

**School Committee Retreat
July 18, 2018
King Philip Middle School – Library
18 King Street
Norfolk, MA 02056**

Mr. Gee, Chair, welcomed everyone and opened the meeting at 9AM. He said that this retreat is an opportunity, working with the new superintendent, Mr. Zinni, to set our expectations and ground rules on how to work together as a committee. It is also an opportunity to come up with a plan as to where we are going and identify the priorities and engage the superintendent and administration to help accomplish these goals. The chair's role is to help facilitate that process, with the help of all members, and to operate as a committee. Mr. Gee asked the members to comment on the agenda and goals for the meeting with the timeframes.

Roll Call of Members:

Members Present:

Norfolk:	Michael Gee, Kenneth Dow
Plainville:	Amy Abrams, Bruce Cates
Wrentham:	Jim Killion, Trevor Knott

Members Absent:

Norfolk:	Paul Cochran
Plainville:	Samad Khan
Wrentham:	Erin DeStefano

Delegations and Visitors:

Mr. Zinni, Superintendent, Mr. Azer, Director of Finance & Operations, Mr. Bois, Director of Technology

Mr. Bois assisted members with setting up their new Gmail accounts as the district has changed from Outlook to Gmail. Mr. Gee indicated that the website would be discussed later in the meeting.

School Committee Norms and Operating Protocols

Mr. Gee presented in the packet a document from MASC entitled, "Role of the Chair, A Guide for Present and Future School Committee Chairs." Mr. Gee explained that this document a nice summary of how a committee operates and offers a lot of examples and guidelines to follow.

Discussion ensued on policies and how consistently they are applied, based on some recent examples (such as the field trips). Mr. Zinni is aware that a broader review is necessary, including some specific policies as well as the issue of implementing and interpreting policies in general at the committee and school level.

Mr. Zinni facilitated a discussion on group norms for the school committee to work together and have productive meetings. After soliciting suggestions, he distributed a list for discussion.

1. Commit to confidentiality
2. Prioritize the program and value the time by being present
3. Ensure everyone's opinion is heard
4. Practice honest & respectful feedback
5. Infuse humor

6. Assume positive intent
7. Treat one another with dignity and respect
8. Withhold judgments
9. Share challenges, success and failure
10. Demonstrate vulnerability. Is the fact that you are willing to be wrong and take a change that you made a mistake and move forward and ties back to trust.

General consensus that this was good working list of norms.

Discussion on “Ensure everyone’s opinion is heard.” The points made included:

- Some members are more vocal than others, but everyone should feel comfortable in sharing their opinion or asking a question to obtain more information to honor the topics and give a respectful vote on that topic.
- It is important to hear all sides if there are differing opinions or points of view. That is the purpose of open meetings and the only time a school committee can deliberate.
- Discussions can also become prolonged at times with further questions and restatements. Members should perhaps try not to repeat what has already been said, but can indicate support or agreement with what has been said.
- The committee needs to make sure the audience understands why a vote was made. Discussion and questions are important to show that the process has been vetted.
- It is important to raise concerns, objections, or dissenting opinions before a vote is taken so that they can potentially be resolved or accounted for by the Chair rather than coming as a surprise.
- Once a vote is taken, the committee should all support the outcome of the vote.
- Mr. Zinni said that the administration needs to clearly present its recommendations so the committee knows why the administration is going in a particular direction.

District governance support project-What protocols cover?

Mr. Gee referred to the MASC document on District governance and offered that the Committee may wish to adopt protocols and referred to Policy BBAA (School Committee Authority) and BCA (School Committee Member Ethics).

How it will Conduct Business:

The following statements were reviewed:

- *The board will conduct its business through a set agenda. Emerging items will be addressed in subsequent meetings through agenda items.*
- *We acknowledge that the School Committee meeting is a meeting of the School Committee that is held in public – not a public meeting, and we will make every effort to ensure that the committee meetings are effective and efficient.*

Discussion ensued on public comment policy and practice. Current policy is that there is an open agenda item at the end of each agenda, but Mr. Gee indicated that in his experience the committee has tended to hear public comment at the time a topic is deliberated or otherwise less formally, as public comment tends to be infrequent. However, in some instances, meetings can turn into a public forum depending on the topic of concern.

