

EASTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS
EASTON, MA

EASTON SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES
Thursday, April 6, 2023

Minutes of the Virtual School Committee Meeting, April 6, 2023 Virtual Meeting via Zoom convened at 6:01p.m. Present: Michelle Durrance, Jennifer Starr, Caroline O'Neill, Nancy De Luca, and Jacqueline Weisman.

Also in Attendance:

Dr. Lisha Cabral, Superintendent; Crissy Pruitt, Assistant Superintendent; Lynn Souza, Administrative Assistant to Dr. Cabral and School Committee Secretary; and Joe Boerman, ECAT.

Call Meeting to Order:

Chair Durrance called the meeting to order and stated in keeping with an act relative to extending certain State Of Emergency accommodations, the meeting will be conducted remotely over Zoom. Attendance by Board/Commission members will be remote and remote attendance shall count toward quorum. The meeting will be broadcast live and recorded on ECAT. The meeting will be open to the public, and questions will be taken via the chat feature. Full name and address must be included with the question and questions that have already been answered will not be read.

Vote to Approve Minutes: 3/23/2023, 3/30/2023; Executive Session 3/23/2023:

On a motion by Ms. O'Neill, seconded by Ms. De Luca, with a roll call vote of 5-0, *O'Neill-yes, De Luca-yes, Durrance-yes, Weisman-yes, Starr-yes*, the Committee approved the minutes of 3/23/2023.

On a motion by Ms. O'Neill, seconded by Ms. Starr, with a roll call vote of 5-0, *O'Neill-yes, De Luca-yes, Durrance-yes, Weisman-yes, Starr-yes*, the Committee approved the minutes of 3/30/2023.

On a motion by Ms. Starr, seconded by Ms. O'Neill, with a roll call vote of 5-0, *O'Neill-yes, De Luca-yes, Durrance-yes, Weisman-yes, Starr-yes*, the Committee approved the Executive Session minutes of 3/23/2023 but not to be released at this time.

Vote to Accept Donation from Sarah's Village:

Dr. Cabral introduced Kelly Cavanaugh, Principal of Oliver Ames High School, Corinne McCarthy, Chair of Physical Education, Health and Wellness Department and the founders of Sarah's Village, Mark and Cynthia Bresnahan. Dr. Cabral noted that Sarah's Village donated \$20,000 in April 2022 to provide information to the district on reducing stress, wellness programs, mental health and how to reduce the stigma of mental health issues.

Ms. McCarthy updated the Committee with the current programs for the 2022-2023 school year that had been funded by the generous donation of Sarah's Village last year and she reviewed the programs for the next school year to be funded by this year's generous donation.

Mr. Bresnahan presented the district with a donation in the amount of \$20,000 from Sarah's Village and noted that it was 6 years ago today that they lost their daughter, Sarah.

The Committee members expressed their gratitude and appreciation for the work that Sarah's Village has done in honor of their late daughter, Sarah.

On a motion by Ms. O'Neill, seconded by Ms. Starr, with a roll call vote of 5-0, *O'Neill-yes, De Luca-yes, Durrance-yes, Weisman-yes, Starr-yes*, the Committee accepted the very generous donation from Sarah's Village with tremendous gratitude to help the students at Oliver Ames High School, Easton Middle School and Richardson Olmsted.

Discussion and Possible Vote to Approve DEI (Diversity Equity Inclusion) Student Advisory Council Proposal:

Ms. Cavanaugh was joined by Ellie Cooper, Adjustment Counselor and Current Social Justice intern; students, Joyce Riad and Sonia Warrick, both Juniors at Oliver Ames High School. The students presented their proposal to hang flags in the Oliver Ames High School cafeteria to represent all students and their diversity at Oliver Ames High School. The total cost for the flags will be \$993.45, \$8.95 per 2' x 3' flags and the funding for the project will come from fundraising. Students and staff were surveyed and so far they have collected data from 400 responses for 111 flags covering the 6 major continents.

A discussion took place.

Ms. Cavanaugh said that she has been working with John Norrman regarding the placement of the flags and with the DPW (Department of Public Works) to ensure compliance with building codes.

On a motion by Ms. O'Neill, seconded by Ms. De Luca, with a roll call vote of 5-0, *O'Neill-yes, De Luca-yes, Durrance-yes, Weisman-yes, Starr-yes*, the Committee approved the flag proposal with enthusiasm.

