

**SHREWSBURY PUBLIC SCHOOLS  
100 MAPLE AVENUE  
SHREWSBURY, MASSACHUSETTS**

**MINUTES OF SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEETING**

**WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 25, 2013**

Present: Ms. Sandra Fryc, Chairperson; Mr. John Samia, Vice Chairperson, Mr. Jason Palitsch, Secretary; Ms. Erin Canzano; Dr. B. Dale Magee; Dr. Joseph Sawyer, Superintendent of Schools; Ms. Mary Beth Banios, Assistant Superintendent of Schools; Mr. Liam Hurley, Director of Business Services.

The meeting was convened at 7:00 PM by Ms. Sandra Fryc.

**I. Public Participation**

Shrewsbury parent Gretchen Gillung-Fontanez expressed her concerns about the large class sizes and mentioned her son's second grade class at Floral with thirty students. She said her son says it is often very noisy and challenging to concentrate with so many students and that she has heard from other parents who share the similar concerns. Ms. Fryc thanked Ms. Gillung-Fontanez for voicing her concerns and communicated that large class sizes continue to be one of the biggest concerns for the Shrewsbury School Committee members.

**II. Chairperson's Report and Members' Reports**

**A. Sherwood Building Committee Report**

Ms. Canzano reported that the Sherwood Building Committee met for their last formal meeting and the Sherwood School building project will be discussed by Mr. Henry Fitzgerald at the Town Meeting. The baseball and softball fields are still being completed. Ms. Canzano shared that the project has been a great success and the cost will be at least \$5 million dollars below the allocated budget. One result of the lower cost will be that the Town will be able to get a lower bond for the project.

**B. Spirit of Shrewsbury**

Ms. Fryc shared that Mrs. Isabel Chang has been chosen to serve as the master of ceremonies for the upcoming Spirit of Shrewsbury festival and celebration. Ms. Fryc offered congratulations to Mrs. Chang on behalf of the School Committee and mentioned that Mrs. Chang previously worked at the Shrewsbury Library and Schools.

**III. Superintendent's Report**

**A. Shrewsbury High School Spirit Week**

Dr. Sawyer congratulated and commended the SHS Seniors, faculty and staff members on a very successful Spirit Week and said that participants demonstrated unity, leadership and school spirit. Dr. Sawyer said that it was terrific to see students involved in such a positive way making this the best annual SHS Spirit Week.

## **B. Shrewsbury High School Debate Team Honors and Recognition**

Dr. Sawyer congratulated the SHS Speech & Debate Team students, volunteer coaches and supporters for outstanding individual and team accomplishments at the National Forensic League Tournament in Birmingham, Alabama. SHS has been named a School of Excellence in Debate and one of the top 20 debate schools in the country. A trophy received by the Speech & Debate Team is currently on display at SHS.

## **IV. Time Scheduled Appointments**

### **A. SHS Community Service Program: Report**

Shrewsbury High School (SHS) administrators and students (Mr. Todd Bazydlo, Principal; PJ O'Connell, Assistant Principal; students Robert Franger, Tatiana Karadimitriou, Sarath Mohan, Lauren Maranto) presented details about the SHS Community Service Program. The theme developed by Community Service Program members is "Make a Difference" and SHS students have challenged each other to complete the "The 10,000 Hour Challenge" (Seniors 4,000 hours, Juniors 3,000 hours, Sophomores 2,000 hours and Freshmen 1,000 hours). SHS has completed over 32,000 hours of community service which has greatly benefited the larger Shrewsbury community. Mr. Rob Franger shared that Representative Matt Beaton has pledged to donate \$1,000 to the SHS Community Service Program for each year that he is in office. Students present discussed their experiences participating in the Community Service Program and the positive impact on individuals and the community. Some of the examples of community service participation and service learning opportunities shared by students were Relay for Life events, Shrewsbury Summer Programs, projects at Shrewsbury Towers and serving as volunteers at area hospitals. Dr. Sawyer and members of the School Committee congratulated the Community Service Program and Advisory Board members for their great accomplishments and continued positive impact in the Shrewsbury community.

