
Mansfield High School

School Council

March 31, 2010

2:10 pm, Room 185

Meeting Minutes

Attendees:

AJ Calvario (student)

Nathaniel Michener (student)

Mitch Negus (student)

Julia Ready (student)

Nancy Breef-Pilz (parent)

Julie Cline (parent)

Jennifer Dempsey (parent)

Deborah Snyder (parent)

Sheila Newton (teacher – music)

John Pontes (teacher - English)

Joanne Vacirca (teacher – math)

Mary Watkins (teacher – social studies)

Tina Karidoyanes (guidance counselor)

Catherine Capolupo (intern)

Dr. Joe Maruszczak (principal)

Not Present: Heather Burgess (student), Amanda Zieselman (student), Vicky Burgess (parent)

Guest: Michael Connolly, Assistant Principal

Agenda:

- Proposed Updates & New Policies in the MHS Student Handbook, 2010-11: Getting your feedback
- Update on FY 2011 Budget
- Brainstorming/Suggestions

Distributed:

- Mansfield Safe Homes Pledge
- Substance Abuse Outside of School Policy
- Handbook Revision Committee proposed changes and updates
- Massachusetts Association of School Committees Bullying Policy

Dr. Joe Maruszczak welcomed the attendees (listed above) and reviewed the previously established agenda. He then introduced Michael Connolly, Assistant Principal. Mr. Connolly outlined several topics currently being addressed by the MHS Handbook Revision Committee and requested the feedback of School Council Members in preparation for bringing the topics to the Mansfield School Committee.

Mr. Connolly shared the role of the Handbook Revision Committee, which is to investigate new policies based on changes and feedback from constituents. They seek feedback on proposed changes from the Parents Advisory Council as well as the Student Council and make recommendations to the Principal, Superintendent and School Committee.

The first issue discussed was the credit reduction policy. The committee sought to establish consistency in the policy by leveling the numbers of infractions over the three equal trimesters. This initiated a discussion among committee members unaware of the credit reduction policy as well as the established appeal process. Dr. Maruszczak and Mr. Connolly reviewed the current policy in place, as well as the appeal process and responded to individual questions. The suggested policy would establish that a credit reduction would take place for a 1 trimester course after 6 absences, after 12 absences for a 2 trimester course and 18 absences for a 3 trimester course. It was noted that student needed to make a formal appeal to avoid a credit reduction even if the absences were documented and excused for medical circumstances. The credit reduction does not affect the student's grade but could impede progress to graduation.

The next policy discussed regarded the prohibition of backpacks in MHS hallways and classrooms. The committee responded with several concerns...

- Many student carry large bags instead of backpacks, which are also hard to store safely in crowded classrooms (if stored on the floor the loops of the handles pose a tripping hazard, if held on the desk students do not have enough room for their work or us the bag to hide cell phone use).
- While female students carry large (Vera Bradley) bags and purses the male students are reluctant to carry other types of bags.
- Students noted that it is challenging to navigate the halls carrying both books and small instruments (such as pens and pencils) required for class.
- Students expressed frustration regarding inconsistent enforcement of the current backpack policy.
- Some students felt there was enough time between classes to visit lockers; others felt that there was not enough time to gather their belongings during transitions (due to the crowded nature of the hallways).
- One suggested alternative was to disallow all bags (larger than a small purse).
- Another suggestion was to offer all students the opportunity to carry an MHS issued sport sack.
- An additional suggestion was to extend the time between classes to allow students to visit their locker during these transitions.

Mr. Connolly shared the suggested changes to the handbook regarding bullying and introduced documentation from the Massachusetts Association of School Committees. He also noted the recent crafting of legislation to address issues of bullying. Mr. Connolly stated that the school had adopted a bullying policy (appended to the current handbook) for the balance of the 09/10 school year, and that the school had adopted new forms in the past year which more clearly illustrate the process of addressing bullying. The current form asks whether there was a significant disruption to the school environment (which reflects the heart of the new legislation; to determine if there is an impact). While the new legislation does not

expand the jurisdiction or powers of the administrators, is does empower the administration to report bullying to the police.

Mr. Connolly solicited feedback on what to consider in the policy for the coming year including the whether to define established consequences and dictate actions to be taken by administrators. The committee discussed the balance between family responsibility and the jurisdiction of the school teaching and administrative staff. The discussion also reflected concerns that while bullying does take place at school, these actions rarely take place directly in front of staff. Teacher education is continuous, and teachers make judgment calls in the course of a day regarding what is acceptable and what is not. Cyber-bullying was also noted as highly problematic and far reaching. It was noted that the behavior of students taking place in their own living rooms on a Saturday night may and does impact the other students and the school environment. One parent noted that “you can’t legislate good behavior and a good upbringing.”