Mr. Gee asked whether the committee feels we should continue the current practice.

- Discussion ensued on moving the public comment agenda item to the beginning as some committees do (including Mr. Zinni's previous district). People wishing to speak sign up and speak at the beginning. That has the benefit of allowing the public to go first and for the committee to hear concerns up front.
- General consensus that we move the public comment procedure up front and explain the protocol at the beginning of the meeting.
- Public comment protocols wouldn't apply to town administrators, selectmen, etc., who may participate or offer insights into budget discussions, for example; the chair has discretion for these types of interactions.
- Depending on the flow of the meeting, if there are a number of people to speak on a particular topic, the chair could ask the committee whether or not they will allow further public comment. In those instances, it may be incumbent on the chair to present ground rules ahead of time, limiting time to 3 minutes, etc., so that the audience is not controlling the meeting.

How it will Conduct Business (continued):

The following statements were reviewed:

- *We will base our decisions upon available facts, vote our convictions, avoid bias, and uphold and support the decisions of the majority of the school committee once a decision is made.*
- *The board will debate the issues, not one another.*
- *We will build trusting relationships.*
- *We will respect staff and fellow board members at all times.*
- *We will work to build trust between and among school committee members and the superintendent by treating everyone with dignity and respect even in times of disagreement.*

Discussion ensued that trust and respect should extend to staff and school committee as well. Mr. Zinni commented that trust needs to be developed on all levels, so that we build relationships and allow us to celebrate successes. The committee should work through Mr. Zinni to address any communication concerns.

Discussion ensued on the benefit of having a school committee presence at school events, which shows visible interest and helps build relationships. Ideally, public events should be attended by an administrator, and school committee visibility can be an important factor. The invitation needs to be extended to school committee and administrators. Mr. Zinni suggested that, if attending an event, to consider meeting the staff responsible and thanking them for their work. A correspondence, such as an email could with a copy to their evaluator is also appropriate. Mr. Killion suggested that banquets should be represented to support staff, students and parents and the programs.

Mr. Knott offered (later in the discussion) dissenting thoughts, as he does not see presence and public relations per se as a focus of the role of the school committee. He referred to the protocols of the Tewksbury School Committee (included as part of the MASC handout) and noted that what we are here for is to focus on empowering the superintendent to do his job and make him accountable and for the superintendent to do that with his staff.

Public Relations:

Following points were discussed:

Important school or committee events sometimes conflict with elementary events. Mr. Zinni would like to create a *google* calendar with KP and the elementary districts. While there is no guarantee it will solve all conflicts, it may help reduce double booking.

Mr. Zinni suggested meetings with town selectmen, finance committees, and town administrators beyond the budget season on issues such as safety that are vertically aligned with elementary districts, for collaboration and communication. Consensus that this would be a positive step and we should try to take the lead with town collaboration, though the towns are not necessarily in lockstep with each other and board membership naturally changes. It was noted that there have been meetings such as this over the years. Mr. Cates referred to at least three meetings that were held with the towns last year and that Plainville included all three towns for a strategy meeting along with KP at a joint meeting.

Mr. Zinni also suggested getting on the agenda of the various Selectmen's meetings.

Discussion ensued on an issue that has been brought forward by the Community Working Groups and others of having the towns look at their education budgets holistically for elementary districts and KP. A reality is that the various town stakeholders view the issue in very different ways.

Mr. Cates suggested that the School Committee hold some meetings in Plainville, as KP does not have a building presence there.