Discussion and Possible Vote to Approve Out of State Trip:

Ms. Cavanaugh presented the out-of-state trip to Orlando Florida for 3 students who qualified for the DECA (Distributive Education Clubs of America) International Career Development Conference on April 22-26th.

On a motion by Ms. O'Neill, seconded by Ms. Starr, with a roll call vote of 5-0, *O'Neill-yes, De Luca-yes, Durrance-yes, Weisman-yes, Starr-yes*, the Committee approved the DECA (Distributive Education Clubs of America) out of state trip to Florida on April 22nd to 26th.

Discussion and Possible Vote to Change the 2022-2023 Schedule of School Committee Meetings:

Chair Durrance stated that she had included the 2022-2023 Schedule of School Committee meetings on the agenda to have a discussion in light of the extension for meeting remotely or to return in person.

A discussion took place and the Committee agreed to continue remotely with a start time of 5:00 p.m. for the remainder of the school year into the July and August meetings and return in person in September. Due to the ability of holding hybrid meetings in the Simmons Lecture Hall at Oliver Ames High School, the Committee agreed to investigate that option and have a test run before returning to in person in September. No vote was needed.

Discussion and Possible Vote on 2023-2024 Schedule of School Committee Meetings (second reading):

Chair Durrance reiterated that the July and August meetings for the 2023-2024 Schedule of School Committee meetings will be held remotely with a start time of 5:00 p.m.

The Committee adjusted the start time for the June 6, 2024 meeting to 6:30 p.m. and changed the December 21, 2023 meeting to Tuesday, December 19, 2023.

On a motion by Ms. O'Neill, seconded by Ms. De Luca, with a roll call vote of 5-0, *O'Neill-yes, De Luca-yes, Durrance-yes, Weisman-yes, Starr-yes*, the Committee accepted the 2023-2024 with noted edits

FY 24 Budget Presentation:

Dr. Cabral extended her gratitude to Ms. Ondrea Starzhevskiy, Director of Finance who has been working tirelessly on the budget.

Dr. Cabral presented a powerpoint presentation of the FY24 budget. She explained the process and consideration and stated that the timelines may be slightly off.

- December - January: Staff Input (School principals spend 2 staff meetings reviewing the Strategic Plan and soliciting budget input from all staff).
- February: Principal Presentations (School principals present their prioritize needs based on staff input and present their budget to the Cabinet).
- February - March: Executive Team Review (district Executive Team prioritizes district needs based on input received and presents district proposal to Cabinet).
- March: Staff Final Review (School principals present district proposal to staff for final review).
- March - April: Public Presentations (District budget is presented to School Committee, Select Board, Finance Committee, and at Town Meeting).

Chair Durrance exited the meeting at 7:02 p.m.

Dr. Cabral reviewed the Budget Target Definitions and Target for FY24:

- Innovative: Developing cutting-edge, state-of-the-art opportunities and programming that prepare students to be among the top thinkers and creators in a global society.
- Strategic: Planning for the challenging and evolving needs of future career and higher education. Includes staff and/or resources that students in peer communities already access.
- Proactive: Preparing for an imminent or developing need or mandate. Lack of preparation results in increased reactive needs.
- Reactive/Essential: Providing staff and/or resources only as a reaction to a current need or mandate. May not fully satisfy need or mandate.
- Regressive: Reducing or eliminating staff/resources. This restricts access to programming, reduces non-core content, and/or sends the district backwards in terms of development/strategy.

Dr. Cabral noted that the FY24 budget target falls under Reactive/Essential. She reviewed the FY24 significant needs which included:

- English Learner Staff
- PK Staff Teachers, Paraprofessionals, Coordinator
- Secondary Counseling
- Oliver Ames High School Special Education Coordinator
- Special Education Program Addition
- DEI (Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion) Coordinator

Dr. Cabral reviewed the English Language Learner requirements and laws along with the Special Education and mental health challenges in the district. She spoke of the district’s work related to Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI). Dr. Cabral discussed the FY24 budget influencers, savings and expenses:

Savings:

- Central Administration Rent
- BA Utilities (possible)
- Food Service (possible)
- Retirements (less than typical)

Expenses:

- Contract Negotiations
- Technology Procurement Cycle
- Transportation Contract Increase
- Increased Enrollments
- Increased Out of District Costs of 14%

Dr. Cabral discussed the FY24 important considerations for future impact to expenses:

- Technology Procurement Cycle still in development
- Some PK Staff in revolving account (tuition continuing)
- Some Special Education staff in revolving account
- Some interventionists in grant
- Some paraprofessionals in grant
- Summer School (SEA) Summer Enrichment Academy in grant

Dr. Cabral reviewed the Chapter 70 summary comparison to FY23 and the FY24 budget proposal of \$47,028,543 at 3.0%. She noted that the Town target for the school department was 2.5%, which Dr. Cabral stated was not sustainable.

