

MASCONOMET REGIONAL DISTRICT SCHOOL COMMITTEE

February 28, 2024

MEMBERS PRESENT: M. Ogden, Chair, Topsfield
T. Currier, Middleton
M. Alexander, Middleton
C. Bolzan, Boxford
D. Casamassima, Middleton
J. McLean, Vice Chair, Boxford
J. Horrigan, Boxford
Z. Bhuj, Topsfield
E. Clements - Boxford
K. Petrone, Middleton

MEMBERS ABSENT: W. Hodges, Topsfield

OTHERS PRESENT: M. Harvey, Superintendent (zoom)
J. Sands, Assistant Supt. & Chief Procurement Officer
L. Bennett, Assistant Supt. For Student Services

A. **Call to Order** – M. Ogden, Chair, called the Regular Meeting of the School Committee of February 28, 2024, to Order at 7:02pm, in the High School Library.

B. **Remarks from the Chair** – None.

C. **Public Comment** –

Adeline Natale, Boxford, a parent of Special Education Student spoke about her daughter's experience with her Adjustment Counselor at the Student Services Center during the pandemic and upon re-entry. She stated that the Adjustment Counselors are able to attend to issues others are not qualified to attend to.

D. **Student Advisory Board Report** – None.

E. **FY25 Budget Deliberation** – J. Sands reviewed Adjustments made to the Budget Recommendation that resulted in a decrease to the Operating Budget in the amount of \$283,330. He reviewed the impact on the Assessment Overview and Assessments by Town.

a. **Student Services (Wellness)** – L. Bennett presented Part 1 of State of our Students to the Committee. She reviewed the 3 Key Indicators of Student Performance, attendance, incident reports and discipline, and special education referrals and eligibility to the Committee.

The DESE attendance policy states that a student must be at school, at a school related activity, or receiving academic instruction for at least half of the school day to be counted as present. The average attendance at Masco has averaged almost 94% since SY22, for both the MS and HS.

DESE defines incidents and discipline as the violation of student code of conduct that results in a disciplinary action which removes the student from their regular educational environment. Incidents involving bullying, drugs, violent or crime-related offenses on school property and any resulting reportable disciplinary actions imposed on the student offender. L. Bennett reviewed incidents for both the MS and HS for SY21-22 and SY22-23.

A Special Education Referral takes place when any person who suspects a student has a disability can submit a referral to the district requesting an assessment in the area of the suspected disability. The referral trends from FY22, FY23 and FY24 through 2/2 showing a downward trend were reviewed. Defining Special Education Eligibility was reviewed, and eligibility trends from FY22, FY23 and FY24 show a downward trend. The number of students currently on an IEP was reviewed with the number one eligibility being specific learning disability and health is the second cause.

The data collected shows attendance is 1% lower than pre-pandemic levels.

Discipline incidents are substantially lower than pre-pandemic levels and decreasing. Special education referrals can be appropriately maintained with the current staffing level, and as the numbers move in a positive direction, we can reduce to pre-pandemic staffing of the School Adjustment Counselors.

M. Ogden asked if the eligibility trends are on track for 2024 and if any forecasting has been done for next year. L. Bennette responded that the rising 7th grade class has a high need for special education services, but no definite number.

M. Alexander asked if the lower number of referrals were due to fewer students needing services or fewer students getting the referrals they need. L. Bennette responded that the work being done is helping to reduce the number of referrals. Eligibility determinations are being reviewed and student support teams are collecting data for referrals.

D. Casamassima asked about the rise in health referrals. L. Bennette informed the Committee that her reasoning is that the relationship between technology and inattentiveness goes hand in hand.

Z. Bhujju asked if there were students with multiple disabilities. Students are found eligible based on their primary disability but can have a secondary disability. The Trends presented are based on the primary disability.

- b. **School Adjustment Counselor Plan** – Irene Duros presented the Social Emotional Learning & School Adjustment Counseling Services to the Committee. She reviewed the four categories describing the students at Masco, students who are academically achieving and coping appropriately, academically achieving but struggling in silence, struggling academically but accepting help and interventions and struggling academically and not responding to help and interventions. Masco uses the Multi-Tiered System of Support, Tier I, Tier II and Tier III, which is the universal tiered system. The different Tiers and services provided in each Tier were reviewed with the Committee.
- The Role of the School Adjustment Counselor was reviewed for the Committee. The focus is mental health and is available to every student. The Adjustment Counselors run the Student Support Center doing assessments, interventions, and helping with classroom management. I. Duros reviewed the number of students accessing the Student Support Center, scheduled and unscheduled, students in ISS, students in CBT and students in lunch group for terms one and two for the MS. She also reviewed the same information for quarters 1 and 2 of the HS.
- Caseloads for School Adjustment Counselors for the MS, including IEPs and 504s were reviewed. There are a total of 95 cases distributed between 3 Adjustment

Counselors. The caseload should be 32. HS caseloads were also reviewed with a total of 129 cases distributed between 4 Adjustment Counselors. They are providing direct, individual school adjustment counseling to students. Over 100 students visited the Academic Success Center last year. The purpose of the Academic Success Center is to provide short term opportunities for students who have missed school for a period of time to get back on track with the academic coursework. The students develop skills that promote success, practice self-advocacy and become self-directed learners. When the students complete their work and have an understanding of the strategies, they can continue classes without the use of the Academic Success Center.

The Student Support Center, for Tier III students, was reviewed for the Committee. The Student Support Center serves students with IEPs, 504 plans, as well as students without either of those plans. Students may come to the Center for crisis management, daily check-ins, adjustment counseling, organizational support, specialized homeroom, transition support from long-term absences and for separate setting for testing.