### **B. State of the District, Part II: Report**

Dr. Sawyer presented Part II of the "State of the District" report. He shared a brief re-cap of the key messages from Part 1 of the State of the District Report: 1.) We have insufficient resources to meet student needs 2.) We are innovating and collaborating to try and cope with increased demands 3.) We are concerned that the quality of the education provided to Shrewsbury students is declining. Dr. Sawyer said he was sorry to be sharing the information that in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts the Shrewsbury School District has been downgraded to a Level 2 rating in 2013 from a Level 1 rating in 2012 and that 5 out of 7 individual schools in our district have been downgraded from Level 1 to Level 2. He said that approximately 25% of the school districts in Massachusetts are rated Level 1 and approximately 57% are rated Level 2. Dr. Sawyer said that some of the achievement gaps widened this year, some of the more vulnerable and at-risk student groups were regressing, and in regards to pure achievement the Shrewsbury schools maintained in the English Language Arts MCAS Achievement area. Dr. Sawyer said that he and other personnel members will continue to do an exhaustive review looking at the data. He shared that students maintained achievement levels in Mathematics and Science. Dr. Sawyer is concerned about the continued growth of students' achievement and that the downgrade from Level 1 to Level 2 is initial evidence that the quality of education for Shrewsbury students is declining. He said we need to limit the damage this year and plan to address issues for the longer term and future. A link for the Part II "State of the District" presentation slides is located on the district website. Dr. Magee commented that the deteriorating performance by students who need the school system the most is troubling, "no money, no mission" and that the community needs to be reached about these issues and challenges. Mr. Palitsch stated that budgets have consequences and that what we are seeing now is the effect on students' performance. He said that the School Committee has had to make hard choices during the past few years

and this is evidence that students performance is suffering despite the high quality of teachers working hard to keep students achieving. Ms. Canzano said that she has observed that over the last five or six years the discussion has been about maintaining, now Dr. Sawyer is talking about limiting the damage to the school system and that we need to take positive action. Mr. Samia said that we have continued to peel away services and what we have given to kids and there is only so much you can squeeze. He said the Shrewsbury Schools have been a crown jewel for the community, having thirty students in a class has consequences and that our students deserve better. Ms. Fryc said there is a sense of urgency to work on this problem.

### **C. FY 2014 Budget and Resource Allocation: Report**

Dr. Sawyer stated that it is important to keep the School Committee and community members informed about the budget and the changes and adjustments made throughout the year. A third school bus is being added on Monday to transport some of the Shrewsbury students who attend the Assabet Regional Vocational Technical High School. The addition of the bus is to address the problem of very long bus rides for students. The cost of the third school bus is \$51,000 and this will be paid for with funds allocated in the budget for vocational transportation and tuition. Due to new students moving into the district, a half-time special education teaching position will be added for the remainder of the year. The cost of the position is approximately \$25,000 and this will be paid from the special education personnel account and a grant. A paraprofessional position will be added at Sherwood to respond to the needs of students. The position will cost approximately \$16,000 for the remainder of the year and the special education personnel account will be able to absorb this expenditure. Dr. Sawyer shared with School Committee members that in order to mitigate the high class size problem for the remainder of the year it is necessary to provide additional aide support in several second and third grade classrooms throughout the district. Dr. Sawyer shared his recommendations and asked the School Committee Members to provide input. He stated that adding additional aide support was a band aid but not a solution to the problem. Dr. Sawyer recommended providing a total of 97.5 additional aide support hours for the schools, the estimated cost for the remainder of the school year is \$40,000 to \$50,000, and the source for funding will be resources in the personnel account. Additional people will be hired and some aides currently on the staff may increase hours. Dr. Sawyer said he will work with administrators to figure out schedules and the allocation of additional aide hours to classrooms. He said that this expenditure might make it necessary to transfer funds from other school budget accounts later in the fiscal year. Dr. Sawyer also said that some other things that were planned for in the budget may not be done, but the problem of high class sizes is an immediate priority. He said that although he has the authority to implement this policy he wanted to give the School Committee members a chance to weigh in before moving forward. School Committee members said they supported Dr. Sawyer's recommendation to move forward with adding additional aide hours since alleviating the immediate problem of high class sizes is urgent.

### **D. FY 2015 Budget Guidelines and Priorities: Discussion**

Mr. Palitsch and Mr. Samia discussed the new draft of the budget guidelines and priorities that has been created since the last School Committee meeting. Mr. Palitsch said the goal is to develop a set of priorities to put forward by the School Committee and to share with the public. He discussed the three main sections of the document: A) Priorities: 1. Bring class sizes to recommended levels 2. The need for new curriculum materials 3. implement the Shrewsbury School District's five-year strategic plan. B.) Assumptions C.) Specific Guidance for Dr. Sawyer and administrators.