A discussion was held.

PUBLIC HEARING: FY 24 Budget

Vice Chair Starr stated that the public has the opportunity to make comments or ask questions as part of the Public Hearing of the FY24 budget. She noted that name and address is required to submit questions and comments via the Chat feature.

Kristin Martin, Center Street, North Easton - *"You mentioned having diverse students, how can you support them without having diverse staff? What are you doing to change it?"*

Dr. Cabral referred to the list on one of the slides from the presentation. She noted the partnerships that the district has with community organizations and the ADL (Anti-Defamation League), Massachusetts Association of School Superintendents. She added that the district needs a DEI (Diversity, Equity and Inclusion) Coordinator. Dr. Cabral said it's not just about recruiting diverse staff, it's about retaining diverse staff. She said they need to make sure that people feel as though they belong and that is all part of this work. She said the district wants to be diverse, we want to have equity and we want to include everyone and the ultimate goal is belonging. Dr. Cabral noted that the district has worked with organizations such as Raising Multicultural Kids to make sure that we have people of color in our elementary classrooms. She added that it is a concerted community effort when someone looks at a place to work, they are looking at the greater community as well because sometimes they are thinking about moving into the community. It is the responsibility of the district to work with the greater community to make sure that the community shows that it is a welcoming place for people to live, learn, to grow, and to belong. The district is looking to coordinate efforts at the town level to make this a welcoming place for people and it is a lifelong process for everyone. Dr. Cabral said the district hired a Human Resources Director to specifically focus more on recruitment and retention and she has become part of the Massachusetts Diversity Partners organization. Dr. Cabral said that the district has attended 2 job fairs specific to diverse candidates and the population of diverse staff members have grown in the last 2 years. She noted that it is about retainment as much as it is about recruitment.

Kristin Martin, Center Street, North Easton - *"You also mentioned equity is a whole person, a whole system. What are you doing to ensure students and staff of color are feeling supported?"*

Dr. Cabral referred to the list on one of the slides in the presentation and added that the district has the Superintendent's Advisory Committee which Raising Multicultural Kids was actually a spinoff of that, and the district has a great partnership with them. The district started a peer leadership program with the ADL (Anti-Defamation League) which is at the high school and middle school. The student leaders are learning through the ADL (Anti-Defamation League) how to approach difficult conversations with students and teach them how to advocate for themselves. She said Ms. Cavanaugh started a DEI (Diversity, Equity and Inclusion) Student Advisory Council at Oliver Ames High School and has received a lot of participation from the students.

She spoke about the program called “Walk in my Shoes” where students were able to speak their truth and really discuss their experience at Oliver Ames and it was very powerful and eye opening for a lot of the staff. Ms. Pruitt added that the district just started a partnership with an organization called IDEA (Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, and Access) and they are offering professional development within the district and also offer affinity groups. She said that they are in the process of advertising for those and ideally would like to have affinity groups within the district for the staff. In order to have an affinity group you need to have a larger population.

Dr. Cabral added that she is very mindful of making sure that we have a balance. Her personal belief is that as a white woman because she has enjoyed privileges not offered to other people in the country, that she has a responsibility to do something about it. She said that she is very mindful of not taking away from the voice of people that have that experience that she doesn’t have so she wants to make sure to encourage people to participate. She added, to Ms. Pruitt’s point about a low incidence right now, while she wants people to participate and have a voice, she feels if she approaches the 7 or 8 African American, that doesn’t include Asian or Indian or Native American, to approach someone and ask if they will lead a particular effort what she doesn’t want to do is to tokenize someone because of their race, disability, or how they identify. She said she doesn’t want to tokenize people and assume that every person of color wants to lead this work or every person of a particular faith wants to lead a charge that’s also objectionable to her and therefore, they are working with people that she would consider experts and she does not consider herself an expert, she said she will always consider herself a student in this area. She said she wants to be a lifelong learner in this area and the district is getting some really expert help on how to try to navigate that and bring in people that can lead this work. She encouraged others to participate voluntarily on their own with the understanding that the district knows it is their responsibility to provide them with the resources that help them be successful and to connect them to other resources to take on the responsibility of finding this information and doing this work. She said she does feel responsible for this but she is also trying to be cognizant of not taking away the voice of those that have the authentic experience, and that she knows they can’t do it right all the time nor does she do it right all the time. She said she is willing to make herself vulnerable to do the work because it is very critical.

