

MINUTES OF THE REGULAR SESSION  
OF THE MALDEN SCHOOL COMMITTEE  
Monday, January 8, 2024  
Herbert L. Jackson Council Chamber Room #106 - 215 Pleasant Street  
And Virtual Meeting

Mayor Christenson called the meeting to order at 6:04 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	Present
Student Representative Abel	Absent
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 December 4<sup>th</sup>, 2023 Regular Session of the School Committee. Mr. Drummey made the motion to adopt the minutes. 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.

Ms. Spadafora made the motion to adopt the January 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2024 special session 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

Ms. Hortie voted YES

Mr. Gray voted YES

Mr. Bernard voted YES

Ms. Rose-Zeiberg voted YES

Mayor Christenson voted YES

Motion passed unanimously.

### **Public Comment**

Ms. Tina Weldai, Retired Malden Public Schools (MPS) Teacher

Ms. Weldai said that she was a teacher at MPS and a Malden Education Association (MEA) member for over 20 years. Ms. Weldai spoke about the unprecedented motion passed by the Massachusetts Teachers Association (MTA) Executive Board. Ms. Weldai said the MTA which has never involved itself in international affairs before made an entirely biased statement on December 9<sup>th</sup>, singularly denouncing the actions of the Israeli government. The statement made no demands for release or even mention of the hostages taken during the barbaric massacre on October 7<sup>th</sup>. Ms. Weldai continued that they call for an immediate and permanent ceasefire while making no mention of Hamas whose openly declared mission is to annihilate Israel and the Jewish people. The MTA's mission has nothing to do with this message which only serves to alienate and divide its membership, and the community at large. Ms. Weldai concluded that it is especially disheartening that this misguided motion was seconded and co-signed by the President of the MEA, which reflects poorly on the City of Malden.

Ms. Amy Friedman, 8 Marvin Street, Malden

Ms. Friedman spoke in opposition to a new contract for Superintendent Noriega-Murphy. Ms. Friedman said that in September 2022, Ms. Spadafora addressed questions surrounding Superintendent Noriega-Murphy's academic credentials. Ms. Friedman said Ms. Spadafora mentioned that the School Committee was provided proof of a doctorate in the form of transcripts from the University of Salamanca but had signed legal documents preventing disclosure to the public because Superintendent Noriega-Murphy was in the midst of legal proceedings, going on to infer that proof will be revealed when the proceedings have been concluded. Ms. Friedman said that over a year later now, the public has yet to see proof that Superintendent Noriega-Murphy has a doctorate degree. Ms. Friedman urged the School Committee to come to terms with the poor decisions of the past and the tumultuous tenure since then and not offer Superintendent Noriega-Murphy a new contract. What was supposed to be a thorough vetting by an outside firm in the hiring process failed to raise a number of very troubling issues including her using the moniker of Doctor yet not including it on her resume with her application.

Ms. Friedman also mentioned that while Superintendent Noriega-Murphy was Headmaster of the Boston English School, she recommended the hiring of Shaun Harrison as a Dean of Students and he worked under her supervision for a period of seven months and at that time was recruiting students to sell drugs, orchestrated the assault of a student in the school bathroom and was convicted of shooting that student in the head. Ms. Friedman continued that while Superintendent Noriega-Murphy was not held legally responsible in a civil lawsuit for those events, one would certainly have thought that it

would have impacted the School Committee's hiring decision but there was no evidence that it ever came up during the hiring process. Ms. Friedman said that in 2022, MPS students organized a massive walkout related to the Superintendent's firing and non-renewal of over 100 educators and staff. Ms. Friedman added that students called for her removal and the MEA had a vote of no-confidence. There were another 50 or so non-renewals the following year and the district remains significantly understaffed. Ms. Friedman continued that less than 8 months after the educator strike that led to a new contract, over 60 grievances have been filed for Malden Public Schools' failure to comply. She mentioned that a Department of Labor Relations complaint is also now pending resulting from Superintendent Noriega-Murphy's actions of locking the MEA President out of work sites in 2023. Ms. Friedman said that Superintendent Noriega-Murphy has defended a curriculum that does not address the needs of special education students and an evaluation performed by the MEA in June 2023 resulted in 52% of the membership stating that the Superintendent's performance as unsatisfactory and needs improvement. Ms. Friedman concluded that Superintendent Noriega-Murphy's contract should not be renewed.