The committee noted the need to educate students on the permanency of their actions when they take place online. Students appear to fail to realize that their postings, texts and voicemails offer a record of what they have said and done. The police department has offered seminars regarding this issue.

The final topic brought for discussion was that of chemical health. Dr. Maruszczak noted that the parent council felt strongly about not using the term “in the presence of...” which elicited much discussion among the committee members. It was noted that athletes are held to a stricter standard regarding chemical health as defined by the MIAA, including penalties for being “in the presence of” in illicit substance. The committee debated whether penalties should be consistent for all students, some feeling that athletes are measured to a higher standard, others asserting that participation in athletics is elective and athletes choose this measure when choosing to participate.

In discussing penalties for students who were found to possess or using illicit substances, student members noted that the consequences which denied participation in extracurricular activities had little to no impact on students who did not take advantage of these activities. This represents 16% of the current high school population. Dr. Maruszczak shared that a student that does not participate in school run extracurricular activities is not more likely to use illicit substances. Students also questioned the relevance of the penalties if the violator was not currently participating in an activity (such as a student who participates in a fall only sport if the violation takes place in the spring). The alternative of attending Alcohol/Drug Awareness Substance Abuse Programs was discussed as an alternative. Sturdy Hospital offers these meeting once a month and AA meetings are also a relevant option.

Dr. Maruszczak shared that he will be distributing a Mansfield Safe Home Pledge during 8th grade parent’s night. His hope is to establish a safe home database which

parents can reference. While the pledge is not legally binding, the hope is that parents will adhere to the pledge and carefully consider the environment they are establishing for their own teen as well as others.

A pdf of the 2009-2010 MHS handbook may be found at <http://www.mansfieldschools.com/MHS/handbook.html>

Following the discussion on the school handbook Dr. Maruszczak thanked Mr. Connolly and offered an update on the FY11 budget. The current deficit stands at approximately \$2.4 million. Two weeks ago the town received the news that it would receive an additional \$1.6 million in Chapter 70 funding. It was anticipated that chapter 70 funding would be reduced, however the state elected not to reduce this funding for Mansfield and a few other towns in light of the fact that Mansfield would fall below foundational funding for the schools if the reduction took place.

Key dates regarding the budget and funding process were offered. On the evening of 3/31/10 the Board of Selectman and School Committee will meet (each will put forth their point of view). On 4/14/10 at 7:00 pm there will be a community budget forum at the high school. The School Committee, Finance Committee and Board of Selectman will all be present.

At this time (based on the current deficit) there will be 10.6 FTE positions cut at the high school. In actuality, the school will really lose 13.6 teachers in this process as some of the high school teachers will bump teachers currently in positions at the middle school.

The committee discussed the budget cuts and noted the ongoing contract negotiations taking place with the teachers union. These negotiations are not public (by law). Some committee members expressed the desire for the teachers union to make concessions (such as those made by Walpole teachers with regard to healthcare). Three years ago the Mansfield Teacher's Union did make health care concessions; the split moving from 80/20 to 70/30. Since the town must also negotiate with multiple unions (fire, police, municipal) the school side is only one piece of the puzzle and is not as simple as sometimes presented.

When asked about the plan regarding the schedule for the coming year, Dr. Maruszczak shared that he is planning six assemblies after April vacation. He will ask students to choose their schedules as usual but add the caveat that students may be looking at a schedule which is mostly core academics. The school will not be able to do scheduling until July since the opportunity for an override cannot be on the ballot until June at the earliest.

The committee discussed the need to educate the whole child, and the appeal of art and music for certain groups of students. It was noted that previous cuts had been "sanitized" and the impact on students and families minimized. These cuts will have a profound impact on teaching and learning. In contrast, teacher Mary Watkins and

several students shared their positive experiences when they had small class sized and the positive impact on student learning.

Upcoming MHS School Council Meetings:

April 28, 2010

May 26, 2010

MHS School Council agendas and meeting notes may be found at the following website: <http://www.mansfieldschools.com/MHS/School Council.html>

Upcoming School Committee Meetings:

http://www.mansfieldschools.com/central/school_committee.htm

7:30 PM Town Hall Rooms 3 B & C

Please note that the agendas for previous meetings are also posted on this site.

May 4, 2010 (Town Meeting)

June 15, 2010

May 25, 2010