Kristin Martin, Center Street, North Easton - *“Dr. Cabral with all do respect what are you doing at the highschool to recruit staff presently? If you listen to the community the school is failing in this aspect. 2 job fairs out of many? Has RMK been involved?”*

Dr. Cabral responded that the job fair process has just started and that she had a conversation with Raising Multicultural Kids explaining that she asked them for help. She said when she and/or Ms. Pruitt attended a job fair they are having trouble attracting people to their table and she expressed her appreciation for a member of Raising Multicultural Kids’ frank feedback stating that as a person of color other people of color may not be incentivized to come up and talk to them because Dr. Cabral and Ms. Pruitt is not a person of color. She noted that a member of Raising Multicultural Kids volunteered to come to job fairs to speak to candidates. She said they were extremely thankful for the honest feedback and for their willingness to help at the job fair.

Kristin Martin, Center Street, North Easton - *“How many black educators do you have to retain?”*

Ms. Pruitt said that question had already been answered.

Discussion and Possible Vote to Approve the FY 24 Budget

Vice Chair Starr asked if Committee members had questions pertaining to the budget.

Ms. Weisman asked Dr. Cabral to remind people when the meeting will take place with the Finance Committee and the Select Board to review the School budget.

Dr. Cabral responded that she will be presenting to the Finance Committee and the Select Board on April 26th and will update the Committee at the April 27th School Committee meeting with the results of that meeting.

On a motion by Ms. O'Neill, seconded by Ms. Weisman, with a roll call vote of 4-0, *O'Neill-yes, De Luca-yes, Weisman-yes, Starr-yes*, the Committee accepted the FY 24 Budget.

Vice Chair Starr thanked Dr. Cabral for the thorough and excellent presentation and Ms. Starzhevskiy for all her work.

Ms. Starzhevskiy thanked the School Committee and Dr. Cabral and said she is looking forward to the Town Meeting.

Vote to Approve Great Minds Contract:

Ms. Pruitt presented the contract for Great Minds to purchase materials for Wit and Wisdom along with professional development at \$354,968.65.

Ms. Weisman asked about the shipping costs.

Ms. Pruitt noted that the district did receive discounts that were double the cost of shipping and that because it goes directly through their shipping and handling process, they can't reduce the shipping costs; therefore, they provided discounts in other ways.

Vice Chair Starr asked if the materials will get shipped to each school or Central Administrative Office.

Ms. Pruitt responded that they will get shipped directly to the schools.

Ms. De Luca asked about the previous contract with Great Minds that the Committee had approved previously and will the total cost for both contracts be approximately \$400,000 total program cost.

Ms. Pruitt noted that the previous contract was for the Preschool teachers and confirmed the total cost of the program.

Vice Chair Starr asked how much would be recurring.

Ms. Pruitt said that she will get that information to the Committee.

On a motion by Ms. O'Neill, seconded by Ms. De Luca, with a roll call vote 4-0, *O'Neill-yes, De Luca-yes, Weisman-yes, Starr-yes*, the Committee approved the Great Minds contract.

Public Comment:

Kristin Martin, Center Street, North Easton *"One more question, RMK went to a job fair in 2019 that was 4 years ago. How recent were these job fairs?"*

Dr. Cabral explained that it was 2019; however, because of COVID job fairs were canceled, they have been going and using the RMK idea. She said the most recent job fair was March 31st, 2023 and the next is April 12th, and another one in May. Dr. Cabral invited Ms. Martin to reach out beyond this meeting as she would be happy to hear her ideas, ask questions, and help them as she would like to get as many eyes on this as possible.

