

MINUTES OF THE REGULAR SESSION  
OF THE MALDEN SCHOOL COMMITTEE  
Monday, December 4, 2023  
Herbert L. Jackson Council Chamber Room #106 - 215 Pleasant Street  
And Virtual Meeting

Mayor Christenson called the meeting to order at 6:00 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
Ms. Hortie	Present
Mr. Gray	Present
Mr. Bernard	Present
Ms. Rose-Zeiberg	Present
Superintendent Noriega-Murphy	Absent
Assistant Superintendent Peña	Present
Student Representative Abel	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 November 13<sup>th</sup>, 2023 Regular Session of the School Committee. Mr. Bernard made the motion to adopt the minutes. Mr. McCarthy seconded and it was so VOTED. Motion passed unanimously.

**Public Comment**

Mx. Michael Ziembra, Salemwood School Educator (they/them/their)

Mx. Ziembra said that they resigned and that their last day will be on December 22, 2023. Mx. Ziembra said that their MPS (Malden Public Schools) account was disabled a few hours earlier during the school day and believes this was an error. As a result, their 8<sup>th</sup> grade math class was interrupted and they were not able to facilitate the following ELA and Science classes. Mx. Ziembra wanted to know why it took only two and half weeks to disable their account and why was it early. Mx. Ziembra also wanted to know why it took about six weeks to set up the MPS account for the ESP (Education Support Professional) assigned

to their classroom when the ESP started with their classroom on the first day of school. Mx. Ziemba asked what was Mayor Christenson's intention at the last School Committee meeting when they asked Superintendent Noriega-Murphy if an educator can ditch the adopted curriculum. Mx. Ziemba also wanted to know why Superintendent Noriega-Murphy wants to work with the children in Malden other than for reasons based on data. Mx. Ziemba asked everyone to reach out to Congresswoman Katherine Clark to support H.Res.786 (Calling for an immediate de-escalation and cease-fire in Israel and occupied Palestine) which will bring a much-needed cease fire.

## **Superintendent's Report**

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

Assistant Superintendent Peña provided updates on the winter break; enrollment; New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC) accreditation process for Malden High School (MHS); curriculum that has been implemented; and concluded with a screening of the Forestdale School video.

In response to Ms. Hortie, Assistant Superintendent Peña said that the early release Professional Development days provide an opportunity for the civics teachers from all the middle school grades to meet and collaborate. Assistant Superintendent Peña added that some of the ESSER III (2021 American Rescue Plan Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief) funds have helped to stipend educators to be able to stay after school to meet with their content directors. Since the ESSER III funds have all been already allocated for various needs, Assistant Superintendent Peña said that there are ELA and Math grants that can provide funding for these opportunities.

In response to Mayor Christenson about NEASC's foundation element that has not been met, Assistant Superintendent Peña said that the Program of Studies is trying to align pacing guides, curriculum and syllabi across all content areas. However, due to so many offerings at the high school, this has posed a challenge. Director of Guidance, Ms. Erin Craven said that for the past two years, the director teams have been working hard to create alignment for science, history and English but then there are other great electives such as engineering, autoshop and business which are mostly home-grown curriculum but they do align with the standards but have not been put into a written format. Ms. Craven mentioned that work on this started last year, continuing into this year as well as into next year. Ms. Craven added that great strides have already been made in the pacing guides and formatting. Mayor Christenson suggested to involve Ms. Littlejohn, Ms. O'Toole and Ms. Spadafora in this area as they have been working on this area too. Mayor Christenson said that the report showed that the school was almost at 100% and congratulated the team. Assistant Superintendent Peña confirmed that the accreditation is valid for ten years. Ms. Spadafora commented that the Policy and Procedures Subcommittee had also worked on improving the Program of Studies.

In response to Ms. Rose-Zeiberg, Ms. Spadafora and STEM Director, Dr. Doug Dias, said that the district is still trying to hire a STEM teacher for the Beebe School. In response to Ms. Hortie, Assistant Superintendent Peña said that each of the standards highlighted by NEASC has a committee led by a chair. Director of Guidance, Ms. Craven, said that they the district has cultivated a relationship with Bunker Hill Community College and has had a dual enrollment early college enrollment program for the last 10 years. Ms. Craven continued that the district

also has a partnership with the MassHire Foundation and they have a job coach at MHS a few days a week to help with community internships and business placements. Ms. Craven added that there was a robust senior internship program prior to the pandemic where seniors took the 4<sup>th</sup> quarter to intern with businesses. Ms. Craven said that the high school is looking to bring that back.

Student Representative Abel commented that the decisions surrounding curriculum is predominantly made by those who are not in the classroom every day and suggested that in addition to high school students, some middle school students as well as teachers should be on the panel. Assistant Superintendent Peña said that she liked the idea of including middle school students and commented that teachers are already involved in the process.

Mayor Christenson spoke about his experience with First Chapter Fridays.

