

Cambridge Association of Neighborhoods (CAN)
Unofficial Notes on Dorchester County Board of Education
Meeting, Thursday, July 13, 2023 - Dorchester Career & Technology Center

Submitted by Tom Puglisi

Note: Supporting documents may be found on the DCPS Board Docs website at <https://go.boarddocs.com/mabe/dcps/Board.nsf/Public>

The Board went into closed Executive Session at 5:00 pm to discuss personnel, negotiations, legal matters, and administrative functions. Board President Susan Morgan opened the Public Meeting at 6:15 pm with the Pledge of Allegiance and review of the Board Calendar (see below).

Ten members of the public delivered oral or written comments regarding the draft Facility Feasibility Study (and the Superintendent's comments regarding it) published this week on the DCPS website. All of the comments included strongly negative sentiments regarding the conduct of the study and its recommendations, which appeared to be little changed from the version published previously. It was noted that the Board had promised that the feasibility study would be suspended and that two additional community meetings would be held before the study was resumed. A serious lack of transparency and collaboration with the community were cited as significant concerns, as were proposals to close or combine high performing rural schools without regard to the effects of such closures on the children, families, and communities involved. Particular opposition was voiced about any proposals that would negatively affect South Dorchester School. It was suggested that DCPS needs to focus on its very serious, currently existing problems related to behavior, discipline, and poor academic performance in city schools rather than on closing successful rural schools. The Superintendent indicated that he would consult with South Dorchester parents to identify a date for a meeting with them. One member of the public, a student from Cambridge-South Dorchester HS, spoke feverently about the need to consider the negative effects on individual students and overall student morale when considering reassignments of teachers.

The Board discussed increasing the 2-year incentive bonuses to be given to teachers (\$5000/yr) and staff (\$2500/yr) at Choptank ES and Maces Lane MS, but took no action on the matter. One Board member suggested that bonus increases were needed to avoid involuntary teacher transfers and that schools with 10-19 uncertificated long term substitute teachers cannot succeed. Dr. Coleman indicated that increased bonuses were justified because teachers will have to engage in extra planning and effort if they are to be successful. Other Board members expressed the concern that offering bonuses to staff with no measurable performance requirements (relative to improved climate, discipline, and academic success) will not solve the problems at these schools (where discipline and safety are a primary concern).

The Board unanimously approved personnel actions proposed by the Superintendent (to be announced shortly) and recognized the appointment of Dawn Corkran as Principal of Hurlock ES. Also approved unanimously were expenditures for Project Lead the Way instructional materials, teacher training conducted by the Maryland Coalition for Inclusive Education, two bus contracts, replacement of flood-damaged flooring at Hurlock ES, and the customary 5-day, overnight environmental learning experience for 5th grade students. Funding for currently participating students to complete the Edmentum blended online Spanish language program was approved with the understanding that the program is being discontinued. One Board member suggested that recruiting for community liaison personnel not be limited to social workers.

The Board approved hiring a "contract" school psychologist if DCPS is unable to fill this through a direct hire, but deferred approval for a "contract" special education teacher. Board members expressed skepticism about the effectiveness of speech pathology teleservices, as opposed to in-person services, but approved

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(by 3-1 votes) contracting for such teleservices if DCPS is unable to fill its 4 vacant speech pathology positions through direct hires (with the understanding that students who are struggling with teleservices would be transferred to in-person pathologists). The Board requested ongoing briefings on recruitment activities overall and the effectiveness of speech pathology teleservices in particular.

Hard-copy and online versions of United States History and Modern World History textbooks were approved by a 3-0 vote, with 1 member abstaining and suggesting that future students be invited to review proposed textbooks to determine if they are student-friendly.

The Board was provided with copies of Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) formalizing guidelines for six third-party providers (Maple Shade, Life Energy Wellness, Creative Space Child Therapy, Compass Health Services, Community Behavioral Health, and the Wellness Center of Salisbury), to deliver externally funded mental health services in DCPS buildings. These MOUs require the providers to provide monthly reports to DCPS. Also provided were updated reports on appropriations and expenditures, capital projects, technology purchases, and grant balances that projected a \$2M positive balance at the end of the fiscal year.

One Board member noted that the ARPA funding of \$15,000 provided through the City to each of four DCPS schools needed to be spent aggressively. The Superintendent agreed and indicated that he would direct the relevant principals to do so.

Board Members thanked the public for their attendance and comments *Note: President Morgan's closing statement can be found at <https://susanmorganschoolboard.com/>.*

The Superintendent thanked members of the public who attended in person or virtually. He encouraged everyone to review the draft Facility Feasibility study on the DCPS website and to provide comments.

The open public meeting was adjourned at 8:26 pm

UPCOMING BOARD EVENTS

Monday, August 14, 2023	New Teachers Report to Work for School Year 2023-2024 NDMS
Thursday, August 17, 2023, 4:30 p.m.	Regular August Meeting of the Board of Education DCTC
Friday, August 25, 2023	All Teachers Report to Work for School Year 2023-2024
Monday, September 4, 2023	Schools/Offices Closed - Labor Day
Tuesday, September 5, 2023	Grades 1-5, 6 and 9 Report for School (South Dorchester School Students - All Grades Report)
Wednesday, September 6, 2023	Grades 1-12 Report to School
Thursday, September 7, 2023	PreK and K Report for the First Day of School
Thursday, September 14, 2023, 4:30 p.m.	Board of Education Work Session (DCPS Central Office)