Superintendent Notes:

Dr. Cabral provided an update on the grounds at the Blanche Ames Elementary School. She said they met with Braitt Builders and they have critical components that are anticipated to be done by the end of April. She noted that the bus loop is in progress and should be completed by the end of April, some poles have been installed for the backstop, the parking lot on Spooner, and the playground; however, the fields won't be ready just yet. She noted that they are anticipating getting it done by the end of May. She said that she asked the landscape architect that if the planting is done by the end of May will it give enough time to have the growing

season that is needed before they have another growing season in the fall so that it can be used, and she was told that it would be very close but possible. She asked for the community's help in staying off the field until the fields are ready for use. Dr. Cabral said that they are hoping to have an open house and ribbon cutting ceremony at the end of the summer, July or August. The CPA (Community Preservation Committee) and the Selectboard unanimously supported the courts and playground projects that will go before Town Meeting. Should the projects fail at town meeting, the tennis courts will be taken off line and the playground between Richardson Olmsted and Easton Middle School would not get completed. Should the project go forward, half of the playground is expected to be completed in October and the other half at the beginning of 2024. She noted that the district is working on a new district website over the summer with a launch for September.

Assistant Superintendent Notes:

Ms. Pruitt said that they are in the beginning stages of hiring a Director of Special Education as Theresa Skinner has submitted her resignation effective June 30th. Ms. Pruitt said she will be sending out a memo to all staff and families letting them know the timeline and that they are actively seeking staff members, parents, and a School Committee member. She will be Co-Chairing the Committee along with Director of Human Resources, Melissa Medeiros. She said the 13 member Committee will consist of a School Committee member, a principal, a Special Education Coordinator, a Special Education teacher, Paraprofessional, support staff, Guidance Counselor, Nurse, special services office staff, and a parent. The Committee will be asked to submit a statement of interest starting tomorrow and will end on April 13th or 14th. The search committee will be appointed and the first meeting will take place April 25th where they will come up with qualifications that they are looking for in a new Director of Special Services. Applications will be screened and applicants will be chosen to be interviewed starting May 1st for the first round and they will go through 2 rounds of interviews. The Committee will have site visits to the districts of the semifinalists, the semifinalists will visit Easton Public Schools as well the week of May 20th. Forums will take place for teachers to attend and a community forum for parents to attend as well as students and the School Committee. Feedback will be collected from the forums. Dr. Cabral will then interview the final 2 or 3 candidates. They are hoping that by June 2nd a new Director of Special Services will be appointed.

Ms. O'Neill stated that she believes this position requires the endorsement of the School Committee.

Ms. Pruitt confirmed that it does.

School Committee Notes:

This meeting was the last meeting for Caroline O'Neill as she did not run for re-election. Ms. O'Neill served on the School Committee for 30 years.

School Committee members along with Dr. Cabral and Ms. Pruitt gave heartfelt thanks and appreciation to Ms. O'Neill for her years of service to the students of Easton Public Schools.

Ms. O'Neill extended her gratitude for the words spoken and said that she was deeply touched and valued each member of the Committee along with Dr. Cabral and Ms. Pruitt.

Ms. Pruitt read a comment in the chat:

Joe Boerman 90 Washington Street - *"Enjoy your retirement from the School Committee Caroline speaking from my role working at ECAT I always appreciated your kindness you always showed towards me and my coworkers. Best of luck."*

Vice Chair Starr said the next School Committee meeting will take place on Thursday, April 27th and in between now and then, the Annual Town Election will be held on Saturday, April 22nd.

Executive Session: Pursuant to M.G.L. c. 30A, §21 3 To Discuss Strategy with Respect to Collective Bargaining for Paraprofessionals, and SPEA (Southeastern Public Employees Association) Secretarial/Clerical Unit:

Vice Chair Starr made a motion to enter into the Executive Session and will not return to Open Session, for the purpose of discussion strategy with respect to collective bargaining for Paraprofessionals and SPEA (Southeastern Public Employees Association) Secretarial Clerical Unit and stated that, in her opinion, having this discussion in public would be detrimental to the bargaining position of the School Committee. Ms. O'Neill seconded the motion, with a roll call vote of 4-0, *O'Neill-yes, De Luca-yes, Weisman-yes, Starr-yes*, the Committee adjourned to enter into Executive Session at 8:46 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Lynn Souza
Secretary

Documents:

Minutes 3/23/2023, 3/30/2023 and Executive Session minutes 3/23/2023
Document of programs funded by Sarah's Village donations
Diversity Equity Inclusion proposal
Out of State Trip Proposal
2022-2023 Schedule of School Committee Meetings
2023-2024 Schedule of School Committee Meetings
Great Minds contract