Ms. Lori Ardai, 41 Williams Street, Malden

Ms. Ardai, a parent of two students who attended and graduated from MPS, said that her daughters are granddaughters of a Holocaust survivor. Ms. Ardai said she is aware of all the anti-semitism in college campuses. Ms. Ardai added that she recently saw a Boston Globe article on the teachers union resolution that seemed very biased as well as a Malden High School (MHS) Blue and Gold article on an opinion regarding an analysis of history that seemed very one-sided. Ms. Ardai said that these two matters made her feel that we went from a caring school system for all students to one that seems to be struggling with caring about the social emotional well-being and safety of our Jewish students, faculty and staff. Ms. Ardai hoped that we can move beyond politics and keep a united focus on being supportive for all students as well as faculty and staff.

Ms. Jessica Slavin Connelly, 17 Corey Road, Malden

Ms. Connelly, moved to Malden in 2010, and has Jewish grandparents who fled from Eastern Europe. Ms. Connelly said she is an involved parent and a member of the community. Ms. Connelly said that she is afraid to send her son who is a Jewish identified student to Malden Public Schools. Ms. Connelly hoped that everyone can come together, beyond politics, to teach children. Ms. Connelly was also an interfaith youth ADL (Anti-Defamation League) facilitator for six years running programs for students of various faiths in the state.

Mr. Edwin Andrews, 83 Cleveland Street, Malden

Mr. Andrews said that his wife and him moved to Malden 37 years ago because it was affordable and had a strong Jewish community. Mr. Andrews continued that over the years, he enjoyed comparing his immigrant history with his neighbors and friends, as his mother was born in Morocco. Mr. Andrews said that it saddens him to have to respond to the MTA's statement on Israel and Hamas. The war on Israel and Gaza started when Hamas attacked Israel on October 7 during a Jewish festival and Israel has been under attack since then with rockets fired by Hamas into civilian areas with the intention of killing as many Israelis as possible. Mr. Andrews said that Israel has responded as any nation would, demolishing the elaborate tunnels built under hospitals, mosques and other civilian areas, and destroying a large amount of weapons that Hamas has stockpiled. Mr. Andrews was at a loss to understand why the MEA felt compelled to speak on this conflict. It is divisive and unprecedented for the MTA to make a statement on international affairs in the name of Massachusetts educators. However, since they made the decision to bring international politics into the arena of Malden teachers concerns, Mr. Andrews said that they should understand that Israel, just as any other nation has the right and obligation to defend

itself from the enemy that has sworn to destroy her and her people in the most vicious heinous ways imaginable. Mr. Andrews continued that the MTA has no more standing on comments on this conflict than if they were to comment on other international events. The MTA should be concerned with making sure that the Malden Public Schools provide a fair and balanced education to all students regardless of gender, race, religion or ethnicity. Mr. Andrews said that all of us in the diverse community of Malden should celebrate our commonalities and learn from our differences rather than remarking on conflicts thousands of miles away that only serve to divide us.

Ms. Marilyn Andrews, 83 Cleveland Street, Malden

Ms. Andrews said that what impressed her about Malden is that she learned a lot about the history from people who grew up in Malden but also from people who moved to Malden from other parts of the world. Ms. Andrews said that her children were able to grow up in a very diverse environment. What saddens her as an educator and as an educational advocate is that an educational association has come out and said something that is very hurtful to her family and children. Ms. Andrews said that she is glad that her children are not in the Malden Public Schools although Malden Public Schools is a good school system. Ms. Andrews was worried if this creates divisiveness if somebody in a leadership role says this is how we are going to react. Ms. Andrews added that she had her political opinion as a teacher but it stayed outside because her job was to educate students.

Mr. Andrew Zeiberg, 86 Lawrence Street, Malden

Mr. Zeiberg said it is imperative for some type of investigation by the School Committee as to why the President of the MEA has signed a letter on behalf of the full union when it is not clear if all members support the signed document. Mr. Zeiberg continued that if teachers support this document, it causes concern for Jewish students and teachers in the school system as it could make them feel discriminated against because of their religion. Mr. Zeiberg said an investigation is needed to find out why the President of the MEA is getting involved in international politics when their job is to educate students and not as a whole get involved in international issues. Mr. Zeiberg added that he understands freedom of speech but when someone is speaking on behalf of a group of people who might not all be behind the document, it is a problem that somebody's opinion will be overlooked or not taken into consideration.

Mayor Christenson said that the School Committee has no jurisdiction over the MEA but the meeting is being recorded and members of the MEA who are present can relay the message to the MEA President.