### **Subcommittee Reports**

#### **1. Policy and Procedures – Ms. Spadafora**

Ms. Spadafora said that the subcommittee met on November 30<sup>th</sup> to discuss the district cell phone policy, student absence policy as well as the vandalism and damage of district property. Ms. Spadafora acknowledged the contributions of Ms. Macklin, Mr. McCarthy and Mr. Weldai who served on the subcommittee for the greater part of 2 years.

Ms. Spadafora said the district cell phone policy came about after the Commissioner of the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) highlighted cell phone hotels and Superintendent Noriega-Murphy stating that cell phones are a distraction in the classroom. Ms. Spadafora continued that the student absence policy was discussed because parents raised this matter to get clarification surrounding excused and unexcused absences. Ms. Spadafora said that the policy regarding vandalism and damage of district property was also discussed because of an up-tick of destructive behavior after the pandemic which has resulted in the district having to spend money to replace damaged property.

### **Motions and Resolutions**

#### **1. District Cell Phone Policy – Ms. Spadafora**

Ms. Spadafora explained the policy for the two different groups of grade levels, PreK-8 and 9-12.

In response to Mr. Bernard, Ms. Spadafora said that if cellphone use is required in a student's IEP (Individualized Education Plan), the student will be allowed access to their cell phone. In response to another question from Mr. Bernard, Ms. Spadafora said although it is not stated in the policy, whenever a student forgets and leaves their cell phone in school, a staff member usually reaches out to the family to inform them. Ms. Spadafora said that she was willing to revisit the policy to address this matter. Mr. Bernard said that he would be happy to vote for the policy right now and revisit this matter at another Policy and Procedures Subcommittee session.

In response to Ms. Rose-Zeiberg about how the cost of the cell phone hotels is funded, Ms. Spadafora said that the school district purchased some and that there is a possibility that DESE

might be offering grants to cities in the near future. In response to another question from Ms. Rose-Zeiberg, Ms. Spadafora said that she had not heard of any case where a student took another student's phone when it was time for students to collect their phones. Assistant Superintendent Peña said that principals have not had an issue with this matter and that school administrators have a key to the cell phone hotels. They notify parents if they see that a cellphone was not picked up.

Ms. Spadafora made the motion to approve the district cell phone policy which will take effect immediately if voted by the School Committee. Ms. Macklin seconded and it was so VOTED. Motion passed unanimously.

**2. Student Absence Policy – Ms. Spadafora**

Ms. Spadafora said that some parents were concerned about whether their students will receive an excused absence if the children are sick and stay home without a doctor's note. Ms. Spadafora continued that the change in the policy indicates that any caregiver who keeps a student home without a doctor's note needs to inform the Principal or nurse for next steps. Ms. Spadafora said that this policy was voted unanimously by the Policy and Procedures Subcommittee.

In response to Student Representative Abel, Ms. Spadafora said that if the policy is approved by the School Committee, it will be effective beginning the next day.

Ms. Hortie asked whether students participating in mental health treatment which may be for an extended period of time such as a week can be added to the policy. Ms. Spadafora highlighted that the disability-related absence mentioned in the policy would cover this circumstance as well. Ms. Hortie said that a parent may not necessarily know that it covers mental health treatment unless it is mentioned explicitly. Mayor Christenson and Assistant Superintendent Peña said that perhaps medical appointments would cover mental health treatment too. Ms. Hortie said that if it is not explicitly noted in the policy, it might get fuzzy.

Ms. Rose-Zeiberg asked what will keep a student coming back to school if they already had four or more unexcused absences in the first week and received a grade of 59 early in the quarter. Ms. Spadafora said that the Superintendent informed the Policy and Procedures Subcommittee when the same question arose that at the meeting that there are buyback days for students who have reached this threshold. They can work with their educators and administrators to do the missing work.

Ms. Spadafora and Mayor Christenson said that even if the policy is adopted as is, there will be opportunities to revisit and change the policy with the proper wording to reflect absences for mental health treatment.

Ms. Spadafora made the motion to approve the student absence policy. Mr. McCarthy seconded and it was so VOTED. Motion passed unanimously.

**3. Vandalism and Damage of District Property – Ms. Spadafora**

Ms. Spadafora said that this is a new policy to the district and it is at the request of the Superintendent following Massachusetts General Laws Chapter 266 for crimes against property and more specifically defacement of property, and the penalties for willful, malicious or wanton

destruction or injury of property. The acts of vandalism includes but are not limited to electronic hardware and software such as unauthorized access, modification, installing or removal of programs, tampering of restricted files, infringing copyright laws, changing settings, graffiti, defacement, and destruction.

