

School Committee Meeting Minutes of April 11, 2019

Members in Attendance: Chair, Shannon Scully, Vice-Chair, Paul Murphy, Joel Blumstein, Susan McCready, and Tracey Spruce.

Others in Attendance: Superintendent Berman, Assistant Superintendent Paul Szymanski, Assistant Superintendent for Student Services Dr. Sara Stetson, and Assistant Superintendent for Teaching and Learning Sandy Trach, and AHS Liaison Ben Roldan.

I. **Call to Order**

The Chair called the meeting to order at 7 P.M. in the School Committee Meeting Room located in the School Administration Building.

A. **Moment of Silence/Salute to Flag**

The meeting began with a Moment of Silence followed by the Pledge of Allegiance.

B. **Recognitions & Communications**

Shelley wants to congratulate Paul Szymanski for submitting the AHS Statement of Interest this week-ahead of schedule; the Committee joined him in stating this. Also, the Superintendent announced the House budget under which Andover would get \$1,072,000 more in Chapter 70 aid than in FY19, which is higher than we anticipated. That is \$214,000 more than the original Governor's budget.

Joel Blumstein reported on the Credit for Life Fair at AHS in which he and Susan McCready participated. Asst. Principal Scott Darlington, David Floreen and Brad Heim did a great job.

Susan McCready reported on a meeting with Pam Lathrop, Linda Croteau and Austin Simko regarding election procedures and safety measures. There are also traffic and dismissal issues which the Town Clerk will speak to Andover Police Department about in order to work out a better situation at election time.

Paul Murphy hosted a SC informal forum on April 6th with Joel. Topics brought up were questions about athletic practices and notices – timeliness on when schedule information is announced; someone asked about the Superintendent's contract coming up in 2020 and asking about process; Michelle from Fusion asked about decision timelines; there also was a question on state standards and report cards at AHS and the middle schools; general question and information about Special Education and how prevalent that population is in Andover; question about why the entire amount of Chapter 70 wasn't given to the schools; question about extracurricular fees; question about flex time in general and use of time.

Tracey Spruce congratulated the AHS Show Choir who had their final competition on Saturday and both the Mix and All Women's group received gold.

Ben Roldan reported on the Tufts Inquiry Project – how international cities deal with the migrant crisis, explained the process – it's like a model UN. This was a good project.

Shannon Scully reported that the AHS jazz band Levels 1-4 performed Wednesday night at AHS and had a wonderful performance.

There was no public input and response to public input. Instead, Fusion Academy was given the opportunity to speak after Ms. Trach's recommendation to the SC on their application.

E. Continuing Business

1. Fusion Academy Application

Shannon went over the timeline which started in May 2018 with the receipt of the letter stating that Fusion would be applying for approval to operate a non-public school in Andover. From July 2018 to March 2019, Sandy Trach conducted an analysis of the Fusion's application. On March 5th, Ms. Trach provided a memo of her findings to the SC regarding the program and application. On March 7th at the SC, Ms. Trach reported her findings at the School Committee meeting. On March 21st, Fusion attended and presented at the SC meeting. Then SC members individually toured the Fusion campus. On April 10th, Ms. Trach issued a memo with her recommendation to the SC and Fusion regarding their application.

Sandy Trach started by giving a brief background on the application timeline. Ms. Trach noted the Standards for Approval of Private Schools outlined in the Advisory of Approval of MA Private Schools pursuant to MGL c76 S1 by J Nellhaus, Acting Commissioner of Education. Sandy stated that several documents requested haven't been submitted including their anti-discrimination policy; staff, student and parent handbooks that communicate school policies; and data regarding teacher turnover rates, prep time and subject matter expertise. There are differences in direct instruction time in terms of hours/per week compared to AHS and Andover middle schools, with instruction time in Andover increasing next year. Also, Fusion will be unable to address students with social, emotional and behavioral needs as it doesn't demonstrate the capacity to provide students with these services. Fusion also won't have a nurse on the premises so it is not equipped to administer medication. It is her recommendation to decline the application for a non-private school for Fusion.

Dr. Berman agreed with Asst. Super's recommendation. He noted that he turned over the materials to Ms. Trach, as the Curriculum Director, when she first arrived in the district in July. Sandy has done a thorough job with the material. He states that the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education standard is a high standard. We have to make clear that this is a thorough and efficient process. This district can't endorse the program as a private school if it hasn't met these standards.