Ms. Bonnie Littlejohn, 127 Emerald Street, Malden

Ms. Littlejohn asked that the Policy and Procedures Subcommittee to discuss and include a no homework policy for the December, February and April breaks. Ms. Littlejohn said she cannot comprehend how her children have had homework over the breaks when they were without special education support and when one of the teachers said that she cannot provide support over the break as it was her vacation time. Ms. Littlejohn added that although homework is assigned before the break, students are unable to complete it if they do not do the work during their break. Ms. Littlejohn said students need the mental break too. Ms. Littlejohn asked that a homework policy be included in the program of studies or handbook.

Ms. Fern Remedi-Brown, 21 Ivy Road, Malden

Ms. Remedi-Brown said her family has lived in Malden since 1988 and that they came to the country as refugees. Ms. Remedi-Brown said that members of her family were murdered because they were Jews. Ms. Remedi-Brown did not want to sit idly by when the MTA decided to engage for the first time in international affairs that had nothing to do with work issues. Ms. Remedi-Brown asked why did the MTA

decide to get involved in foreign policy regarding Israel and Gaza, why now and why this conflict. Ms. Remedi-Brown said that the decision that the MTA has taken is not the full story, as it is based on the rhetoric of terrorism. Hamas, a terrorist group that has as its charter to eliminate the only democratic state in the region, Israel, and all the Jews, known as “Yehud” teaches their young children to martyr themselves and is trying to get the world to agree that Palestine exists as a state even though they have refused any offers to create one unless there is the complete annihilation of Jews and Israel. Ms. Remedi-Brown said that when Hamas calls for a ceasefire, what they mean is that when Israel stops defending itself. Ms. Remedi-Brown said that Hamas does not care about the Palestinians because if they did, they would not build tunnels and aim missiles at Israel from under residential areas, mosques and hospitals. They would give the humanitarian aid allocated by the world so that Gaza could build infrastructure and get people out of refugee status; and in fact develop a beautiful tourist area. Ms. Remedi-Brown added that by aligning itself with the rhetoric of Hamas “from the river to the sea,” meaning “slaughter the Jews”, the MTA is emboldening Hamas and not helping the Palestinian people at all. Ms. Remedi-Brown directed her comments to the MTA.

Mayor Christenson called a brief recess at 6:31 pm. The meeting resumed at 6:34 pm.

### **Superintendent’s Report**

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

Superintendent Noriega-Murphy acknowledged the passing of a student and a former educator who was instrumental in opening the daycare in partnership with Catholic Charities.

Superintendent Noriega-Murphy continued to provide updates on district enrollment; multi-lingual learners in MPS; licensure support for educators; hiring effort; and professional development. Superintendent Noriega-Murphy invited Data Analyst, Dr. Pam Stazesky to provide updates on the i-Ready data, IXL data, English proficiency of multilingual learners’, graduation rate, dropout rate, mobility rates, stability rate, average MCAS scale scores, and reducing chronic absenteeism. Superintendent Noriega-Murphy said that the district is moving forward and is in better shape compared to other districts.

In response to Ms. Hortie, Superintendent Noriega-Murphy confirmed that the Forestdale School does not have a waiting list for enrollment. In response to another question from Ms. Hortie, Superintendent Noriega-Murphy explained that if a student unenrolls from the district and does not enroll in another school district, they count as a dropout for MPS. This is why the schools make many phone calls to find out if the students have enrolled in another school district.

Ms. Hortie asked about the passing requirement for the MCAS which was recently changed. Dr. Stazesky said that for ELA and Math, the students need to meet the standards whereas for science, the students could receive a pass if they partially meet the standards. Dr. Stazesky added that students have multiple opportunities to take the test as well as having an Educational Proficiency Plan (EPP) or a waiver process to enable them to meet the requirements. Director of Guidance, Ms. Craven said that because of the pandemic, the MCAS passing score for English was 455 and Math was 469 but that this is changing to 470 for everyone starting with the Class of 2025. Ms. Craven added that the directors and administration have been thinking about MCAS prep courses and how to bridge the gap.

In response to Ms. Rose-Zeiberg about the state level dropout level, Ms. Craven said it is about 2.5% and Malden as a gateway city is about 2.8% which is not too bad. Dr. Stazesky confirmed that the stability rate is tracked based on specific students throughout their school years. In response to Ms. Rose-Zeiberg about proportion of excused and unexcused absences, Dr. Stazesky said that she did not have the breakdown but that the state does not except 0 chronic absences because there are circumstances which necessitate such absences.