How it will communicate:

The following statements were reviewed:

- *The Superintendent and the SC recognize the importance of proactive communication and agree that there will be no surprises. If SC members have questions or concerns, they agree to contact the superintendent well in advance of a meeting.*
- *SC members will channel requests for information through the superintendent and SC chair rather than directly to staff.*

Mr. Zinni asked for school committee assistance in having these requests be sent to him rather than staff. Discussion ensued on the recent high school graffiti incident in relation to chain of command and how it was handled internally and in coordination with the police department, communicated internally and externally, and communicated to the school committee. It was a complex situation but there were several gaps, with the transition in leadership probably a contributing factor.

The chain of command was reviewed in which the first contact should be the superintendent and then the assistant superintendent.

Professional Development:

As noted above, Mr. Knott offered comments on what he feels should be the focus of the school committee. He pointed out that we have the opportunity to have a fresh start with strong new leadership. He referred to the issue of regionalization and suggested that what we need to do is get focused on topics such as that, to bring about needed change and make a difference.

Mr. Gee indicated that Mr. Knott's statement was a good reality check and also leads to a discussion on how the school committee can improve. Formal training can help us all stay on track from a protocol standpoint. Professional development also helps members stay abreast of complex issues that schools face

and help us make informed decisions. Most of us are not experts in areas such as school law, special education, curriculum and pedagogy, and so forth.

Discussion ensued on professional development for school committee members such as MASC Charting the Course and the MASC/MASS Joint Conference that all members can attend. Mr. Gee also pointed out that MASC offers a workshop to integrate the new superintendent as part of the hiring process.

Mr. Zinni has been considering this, given that there are many new members, and recommended that we have experts present to us certain topics such as school discipline and special education that members may want to know more about. He's had a conversation with our district lawyer about confidentiality as a potential topic. He also indicated that he is looking into a new special education attorney, who offers workshops on specific topics that may be of interest.

Discussion ensued on the possibility of having one meeting of the month as a business meeting and one meeting as a workshop or address an issue of community interest.

School Committee Operational Review

Mr. Gee asked for comments on meeting efficiency.

Discussion ensued on presentations overall and those relating to field trips. Points made include:

- Setting tight parameters duration and format of presentations.
- Need to review policy for overnight field trips as well as what needs to be presented.
- Mr. Zinni indicated that the vetting process by the administration should provide most of the information the school committee needs. He himself should be able to address questions that come up.

The use of subcommittees should also contribute to efficiency. Mr. Gee indicated that subcommittees are formed for a reason and what should come out as a recommendation from the subcommittee if the school committee asks for a recommendation. Subcommittees don't take action, their only action is to recommend to the full committee within the parameters set. They only have the authority given to them by the full committee.

Mr. Zinni suggests members review the packet in advance and let him know in advance if there are any questions to move the meeting along.

The 2018/2019 School Committee benchmark calendar was distributed for review. Discussion ensued on the meeting schedule as twice per month indicated by the bylaws.

Superintendent Entry Plan and Recommendations:

Mr. Zinni was appointed by the Committee in February with a signed contract in March 2018.

Mr. Zinni met with the members of the administrative team as well as Lisa Witkus, Executive Assistant, Michael Bois, Technology Director, and Larry Azer, Director of Finance, on several occasions prior to starting his position on July 1, 2018. He also served on the director of student support services screening committee so he met several staff members. Mr. Zinni shared his initial observations and indicated he will continue over the summer to set up appointments with town managers, town board members, and as many stakeholders as possible and hold a meet-the-superintendent event.

Mr. Zinni indicated that he has set up 3 administrative meetings to look at strategic planning. The approach he is recommending is to have the administrative team first focus on a one-year strategic plan with action steps. As we move into the spring and he has more data and feedback, they can work on a more thoughtful and comprehensive 3-to-5-year plan.

Mr. Zinni said that from what he has seen so far, the district does well academically and consistently produces strong academic scores. He stated that he needs to go into classrooms and do observations and looking at curriculum to really understand why the district is successful. The district offers a wide variety of academic supports. Mr. Zinni indicated that the district also has a phenomenal wealth of activities to offer that other districts do not such as athletics and music. Mr. Zinni does not see his first major task coming as addresses academic issues.

