

DOVER SCHOOL COMMITTEE
MEETING MINUTES
March 3, 2010

Members Present: Bob Springett, Chairperson
Jennifer DaSilva
Peter Lert
Carolyn Ringel
James Stuart

Also Present: Valerie Spriggs, Superintendent
Dr. Deb Reinemann, Curriculum Coordinator
Mr. Glen Koocher, MASC

1. Call to order – Mr. Springett

- Mr. Springett called the meeting to order at 9:10 am in the Chickering Music Room.
- Mr. Springett welcomed and introduced Mr. Glen Koocher, Executive Director, Massachusetts Association of School Committees (MASC).
- Mr. Springett spoke of the ground rules for this meeting. In general the meeting is scheduled for 9:00-10:30, but there is the ability to extend it longer today. Mr. Springett would like the meeting to be interactive and feels the best approach would be to use the Town Meeting protocol where community participants raise their hand to be recognized and state their name.

2. Roles and Responsibilities Presentation—Mr. Koocher

Mr. Koocher distributed his presentation to the committee and the community. Highlights of Mr. Koocher's presentation follow:

- School Committees are allowed to make their own rules for their district.
- The meeting is not over until the Chair says the meeting is adjourned.
- The majority of the Committee can overrule the Chair.
- Issues with teachers are to be directed to the Superintendent.
- There is a balance between the School Committee and Superintendent, for example, a teacher going through corrective action goes through the Superintendent and it can't be discussed with the School Committee.
- Advocacy Role—School Committee members are often called on to comment on policy, they may speak to the media and constituents in their advocacy role.
- Community Values—the community looks for the School Committee to articulate the values of the community, including in the curriculum.
- In 1993 the role of School Committees was redefined—previously every appointment in the district had to be approved by the School Committee, if they rejected the Superintendents nomination three times they could appoint their own person. Now the Superintendent is the personnel officer for the district.
- The Superintendent oversees the Principals, and decides to renew or not renew the contract, not the School Committee.
- The National Database of School Policies is available to Dover through the MASC.
- The Superintendent is hired and evaluated by the School Committee.
- Principals are hired and supervised by the Superintendent. The contract is public but personnel file is confidential.
- The heart of most conflicts: when roles and responsibilities aren't understood; when people act incorrectly but not illegally; when there is poor communication between the School Committee and Superintendent; when someone needs to control; when the media gets involved, and; problems over money. Mr. Koocher spoke of the difficulty a Committee can face when needing to reduce a budget and they need to increase class size vs. cutting programs.
- Budget: The Superintendent proposes a budget to the School Committee. There are policy questions within the budget. The Selectmen are given the budget, once approved it goes back to the School Committee who can then make downward adjustments only.
- Policies are found in: the District Policy Manual which is a compilation of all the policies; student handbooks; collective bargaining agreements, strategic plans, goals and objectives; school committee

minutes; grant applications; legal documents; directives of the Superintendent; past practices; regional agreements –superintendancy union, and; the town charter.

- Mr. Koocher spoke about Nancy Walser’s book on the Best Practices of Best School Boards which identifies a dozen characteristics of highly performing school boards, including: strong Superintendent/School Committee collaboration; clearly defined roles in promoting student achievement; having varied purposeful meetings, which includes having teachers present the components of the programs vs. just showing the end product; goal setting; professional development for the School Committee—there are 15 sets of requirements in Massachusetts; self governing boards; hiring and supporting an effective Superintendent; routine use of student development and achievement data; go with what’s proven to be effective, not necessarily what’s new; setting achievement related policies, such as around class size; shared leadership; an engaged School Committee Chair; aligned subcommittees.