Ms. Spadafora asked Superintendent Noriega-Murphy for a breakdown of the numbers on waitlist at each school for the next meeting. In response to Ms. Spadafora, Dr. Stazesky said that the 3 year i-Ready data is for grades K-8. Ms. Spadafora asked about the met target data for multilingual learners. Ms. Spadafora also asked to find out why there is such high dropout rates among Latino students. Dr. Stazesky said that many factors contribute towards the number and that information is available. Ms. Spadafora mentioned that she is not impressed with pre-pandemic MCAS scores. Dr. Stazesky said that the focus is on growth when looking at all the data points. Dr. Stazesky said that more research can be done on the scores to see what is working and what is not working.

In response to Mayor Christenson, Dr. Stazesky said that the data is presented now because the i-Ready and IXL data is after the winter snapshot, and the dropout as well as graduation rates is sometimes not readily available in early fall. It also allows the data to be broken up into manageable chunks.

In response to Mayor Christenson about the dropouts, Dr. Stazesky said that research is being done at MHS about each dropout. Superintendent Noriega-Murphy said that the dropout number is a true number but that it is always changing as it is a revolving number. Superintendent Noriega-Murphy said that the dropout information can be presented at another meeting. Ms. Craven further explained that the high school continuously monitors all dropout or chronically absent students.

Superintendent Noriega-Murphy provided more information on the licensure status for educators and said that the district is supporting educators with expired or almost expired and emergency licenses to renew their licenses.

Superintendent Noriega-Murphy ended her presentation with a video featuring the Linden S.T.E.A.M. Academy.

## **Subcommittee Reports**

### **1. Subcommittee Assignments – Mayor Christenson**

Mayor Christenson requested Ms. Spadafora to speak on the subcommittee assignments. Ms. Spadafora read the list of all the subcommittee memberships and liaisons as follows:

#### ***Standing Committees:***

- Budget** - Jennifer Spadafora (*chair*), Mike Drummey, Joe Gray, Elizabeth Hortie, Rob McCarthy
- Policy and Procedures** - Sharyn Rose-Zeiberg (*chair*), Rob McCarthy, Dawn Macklin, Keith Bernard

3. **Public Facilities and Safety** - *Mike Drummey (chair)*, Joe Gray, Elizabeth Hortie, Rob McCarthy
4. **Technology and Student Services** - *Joe Gray (chair)*, Keith Bernard, Sharyn Rose-Zeiberg, Jennifer Spadafora
5. **Negotiations** - *Jennifer Spadafora (chair)*, Keith Bernard, Sharyn Rose-Zeiberg

***Ad-Hoc Committees:***

1. **Equity and Opportunity** - *Robert McCarthy (chair)*, Dawn Macklin, Elizabeth Hortie
2. **Superintendent Evaluation** - *Dawn Macklin (chair)*, Mike Drummey, Sharyn Rose-Zeiberg
3. **Calendar Review** - *Keith Bernard (chair)*, Joe Gray, Jennifer Spadafora

***Liaisons:***

1. **Sick Bank** - Sharyn Rose-Zeiberg
2. **SHORE Collaborative** - Elizabeth Hortie
3. **Malden High School Alumni Association** - Robert McCarthy
4. **Special Education Parent Advisory Council** - Jennifer Spadafora
5. **English Language Learners Parent Advisory Council** - Joe Gray

Mayor Christenson said that if there are any questions, queries or qualms, the list can be amended if needed.

Ms. Spadafora made the motion to approve the subcommittee assignments. 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

Ms. Hortie voted YES

Mr. Gray voted YES

Mr. Bernard voted YES

Ms. Rose-Zeiberg voted YES

Mayor Christenson voted YES

Motion passed unanimously.

## **Motions and Resolutions**

### **Personal Privilege**

Mayor Christenson ended the meeting stating that after the last meeting, the Vice-Chair, Ms. Spadafora and Mayor Christenson met with Superintendent Noriega-Murphy and they agreed to work together on the transition to a new Superintendent at the end of this school year.

Mayor Christenson continued that Dr. Noriega-Murphy led the district for the past two and a half years including the incredible difficult return after the pandemic. Mayor Christenson said that he speaks for the entire School Committee in appreciating the passion Superintendent Noriega-Murphy brought for education to Malden and for the work that has been done to set the district for future success. Mayor

Christenson said that running a vibrant urban school district is incredibly demanding and thanked Superintendent Noriega-Murphy for her work in Malden.

Mayor Christenson added that we are just beginning to tap our full potential as a district and with the foundation in place, this elected body and the great work done on a daily basis by our educators, the future remains bright. Mayor Christenson looked forward to working with the Superintendent on the transition and will keep the district updated as to next steps.

**Adjournment**

Ms. Spadafora made a motion to adjourn at 7:45 p.m. Ms. Hortie 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.

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