Mr. Samia added that he thinks the document serves a two-fold purpose: provides guidelines and a roadmap for the Fiscal Year 2015 budget and helps provide the community with an understanding of the work we are doing. Mr. Samia also said that regarding the first priority related to class size, although

aides can help, this does not replace a classroom teacher. Dr. Magee said he wanted to make a comment he has made before about placing the technology piece in the value column. He said he is impressed with how the Shrewsbury School district handles the Special Education program and asked Dr. Sawyer to explain why restructuring is needed in this area. Dr. Sawyer said the bottom line is that the Special Education program does not have what it needs to be more innovative and it is the most regulated program in the district. Dr. Sawyer stated that the intent of indicating the need to restructure is not because we are in a problematic position with the program, but it is a capacity issue to implement what needs to be done for the Special Education program. Dr. Magee stated that there seems to be the need to enhance the ability to innovate in special education as opposed to knocking down something that is not working well. Mr. Samia suggested that this section of the draft document be reworded to provide additional opportunities. Dr. Magee said the Special Education program is exceptionally well-managed in Shrewsbury and this information should be exposed to the public. Ms. Canzano said she is pleased with the document and the priorities are clear. Ms. Fryc said she likes the format of the document and it is a great roadmap for community members to see. She suggested getting the draft document out to the community and staff members to view. There will be a vote at the next School Committee meeting to make the document official after further revisions are completed and the public had the opportunity to comment.

#### **E. Transportation Update: Report**

Mr. Liam Hurley provided an update regarding bus registrations, late registrations and issues related to transportation during the start-up phase of the school year. The district put out bids for the bus transportation contract and the AA provider was the only bidder with a little over \$56,000 per bus. Mr. Hurley said the district has been satisfied with the AA services. Mr. Hurley said the current fleet is 46 and will be increasing to 47 buses with the addition of the bus to transport students to Assabet. The Power School system has been working well and the bus fee remains unchanged at \$250 a student with a \$500 cap per family. Mr. Hurley suggested a future discussion about strategies to discourage late registrations in August and possibly communicating to all late registrants, except new families moving into the district, that there may be a delay in getting bus service transportation started for the school year. Mr. Hurley explained the details of why it becomes a problem to change and re-route bus routes in August close to the start of the school year. He hopes that registration can be opened up earlier during spring 2014 to give families the opportunity to register by the deadlines. Ms. Canzano said it was very helpful this year to receive the phone calls and emails reminding families about bus registration deadlines. Mr. Hurley shared that the district has organized an upcoming training session for 74 AA Transportation staff members to be trained in First Aid, CPR and epi-pen administration. Dr. Sawyer thanked Mr. Hurley and the rest of the staff members for the good work with the school transportation program.

#### **V. Curriculum**

None

#### **VI. Policy**

##### **A. Bullying Statistics for 2012-2013: Report**

Dr. Sawyer shared the report with the School Committee members and said that the district did not see any significant changes this past year with the total number of reported allegations of bullying going from 46 to 42. School Committee members asked questions about the reported allegations of bullying and Dr. Sawyer explained that under the definition of bullying many one-time incidents are not defined as bullying. However, Dr. Sawyer emphasized that all incidents are investigated and the appropriate actions are taken whether an incident is defined as bullying or falls under other categories. Dr. Sawyer said that it is positive that bullying is not a major issue in our district; however this is not to minimize the impact of a

student who is experiencing bullying. He said it is important to stay vigilant and build a culture where kids speak up. The Massachusetts Legislature has passed an amendment to add some additional language about bullying when the aggressor is a staff member. Dr. Sawyer said that guidance on this matter had been released only yesterday, and he will be providing information before the next School Committee meeting.

#### **VIII. Old Business**

None

#### **IX. New Business**

None

#### **X. Approval of Minutes**

Mr. Jason Palitsch reviewed the minutes from the September 11, 2013 School Committee meeting and had two changes. He requested that the word unanimous be inserted to describe the votes for a \$50,000 donation from the Garden Party and an increase in the daily rate for substitution teaching. On a motion by Mr. Samia, seconded by Dr. Magee, the School Committee voted unanimously to approve the amended minutes for the School Committee Meeting for September 11, 2013.

#### **XI. Executive Session**

At 8:44 PM, on a motion by Ms. Fryc, seconded by Mr. Palitsch, the School Committee voted to adjourn to Executive Session for the purpose of negotiations. On a roll call vote: Dr. Magee, yes; Ms. Canzano, yes; Mr. Palitsch, yes; Mr. Samia, yes; Ms. Fryc, yes.

#### **XIII. Adjournment**

On a motion by Ms. Canzano, seconded by Dr. Magee, the meeting was adjourned at 9:03 PM. On a roll call vote: Dr. Magee, yes; Ms. Canzano, yes; Mr. Palitsch, yes; Mr. Samia, yes; Ms. Fryc, yes.

Respectfully submitted

Christine Taylor, Clerk

Documents referenced:

- 1) State of the District Part II, Report and Discussion
- 2) FY 2014 Budget & Resource Allocation Report
- 3) FY 2005 Budget Guidelines & Priorities Discussion
- 4) Transportation Update Report
- 5) Bullying Statistics for 2012-2013 Report