Social Emotional Learning has brought about the evolution of Social Emotional Learning Leadership Team and the creation of an SEL Strategic Action Plan. The Strategic Action Plan priorities were reviewed for the Committee. The SEL Strategic Action Plan for 2024-2025 will continue with Universal Mental Health Screening; explore opportunities to offer post UMHS CBT Groups; continue to update and expand the SEL Faculty Library; and conduct the SHAPES assessment for the district.

School Adjustment Counseling for 2024-2025 will have 5 Adjustment Counselors; re-evaluate counselor caseloads; re-examine entry and exit criteria for the Student Support Center; explore transitions; referrals for CBT groups based on student needs; and increased connection with community mental health resources.

The Academic Success Center staffing model for 2024-2025 will have the Academic Support Center staffed by 1 teacher and 2 paraprofessionals; and the teacher will not serve as a co-teacher for other classes so the center will be open 5 days a week.

J. McLean asked if the Student Adjustment Counselor remained with one student. They remain with one student through MS and with one student at the HS. Discussion followed regarding the MS and HS sharing one Adjustment Counselor.

K. Petrone asked for a review of the Tier III referral process. I. Duros reviewed the referral process and the transition process.

Discussion followed regarding unscheduled visits and how they are handled and the process for a general education student to obtain help when needed. Also discussed was the tracking of chronic absenteeism.

Discussion took place regarding the case load of School Adjustment Counselors prior to ESSR funding and the offboarding process to bring current caseloads down and how the caseloads will be redistributed so an Adjustment Counselor can still attend workshops etc.

M. Ogden asked for the number of students coming up who will need these services as it would be helpful during the budget deliberations.

M. Alexander asked if connections and communications with community mental health resources are ongoing. There are some difficulties getting access to community services, but the work is ongoing.

T. Currier asked I. Duros if the services being provided can be sustained with the recommended cuts. Reexaminations and reevaluations will take place to make it work within the budget.

c. Budget Adjustments

d. Review Expense Categories

J. Sands reviewed the Major Expense Category Analysis and the items remaining to be reviewed with the Committee.

The Insurance Benefits were reviewed with 2.20% increase in health premiums and a 4.80% increase in dental premiums.

Maintenance increases were reviewed, including an increase in utility costs, increase in the Janitorial contract, landscaping, consumable supplies and plumbing services.

Transportation was reviewed which included a reduction in the number of shared bus routes from 28 to 25, a 2-year contract rate increase for shared buses and late buses.

Retirement contributions were reviewed which included a decrease in the Essex Retirement Appropriation, an increase in 403B Employer Match and an increase in Employer Paid Medicare Tax.

MIS and Instructional Tech was reviewed, including an increase in Maintenance, rentals in fees for Barracuda Email Spam and Phishing filter upgrade and transition to the Cloud, an increase in Other Published Materials and a decrease in Other Published Materials for nonrenewal of Newsela and Formative subscriptions.

Athletics increases were reviewed with the Committee.

HS Mats, Supplies and Resources increases were reviewed with the Committee.

Property Liability Insurance increases were reviewed with the Committee.

Business, Finance and HR and All Other increases were reviewed with the Committee.

J. Sands reviewed the items to be reviewed and discussed at the March 6th meeting.

J. Sands reviewed the Summary of Recommended Staffing Adjustments impacting the Operating Budget which included savings of \$101,000 and one FTE.

M. Ogden added that AP Science Books, AP Social Studies Books and HS lab equipment could be paid in FY24. She also asked if Athletic fees could be reviewed for any potential increases due to increased costs.

- F. **Superintendent's Report** – M. Harvey congratulated the girls' ski team on their State Championship. The School Calendar for 2024-2025 has been posted. There will be a webinar to introduce families to the new IEP forms from DESE. The next MS coffee will be held 3/15 at 8:30am.

The Parents Activity Committee is hosting a Comedy and Dinner fundraiser on 3/23 at Theresa's restaurant in Middleton.

Opioid rescue kits have been installed in public spaces and schools and are available to families from the Public Health Offices of Boxford, Topsfield and Middleton.

Elementary school schedule aligns with the HS schedule for opening day and holiday break, but not PD.

G. Subcommittee Reports

Community Relations – March 8th is the next working meeting.

Liaison Updates – The Middleton Capital meeting is this Saturday at 9AM.

All other subcommittee updates tabled.

H. Consent Agenda

1. Approval of Minutes of February 7, 2024, and February 14, 2024.

2. Warrants signed since February 14, 2024, in the amount of \$2,075,526.03.

3. Approval of MEF Psychology FT Grant in the amount of \$440.00.

A motion was made by Z. Bhujju to approve the Consent Agenda as presented; it was seconded by J. McLean and unanimously approved.

MOTION: Approve Consent Agenda

VOTE: 10-0, Motion Passed.

The next meeting will be held March 6, 2024, at 7:00pm.

M. Ogden made a Motion to enter into Executive Session for the purpose of discussing strategy relative to bargaining with the Masconomet Teachers Association and to not return to Open Session (Executive Session Purpose #3). The Chair has determined that holding this discussion in open session may have a detrimental impact on the School Committee's bargaining position. The Motion was seconded by J. McLean and unanimously approved by Rollcall vote:

M. Ogden – yes

T. Currier – yes

M. Alexander – yes

J. Horrigan – yes

Z. Bhujju – yes C. Bolzan – yes

M. Alexander - yes

E. Clements – yes

D. Casamassima – yes J. McLean - yes

Submitted By: _____ Approved: _____
Lynn Viselli, Recording Secretary Date

Per the Massachusetts Open Meeting Law, the list of documents that were either distributed to the Masconomet School Committee before the meeting in the packet or at the meeting.

1. Agenda
2. Agenda Guide
3. FY25 Budget Deliberation
4. Consent Agenda