Ms. Spadafora said that the district purchased over 7,000 Chromebooks during the pandemic using ESSER I funds. The warranties for most of them have since expired. Ms. Spadafora said that some students are destroying the Chromebooks and the school district has been taking the destroyed Chromebooks and replacing them. The school district will soon run out of replacements and be unable to continuously budget thousands of dollars to replace vandalized equipment. Ms. Spadafora continued that there will now be an investigation when there is any vandalism or damage to district property and the school district will set a restitution payment. The school district will work with families to set up a payment plan but also expect the student to acknowledge the behavior with a letter of apology and claim ownership.

Ms. Spadafora added that if the damage is over \$1,000, the school district will legally have to contact the local police department and file a police report. Ms. Spadafora said that this is included in the policy under M.G.L Chapter 266, where if there is evidence of Hate Crime, vandalism/damages, there would be an investigation and police report which could result in fines and/or Imprisonment. Ms. Spadafora added that the school district has amazing adjustment counselors and does a great job in restorative practices when trying to find root cause of behaviors but sometimes there needs to be consequences for the destruction of school property. Ms. Spadafora said that this policy was voted unanimously at the Policy and Procedures Subcommittee.

Mr. Bernard was in agreement with the policy but also hoped that the consequences go hand in hand with restorative practices.

Ms. Rose-Zeiberg asked for more clarification about how situations are handled in-district and out-of-district, as well as consequences that would lead to a police report being filed because the cases could appear before the courts as misdemeanors or felony charges. Ms. Rose-Zeiberg continued that she understands the seriousness of the vandalism and destruction to school property as there are many cases within the school system. Ms. Rose-Zeiberg wanted to know who makes the police reports and if it will be done in an equitable manner. Ms. Rose-Zeiberg also asked about where the \$1,000 amount appears in the legislation and whether out-of-district could also mean when someone is outside of school premises.

Ms. Spadafora said that in-district refers to matters that will be handled within the district where the damage is less than \$1,000. Ms. Macklin added that unless the incident is a hate crime, then the matter will need to be referred to the police. Ms. Spadafora said that out-of-district means that the matter is being handled by local authorities because the cost of damages is more than \$1,000. Ms. Spadafora continued that she will consult counsel regarding the \$1,000. In response to another question from Ms. Rose-Zeiberg, Ms. Spadafora said that the police department is in communication with the Superintendent and is already aware of this policy as they have had to already handle some cases involving this issue.

In response to Student Representative Abel, Ms. Spadafora clarified that the damage would need to be willful, malicious, wanton and done on purpose for all the consequences to apply. It would not apply if it was an accident.

In response to Ms. Rose-Zeiberg, Ms. Spadafora said that students/caregivers need to sign a form before their students get Chromebooks. Ms. Rose-Zeiberg continued that it would be good if this policy was included in the form so that parents are aware of the matter.

Ms. Rose-Zeiberg asked if there is insurance for the equipment and other property of the school district. Finance and Operations Director, Ms. Mertz said there is a 3-year warranty for the Chromebooks but they are set to expire this year. Ms. Mertz added that the property liability insurance is carried by the city. Ms. Rose-Zeiberg asked if the city's insurance would cover the Chromebooks as well. Mayor Christenson requested Ms. Mertz to find out for the next meeting.

This matter was tabled for the next meeting.

**4. School Council Membership List – Ms. Spadafora**

Ms. Spadafora said that this is a matter that comes before the School Committee for approval every year as each school is required to have a School Council that consists of parents, staff and community members who volunteer to be part of the School Council. The School Council is responsible for the School Improvement Plans among other things.

Ms. Spadafora made the motion to approve the School Council members for 2023-2024. Mr. Drummey seconded and it was so VOTED. Motion passed unanimously.

**Personal Privilege**

**Executive Session**

Mr. Bernard made a motion to enter into Executive Session at 7:26 p.m. Mr. McCarthy seconded. A roll call vote was taken.

Mr. Drummey voted YES

Mr. McCarthy voted YES

Ms. Spadafora voted YES

Ms. Macklin voted YES

Ms. Hortie voted YES

Mr. Gray voted YES

Mr. Bernard voted YES

Ms. Rose-Zeiberg voted YES

Mayor Christenson voted YES

Motion passed unanimously.

The committee reconvened to the Regular Session at 9:18 p.m.

Ms. Spadafora made the motion to approve to increase the salary of the non-union Malden Out of School Time (MOST) Director to \$115,000 effective January 1, 2024. Mr. McCarthy seconded. A roll call vote was taken.

Mr. Drummey voted YES  
Mr. McCarthy voted YES  
Ms. Spadafora voted YES  
Ms. Macklin voted YES  
Ms. Hortie voted YES  
Mr. Gray voted YES  
Mr. Bernard voted YES  
Ms. Rose-Zeiberg voted YES  
Mayor Christenson voted YES  
Motion passed unanimously.

**Adjournment**

Ms. Spadafora made a motion to adjourn at 9:21 p.m. Mr. Drummey seconded and it was so VOTED.  
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.



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Shirley Dorai, Clerk