

REGULAR MEETING OF THE PITTSFIELD SCHOOL COMMITTEE HELD ON WEDNESDAY,
SEPTEMBER 24, 2008, 7:00 P.M., PITTSFIELD HIGH SCHOOL

I. A. CALL TO ORDER

Chairperson Amuso called the meeting to order.

PRESENT

Kathleen Amuso, Chairperson
Hon. James Ruberto
Churchill Cotton
Daniel Elias
Carmen C. Massimiano, Jr.
Angel Ramirez
Erin Sullivan

Chairperson Amuso declared a quorum.

B. Moment of Silence

C. Pledge of Allegiance

II. A. Participation by the Public

None

B. Participation by the School Committee

Daniel Elias expressed appreciation for the publication of the "PPS Post: The Pittsfield Public School Digest." Superintendent Jake Eberwein noted that the newsletter will be made available to organizations and individuals throughout Pittsfield and is also available, with enhancements, online.

Mayor Ruberto encouraged school unions to reconsider the City's offer regarding health insurance.

III. Information

A. AYP (Adequate Yearly Progress) Report

Superintendent Jake Eberwein introduced the discussion of AYP and 2008 MCAS test results recently released by the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. Deputy Superintendent Barbara Malkas explained how AYP is measured and the connection to the federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act. Included in her presentation were the time limits for reaching the goals of the Commonwealth, the need for overall as well as subgroup (income level, race, special education, English language proficiency) progress, the need for improvement from the baseline in 2001, performance and benchmark targets, attendance and graduation statistics, and the efforts the district is making to make progress and implement corrective action steps for those schools that have not made AYP.

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Ms. Malkas explained the impact of having math and ELA (English Language Arts) coaches in the schools and the focus of School Improvement Plans on working toward state MCAS goals. She also emphasized the attention that all schools are paying to district data, enabling administrators and teachers to see and work on problem areas in the testing. In moving through her presentation, Ms. Malkas regularly responded to questions from the School Committee regarding the specific steps that are being taken to improve test results, use of COGNOS data and pacing guides, and how to bring lower scoring students up to proficiency. Ms. Malkas reviewed the MCAS/AYP standing of each school and introduced the principals to comment on what each school is doing to make gains in MCAS. A sample of their comments follows.

Allendale Elementary Principal Carl Ameen responded to questions from the School Committee and noted the impact of reading and math coaches and data teams. Principal Joseph Curtis, backed by a cheering squad of students from his school, the Morningside Meerkats, addressed the Committee on the progress that Morningside made in 2008, maintaining that it was the result of good teaching. He also spoke about the importance of vocabulary in enabling the students to succeed. Donna Leep, Conte Community School principal, asserted the value of district-wide efforts, emphasizing the importance of principals and staffs working together as well as the need at Conte for greater staff stability and community support. Churchill Cotton stated the desire of the Westside Initiative to provide that support. Mary Ellen Trumbull, Capeless principal, stressed providing teachers with more knowledge in the vital subject areas, (English language arts and mathematics) through coaching and professional development.

When questioned as to the direction the district is taking in assisting lower income schools and making sure that all students receive the help they need, Ms. Malkas stated that progress monitoring is ongoing and student evaluations will be available in fall, winter, and spring before the next MCAS are administered.

Mayor Ruberto moved that the Committee take a ten minute break. The motion was seconded and was by vote approved unanimously.

Motion by Angel Ramirez, seconded by Carmen Massimiano, that the School Committee return to regular order of business was by vote unanimously approved. The School Committee returned to the regular order of business at 9:15 p.m.

Deputy Superintendent Barbara Malkas introduced Lisa Buchinski, principal of Crosby Community School, who spoke about the action steps and increased early intervention that are part of Crosby's action plan as well as the work of the reading specialist and math coach to increase and improve instruction. Ms. Buchinski mentioned the increased precision of Data Warehouse in enabling teachers and administrators to teach to the areas of greatest need.

Curriculum Coordinator for Reading Kathleen Latham addressed the Committee about some of the data results that are being applied to specific needs in reading and

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writing. In responding to a question from the Committee, Ms. Latham said the the DIBELS test provides indications of which students are at risk. Especially among low-income students, lack of exposure leaves them with less vocabulary, which makes it harder for them to read. The aim is to close the gap.

Principal Karen Senus said that Egremont School is looking at standards and tasks analyses and is targeting writing, computation and number sense, and using 90-minute reading and math blocks to strengthen skills in those areas. Jean Bednarski, Stearns principal, emphasized the importance of coaches, practice MCAS, and using MCAS questions. Williams School, under principal Brenda Wells, does monthly progress monitoring and has flexible grouping and works on getting students interested in learning.

Herberg Middle School principal Christopher Jacoby highlighted intervention, the efforts of data teams, professional development for teachers, and making Effective Daily Instruction a standard in the classroom that will enable students to make progress in MCAS. Under principal Morgan Williams, students will be made more knowledgeable about the MCAS test itself and taught to understand the strategies of the assessment while not making everything test specific but incorporating hands-on projects on a regular basis.

Christopher Sposato, Pittsfield High School principal, says that one of the action steps at that school is daily written exercise to improve writing skills. Academic coaches are providing the staff with specific interventions for specific students. Principal Douglas McNally from Taconic High School sees a great curriculum that is taught well and regular assessment enables students to succeed at MCAS. He addressed the conflict between the MCAS-required four-year graduation rate and the School Committee supported five-year plan that has raised the graduation rate to 85%.

The School Committee thanked the principals for all their work for Pittsfield's students and for the informative meeting, expressing appreciation for their efforts and progress.

IV. Executive Session

Motion by Angel Ramirez, seconded by Carmen Massimiano, that the School Committee adjourn for Executive Session to discuss grievances and negotiations issues was by vote unanimously approved.

The Committee went into Executive Session at 10:35 p.m.

Motion by Angel Ramirez, seconded by Carmen Massimiano, that the School Committee return to regular order of business was by vote unanimously approved. The School Committee returned to the regular order of business at 10:53 p.m.

A. Discussion of Grievances and Negotiations Issues

Motion by Angel Ramirez, seconded by Carmen Massimiano, to deny grievance brought forward by the Pittsfield Custodial Association and heard by the School

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Committee Negotiations Subcommittee on September 24, 2008 was by vote unanimously approved.

Motion by Angel Ramirez, seconded by Erin Sullivan, to deny a request for an extended leave for October 2008 reviewed by the School Committee Negotiations Subcommittee on September 25, 2008 was unanimously approved.

Motion by Angel Ramirez, seconded by Erin Sullivan, to deny a request for an extended leave for November 2008 reviewed by the School Committee Negotiations Subcommittee on September 24, 2008 was unanimously approved.

Motion by Angel Ramirez, seconded by Erin Sullivan, to allow a request for a continuation of medical leave reviewed by the School Committee Negotiations Subcommittee on September 24, 2008 was unanimously approved.

VI. Future Business

- A. The next regular Meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, October 8, 2008, 7:00 P.M., Pittsfield High School.

VII. Adjournment

Motion by Angel Ramirez, seconded by Carmen Massimiano, that the School Committee be adjourned was by vote unanimously approved at 10:55 p.m..

Respectfully submitted,

Angel Ramirez, Secretary