Mr. Zinni stated that the areas of need, based upon the questions asked by the members of the superintendent search committee, include technology. Devices are old and a number of the software tools are antiquated. Michael Bois, Technology Director has a vision, but needs resources. Mr. Gee referred to a discussion a few years ago where a position for a technology integrated specialist was in place but was taken out of the budget.

Mr. Zinni noted that during the search, there were no questions on curriculum. Instead, questions focused on budget, special education and culture. Mr. Zinni has reviewed Mr. Azer's budget presentations, which celebrated student success, and feels this is a move in the right direction and the district should continue to work on this. Special education is complex and Mr. Zinni explained his philosophy and is concerned that previous budget documents put the blame on special education.

Mr. Dow indicated that in the budget presentation to Norfolk there was significant discussion on that topic and all the towns were questioning the costs associated with special education and that this was a trust issue. Mr. Azer explained that he inherited the budget presentation and the towns wanted that slide in there to see "who is to blame." Mr. Zinni referred back to confidentiality.

Mr. Zinni referred to the Walker Report and referred to the concept of a co-teaching model. Co-teachers could cost more, but we need to explore that further. There is already a mechanism in place for shared services and will be presented at a school committee meeting in the future. He intends to work with the 3 elementary superintendents and special education directors at a retreat in the fall. Mr. Zinni indicated that he and Lisa Moy will be reviewing the entire special education department.

Mr. Zinni referred to the culture and climate and stated that this issue was a recurring theme when having discussions with staff. It is an area that he will be focusing on throughout the year but reminded the committee that it takes time to build trust.

Mr. Zinni indicated that he has met with the KPTA and met with Adam Gentili to address issues and sees this as an important piece to working on with culture and climate.

Mr. Dow asked if the administration from the MS and the HS meet on a regular basis. Mr. Zinni indicated that they stopped meeting as a whole administrative team several months ago, however, they have started to work on repairing those relationships. Mr. Zinni spoke about the combined role of an assistant superintendent and a MS principal. There are two buildings with a full-time curriculum administrator for the district. Curriculum should be reviewed on a regular basis and a review of curriculum is very time consuming, and should include observing what is going on in classrooms. Each of these roles is a fulltime job.

Mr. Killion asked if Mr. Zinni saw this as a long-term goal to fund a position. Mr. Zinni indicated that he is just sharing observations at this point in time.

Mr. Gee indicated that when we set up the dual role, it was before the new evaluation system. Curriculum has been rolled into a management system. Mr. Zinni said it means that some areas are not getting as much attention as they should, but scores are good, so somehow it is working.

Mr. Knott said that culture is number one and asked how about faculty culture, is there anything unique that needs to be addressed as well. There has been a lack of chain of command, lack of continuity between the two buildings and lack of cohesiveness. He feels he needs to create relationships and will begin with curriculum and professional development conversations.

Discussion ensued on “silo” mentality and the need to work on communication. A suggestion is that Mr. Zinni will do presentations to the School Committee. It is important to craft clear and consistent messages and for the district and administration to speak with one voice.

Mr. Knott said that from a culture standpoint, there is a need to focus on the chain of command, we need to realign and focus on this topic with the superintendent as a constant line of focus on this. What are tangible milestones that are going on to improve the culture and could they be tied to a goal, such as culture initiative, or an aspirational goal?

Mr. Zinni referred to the One KP, one voice plan and a discussed a structure for holding meetings both at the MS and at the HS on a revolving basis.

Mr. Killion talked about the special education budget and the extremely demanding request from the towns who wanted to know what was behind those dollars, but we may have been giving too much information. During the interview process for the superintendent, issues of culture and climate were a big part of the discussions. How does this change happen?

Mr. Zinni said it is about relationship building and will take time. “I have to be careful about how things are rolled out so that people can trust me. It needs to be transparent and thoughtful and done for the right reasons.”

