

Nantucket School Committee
Workshop Meeting Minutes
March 10, 2020

Present Members: Jennifer Iller, Zona Butler, Pauline Proch, Steve Sortevik, Superintendent W. Michael Cozort and Deputy Superintendent, Elizabeth Hallett

The meeting was called to order when a quorum was present, by Chair, Jennifer Iller at 5:05 PM in the Nantucket Elementary School District Conference Room. Steve Sortevik made a motion to approve the agenda which was seconded by Zona Butler, and the Committee approved unanimously. The Chair motioned to move to a Workshop with the same persons approving.

School Committee Self Evaluation

Chair Jennifer Iller thanked everyone for submitting their answers. The group was given a summary of the collated responses to guide them along in their review. There was a question as to why some answers were omitted. Not all the submissions were complete. Superintendent Cozort reminded the School Committee that it is okay to disagree. There was discussion among Committee members about changing the format and specifically the coding labels of Strongly Agree, Agree, Strongly Disagree, etc...and there was some debate about the answer code system. Deputy Elizabeth Hallett offered the coding scale is determined by MASC and policy. Mrs. Butler thought maybe it was time to utilize a different evaluation system all together. The Committee agreed that now was not the time to reinvent, but they could work on this for next year in the confines of Policy and to maybe find a different scale.

Chair Jennifer Iller read through the collated Self Evaluation statements and submissions and reviewed them line by line. Often the Committee was in general agreement but there were a few occasions when one or two members felt differently. A few examples:

Governance, #4 – The Committee refrains from decision-making at the administrative level and reinforces the expected chain of command. Some agreed, some did not and there was discussion about maintaining respect for the Superintendent’s decisions, maintaining proper protocol by redirecting outsiders through the proper channel and being cognizant of areas like the budget and trusting in the leadership choices and processes in place.

Member Relations, #5 – Members “do their homework” and come prepared to make decisions. The Chair alluded to one member disagreeing with this statement and felt that she herself could improve in this area. Dr. Hallett reinforced when the documents are text heavy it is helpful to have the School Committee digest the information earlier than the scheduled meeting to be more impactful to the movement of the meeting.

Committee/Superintendent Relations #4 – The Superintendent informs the Committee of major personnel decisions. Steve Sortevik stated he felt there could be improvement in this area. The Superintendent responded that this requires a delicate balance, and that sometimes they are better positioned to say they do not know more about a situation. Pauline Proch offered it is times like this we as a Committee need to be careful of what we say in the public eye and to be non-committal.

Fiscal Management #3 – The Committee, as a group, presents and advocates the budget to the Town of Nantucket officials and the community. Steve Sortevik does not agree with this statement and restated why he pushed back at the Town with the Budget process. It was pointed out the Town Administrator did agree to consider bringing back the AdHoc committee pertaining to the collaboration on the Budget with Town and School. Other members felt the Committee expressed a united front on the budget.

Community Relations (general category) – there was a fair amount of discussion about connecting with the community, how to best accomplish this, how to be more visible or involved, and allowing the general public access to voice opinions while not letting them control meetings. - overall how to improve in this area. The Chair recalled when the School Committee had a sub committee for PR/Communications & Media and thought perhaps this should return as a sub-committee task force group.

Collectively, the School Committee felt things were going well. The Superintendent commented the meetings are very different from the years that meetings allegedly went to 11 p.m., and the Horizon has helped to organize and shape the agendas. The Chair agreed the Agendas are well planned and they offer a lot of information, and the meetings are not agonizing in length. (At 6:04pm, Dr. Lepore was called to NCH).

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Superintendent Evaluation

The Chair asked the Superintendent to remain at the Workshop and to please reflect on his own Self Evaluation. In Superintendent's written Self Evaluation, he wrote a comment for each standard: 1. Instructional Leadership, 2. Management & Operations, 3. Family & Community Engagement, 4. Professional Culture. He stressed to the Committee his primary goal for this 'extra' year was to prepare and mentor Deputy Superintendent, Dr. Elizabeth Hallett, to take over the role in July. He wanted to ensure she had knowledge of systems and how NPS and Nantucket works.

There were some key points that were important for Mr. Cozort. He noted improvements in Instruction for NES, NIS and NHS, and ELL scores across the district steadily improving. He thanked everyone in the district for supporting these gains. He also shared that behavioral challenges have risen as a result of mental health concerns, but the district has added Social Workers at all schools to help the staff address these students and their families. Mr. Cozort spoke with pride of his work in Standard 3 (Family and Community Engagement), noting that he tries to be accessible and highly visible at events in all schools and in the community. He knows our students and they know him and appreciate that they can share any concerns they might have. He also shared that the district is in good hands moving forward, with Dr. Hallett leading a strong administrative team. The conversation morphed to administrative openings to fill for the coming year, now that we must fill the middle and high school principal positions. School Committee members were reminded to submit their individual assessments of the Superintendent to Mrs. Proch no later than March 16 and she will report to the public on April 7th.

There was mention of putting together a task force subcommittee for the Green projecting (previously coming to light with the Town Energy Plan coordinated by Lauren Sinatra). The Committee agreed to hold their Re-Organizational meeting on April 7th at 5:30pm. Superintendent Cozort is meeting with the Department of Public Health for guidance on the current uptick on the Corona Virus and how it might impact the Town and School, closing school could be a consideration. Mr. Sortevik asked about the 180 days required for the school year, Dr. Hallett reminded there is built in time between March and June for completion of instructional days.

At 6:44 the School Committee adjourned on a motion made by Zona Butler and seconded by Pauline Proch, and unanimously approved.

Respectfully submitted,
Logan O'Connor, School Committee Clerk