3. Community Questions/Comments

- Jim Alpers--What is the most efficient way to contact the School Committee? Mr. Springett responded that the contact information is on the website and in the Chickering Directory.
- Dana White—how do you balance the fiduciary and administrative decisions? Mr. Koocher responded that they recommend that the Superintendent puts the budget for the entire district in 10 categories, and those will be the principal ones to manage, adjustments within those lines that concern policy are brought back to the School Committee by the Superintendent.
- Carolyn Ringel—Where can members of the community find the District Policy Manual? Ms. Spriggs responded that it is in the process of being updated to replace the current 4-5 versions. The goal is to complete the update this year, and then it will be put online with access from the webpages. Policies are brought to the Joint Committee for review and voting. Ms. Spriggs will provide a copy of the current book she is using to the school.
- Carolyn Ringel asked Mr. Koocher if the Principal usually attends School Committee meeting. Mr. Koocher responded that it varies by district, in a one school district you are more likely to see the principal present.
- Mike Ryan—How do split town school districts with multiple school committees have one district policy manual? Mr. Koocher responded that the two districts feed into the region, which is under the leadership of one Superintendent.
- Betsy Ryan—How do School Committees evolve from past models? Mr. Koocher responded that it is collaboration; high performing districts keep sending people to the School Committee who support high standards. There are some districts that have systemic issues that need to be resolved, such as Chelsea who is using a receiver.
- Peter Lert—How can we as an elected board improve student achievement? Mr. Koocher responded that you take the data you have and ask the Superintendent what it shows, you can determine how well the kids do on tests and compare how much growth they achieve vs. other students, you can determine what works in one class vs. another to find best practices. It also sends a message to the faculty that we are watching what works. Arlington, Lexington, Acton/Boxboro and Hudson do this well. You can contact the Value Added Specialist at the DOE for more information.
- Peter Lert--How does this work as a matter of policy? Mr. Koocher responded that School Committee can have the discussions to measure how effective we are and set standards for students to meet. A challenge for a high performing districts like this one is just how much better are you supposed to get, you want to maintain but not loose, broaden not narrow the options available to students. There is always room for improvement in certain places and in certain topics. You want to prove to the community how well you are doing.
- Meg Field—How do you gather the data and who is responsible for getting the data to you and us? Mr. Koocher stated that the DOE gathers data such as MCAS, and; you can also develop your own internal data. MCAS can be used for diagnostic purposes as a way to look at students at risk to identify what needs special attention. The state is trying to move to focusing on improvement instead of regulation and punishment. Mr. Springett spoke of how internally we want to take assessments from classroom teachers to create a snapshot across grades of how students are doing. We experimented with GuideEM on Math which tied to our standards and capturing the information more real time, when we got the data we shared it with the teachers and great things came out of it, we were able to see what standards and skills were being mastered or struggled with. From there we worked with Tufts on the BLA program, we wanted to

apply the Math model to ELA but chose to use Galileo. Our view is if we have the data we can get aggregate data (dashboards) of how the kids are doing.

- Dana White—There seems like a fine line between collaborative discussions vs. micromanaging. How do you manage it? Mr. Koocher spoke of it not being about the data analysis, but what you do afterward related to student achievement. The School Committee doesn't direct what to do, the Superintendent does on a teacher level, the Committee can ask for milestones.
- Dr. Reinemann—Does the open meeting policy require that the door to the room be kept open? Mr. Koocher stated you can close the door, but not lock it.
- Dawn Fattore—What is the role of the Principal in relation to the School Committee? Mr. Koocher responded that the attendance is not universal; often times there are so many questions that are directly related to the school, so the principal attends.
- Paul Wood—What brought you here today, can you offer guidance for the future? Mr. Koocher spoke of training related to new laws, training when staff leave and the discussions being private not public. The School Committee needs to protect the privacy of the individual leaving the district. Mr. Springett said there was a group of people wanting more information about roles and responsibilities, so this was thought to be the best way to share the information; we have dialogue leading to detente. We keep what's best for the kids and common goals in mind. The relationship with the Principal and the Committee is that they have tried to engage the Administration at the Central Office and building management about goals, initiatives and tracking to be sure we are doing the best for the kids. Some discussions can become heated due the passion of the issue, but we're able to work through. We make sure that the monies spent and programs approved achieve their objectives.
- Ms. Spriggs spoke of the request made of School Committee to be able to come together to have a conversation. This meeting gives us a common understanding of the roles and responsibilities; from here we can build a relationship with the parents and the community that allows the faculty to achieve. One thing she thinks has been frustrating for School Committee is that they have been looking for a reaction from Administration, in the past there wasn't a collaborative model, even when we're on the same page of wanting the best for the children. We had Administration, School Committee and the Superintendent at the table last summer to establish a collaborative model. Ms. Spriggs also spoke of mistakes being made but the focus not leaving the children. Ms. Spriggs can reach for the stars, but she needs parent and community involvement to succeed. A strong partnership is what has made us so good.
- Ms. Ringel spoke of the small group that will be established. Members of the community who are interested in participating are asked to send their name to Ms. Spriggs, and also send her topics to further discuss.

4. **Adjournment**-- Mr. Springett requested a motion to adjourn. Mr. Lert motioned, Ms. Ringel seconded. Meeting adjourned at 10:58 a.m.

Respectfully Submitted,
Deb Savastano