Mike Vander is with the Fusion Academy Group – he's from Grand Rapids MI. He stated they have not articulated their program well enough to the Committee. The system has 4000 students and 1200 teachers throughout the country. He apologizes for not submitting the missing materials. They have a robust science lab in Newton. They will align curriculum with Andover and also align with the local accreditation agencies. The third issue is equivalency. They do have traditional students that don't have an IEP, 97% are private pay. Fusion has been accredited by NEASC. Focus on mastery, key component "homework café", this is a core part of program; they develop skills needed in college. Program includes 100 sessions. Their desire is to be partner in the community. Their commitment is to gain SC approval and eager to grow.

Brian Spellman, Director of Admissions. He feels partially responsible for tonight. He has heard overwhelming favorable comments saying that this is what we need in our community. He thanks the Committee for their time.

Bill Blair, Asst Director of Admissions and has also taught. Bill has been with Fusion for 6 years. He told a story about a student from a NY Fusion Academy where he taught US History. He had used Music studio as a different approach to instruction as he also has a music background. This student graduated and was accepted to the Berkeley School of Music.

Michelle Smith – Head of School at Newton Campus. Her background is in Independent School education and has worked in public schools in Massachusetts. She understands both private and public schools. She pointed out there are some instances where students feel they don't fit in at a public school. Those are the reasons why Fusion works for some of these students. Michelle is thrilled to be part of their Fusion program. She felt that she could make an impact on students who don't feel safe or welcomed but love to learn. They now have 40 students on the Newton campus. She spoke of several students on the Newton Campus who are successfully thriving.

Michelle Glynn – Head of School for Fusion. She summarized everything that they heard tonight. She has worked in hospitals, public and private schools. She feels that this is something that families need; it is a flexible 12-month program that can work with some of the students' backgrounds. Michelle moved to Andover. She feels the academic environment is pretty special and knows Fusion could be successful here.

Tracey Spruce stated that it's the SC's job by law to evaluate whether a private school program is equivalent in thoroughness and efficiency. She appreciates how much work has been put in by both sides. She has studied the material and believes in what Sandy states. She can see how this can be a good fit for some kids. But she can't get past the significant instructional time difference.

Susan McCready wants to thank everyone. She takes her role on SC very seriously for all the children. Susan also shares the same concern in instruction times and also concern about teachers and retention. Knowing how teacher retention rates are an important piece of the puzzle and also important to Fusion. She read a lot about their students who have unique circumstances, which is not the norm. But it is a place for students who require some support which she likes to understand better. She can't connect the dots between the support for the students and the academic piece.

Joel Blumstein appreciates that a one-to-one role could work for some students. However, no one has talked about the absence of a nurse which does trouble him. And 911 isn't always the answer especially during the course of a school day. He agrees with Tracey that it's our legal obligation to show equivalence, including in the total number of instructional hours. There seems to be a major gap – doesn't see how course materials can be covered in Fusion's amount of instructional time.

Paul Murphy stated that in 3 years of being on the Committee, this is the most conflicted he has felt even though he has taught in a private school for 30 years. He felt excited when he was walking around Fusion initially. Seeing kids turn corners from not feeling great about school to

feeling great is powerful. He hasn't taught in the public system. But as he sits here, he has great respect and value in what our administrators say about Fusion especially in Sandy Trach who has spent hours of research for this application. He understands his role here relative to the public system.

Shannon Scully said that they don't have the luxury of arguing whether the MGL makes sense. She also said that she's not going to argue whether it makes sense for the SC to make this judgment but they have to do so. But they do have to look at the thoroughness and efficiency of the program. Sandy's memo is pretty strong and speaks for itself. She appreciates the due diligence and the thorough analysis. All the memos are consistent, have a good understanding of the program and what's been proposed and believe that Fusion doesn't meet the criteria of thorough and efficient.

On a motion by Joel Blumstein and seconded by Susan McCready, the School Committee voted to decline the Fusion Academy Application for private school approval per the Recommendation of the Superintendent of Schools and Assistant Superintendent for Teaching and Learning. The motion passed unanimously on a 5-0 vote.

F. Consent Agenda

1. Warrants
2. Minutes
3. Grants/Donations to District:

On a motion by Susan and seconded by Joel the School Committee voted 5-0 to approve the Consent Agenda as presented.

H. Adjournment

On a motion by Joel Blumstein and seconded by Tracey Spruce, the School Committee voted 5-0 to adjourn the Regular Meeting of April 11, 2019 at 7:57 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Alison Phelan
Recording Secretary