesky said that she had not yet done any comparisons between districts because the District Analysis Review Tools (DART) information is not available yet. Dr. Stazesky said that DESE has advised not to do any comparison for 2020 and 2021 as the full accountability system was not used as there was a decline across the board because of the pandemic. However, Dr. Stazesky said that a comparison can be done for 2019, 2022, 2023 as well as subsequent years. In response to Mr. Bernard's question about whether we can see any

improvements in the MCAS math scores next year since the district has just adopted a new curriculum, Superintendent Noriega-Murphy said that the budget allowed the district to hire a full-time math coach and STEM Director, Dr. Doug Dias, said that with the Carnegie math curriculum for the high school, the district was informed that during the first year, there will not be any significant changes in results and the results have been exactly as mentioned. However, based on their results with other districts, the second and third year showed increases with success on state standardized test across the country. Dr. Dias was optimistic and anticipates that the district will see successes in 2024 and beyond.

Ms. Rose-Zeiberg echoed Mr. Bernard regarding obtaining more information on the high school class sizes at the next meeting. Ms. Rose-Zeiberg also requested more information about building capacity at the ELC. Superintendent Noriega-Murphy responded that there are 300 students at the ELC at the moment and that there will be a report on this matter at the next meeting.

Mayor Christenson noted that the district is making progress as shown by the comparison with other districts. Ms. Spadafora was impressed with the progress made by the multi-lingual students. Ms. Spadafora mentioned that the data about the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) test results showed everything involved with the testing and what students need to go through with the standardized testing. Ms. Spadafora voiced her support for the THRIVE Act and hoped for a more thoughtful way to measure students' achievement. Superintendent Noriega-Murphy said that MCAS does not measure all the students in the district. Superintendent Noriega-Murphy added that the district also employs DIBELS (Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills), i-Ready and IXL to monitor student progress more frequently because MCAS is only administered once a year.

### **Subcommittee Reports**

### **Motions and Resolutions**

### **Personal Privilege**

### **Adjournment**

Mr. Drummey made a motion to adjourn at 7:40 p.m. Mr. Bernard seconded. A roll call vote was taken.

Mr. Drummey voted YES

Mr. McCarthy voted YES

Ms. Spadafora voted YES

Ms. Macklin voted YES

Mr. Gray voted YES

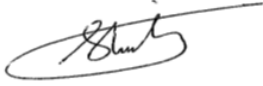
Mr. Bernard voted YES

Ms. Rose-Zeiberg voted YES

Mayor Christenson voted YES

Motion passed unanimously.

I certify that a notice of this meeting was filed with the Clerk of the City of Malden in the manner provided under Chapter 39, Section 23A of the General Laws.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Shirley Dorai", written over a horizontal line.

Shirley Dorai, Clerk