Mr. Gee referred to communication from the superintendent to the school committee and referred to the *Friday Letter*. Discussion ensued on some form of communication on a routine basis. Mr. Zinni could send an email on Friday’s about events that occurred during the week in a bullet point format or it could be adjusted as needed. If a ConnectEd message goes out, he could let the school committee know ahead of time and asks that SC members contact him at any time.

Discussion ensued that School Committee members do not receive all ConnectEd messages sent from the district, middle school and high school. Mr. Zinni will work with technology to send out all ConnectEd messages to school committee members.

Budget Process:

As one of Mr. Zinni’s priorities, the budget process is something we need to build into our agenda this year on such topics as fees, E&D, capital plan, and long-term funding solutions. Discussion ensued on the need to break through the yearly budget impasse. Points raised include:

- Desire to get a long-term plan in place that the towns are on board with. A concrete strategic plan to support annual funding requests or future consideration of an override.

- Focus on regional collaboration as a potential enabler. Mr. Knott indicated that this discussion has been bubbling around for a while but needs real consideration. He noted a superintendency union may be a more achievable goal than full regionalization.
- Mr. Azer noted that a superintendents' union is pretty close to the full regional because the towns have to approve it; two of the towns would need to approve that process and then DESE would need to approve as well
- Mr. Cates raised the issue of exploring shared resources in the three towns and four school districts. Discussion ensued if there was a way to start looking at shared resources of a K-12 regionalization. It was noted that some services within the towns may already be shared.
- Mr. Knott said that we have to get the towns more invested in KP beyond some sort of regional structure. SPED is a good collaboration with the other towns and a good starting point.
- Mr. Gee expressed his view that change such as regionalization would not happen overnight, or even within a year. We need to define our expectations. But if we start exploring, we may know in a year whether it could be done.
- Discussion ensued on what the committee should decide upon and what is a reasonable goal to set by this time next year. Mrs. Abrams suggested having an outside consultant come in and educate us on what the next steps are. Sharing the cost among the four districts was discussed, such as was done with the Walker Report re to sell the idea on alignment and curriculum. An approach could be to look at district alignment from a broad perspective including curriculum, etc.

Discussion ensued on the format of investigating regionalization and having an outside consultant come in. It was noted that as this is a governance issue, any outside professional should consult but not drive the process. Suggestion to start with a meeting of the four School Committee chairs and representatives from selectmen and town administrators of the three towns on how to solve this education problem. Bring in the Community Working Groups and then bring in the towns. DESE would also need to be involved down the road.

Mr. Zinni suggested that first it needs to be articulated where the significant problems are – what are the problems we are solving for. Then explore regionalization or other solutions to address the problems that we cannot address internally. He noted example of districts that created a superintendency union, but that it has not resolved some of the problems they had.

School Start Times:

Mr. Gee asked for thoughts on beginning an exploration of the topic of start times this year. Discussion ensued that this topic would need to be vetted from A-Z, along with teacher contracts, sports, busing, elementary schools, and the impact to families. Mr. Zinni will recommend next steps in the exploration process.

Mr. Cates asked if there was any thought given to getting rid of February vacation and combining it with April vacation. Mr. Azer indicated that DESE and the state would need to be involved in this process. Mrs. Abrams noted that Plainville is looking to form a Calendar Committee and is trying to get the other districts involved.

Mrs. Abrams left the meeting at 2pm.

ADJOURNMENT INTO EXECUTIVE SESSION:

- ✚ A Motion was made at 2:07pm by Mr. Cates, seconded by Mr. Knott, to enter into Executive Session for the purpose of discussing strategy with respect to collective bargaining or litigation if an open meeting may have a detrimental effect on the bargaining or litigating position of a public body and the chair so declares; and, to return to open session solely for the purpose of adjournment. All in favor by roll call vote: Yes (5); No (0). Motion carried.

(Mr. Dow recused himself from Executive Session.)

ADJOURNMENT:

- ✚ A Motion was made at 2:15pm by Mr. Cates, seconded by Mr. Killion, to adjourn. All in favor by roll call vote: Yes (4); No (0). Motion carried.