

UXBRIDGE SCHOOL COMMITTEE

June 27, 2023

Uxbridge High School Library

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School Committee Members in Attendance:

	Present	Absent
Mr. Barry Desruisseaux, Chair	X	
Ms. Arlene Liscinsky, Vice-Chair	X	
Mr. Ed Maharay, Clerk	X	
Mr. Ben Casper (arrived at 6:02)	X	
Mr. David Shinnick	X	
Mr. Aaron Lenart (arrived at @6:22)	X	
Mr. Michael Dion	X	

Call to order (6:00)

Mr. Desruisseaux called the meeting to order at 6:00PM.

• Public Comment (6:00-6:01)

No public comment.

• Superintendent Update (6:01-6:11)

Dr. Baldassarre shared the following:

1. He and Dr. Dwyer are working on contractual negotiations with their preferred finalist for the next pupil services director. Since the finalist is currently employed by another district, Dr. Baldassarre is working with her current superintendent in the hope that she would start in Uxbridge in August. He said that the current pupil services director will stay on through August and give additional time through September to help the new director in the transition. Dr. Baldassarre would like the Committee to put time on their July 13 agenda for a potential vote to appoint the new pupil services director,
2. Dr. Baldassarre and Dr. Dwyer will be personally interviewing and meeting with all potential instructional staff during their final interviews.
3. DESE has changed its entire grants management and submission system.
4. As of July, DESE is moving their physical offices and there have been concerns that the focus needed for their move might be disruptive to districts for a period of time.

5. ESY (Extended school year) will run July 10-August 11. It will run Monday through Thursday from 8-11:30AM. He invited the Committee to visit ESY in action.
6. The Administrative Launching Pad will be August 16-18. After the schedule is set, he will be inviting members of the Committee, as well as town officials, to participate at certain times.
7. He passed out a memo regarding a new recommendation for school choice for the upcoming 9th grade class. Their recommendation has changed from accepting zero students to accepting "up to" 15 due to a more recent understanding of anticipated enrollment numbers. He asked for a formal vote.

Mr. Maharay moved that the school committee accept up to 15 slots in grade 9 for the 23-24 school year. Ms. Liscinsky seconded the motion. The Committee voted 6-0 in favor of the motion. The motion passed.

Dr. Baldassarre said that state law only requires that a Committee approve a set number of seats per building, not per grade. Mr. Maharay asked if there was a better way to handle the vote in the future since the Committee was currently voting seats per grade. Dr. Baldassarre said he felt that moving forward they should vote for total seats at a school, not seats per grade.

• Ticketing at Athletic and Other Events – Hand Book Changes HS (6:11-6:29)

The administration recommendation for ticketing is as follows:

–High school students receive a Spartan Pass that allows them to attend all home ticketed athletic events for free.

–Adults can buy an all sports pass for \$40 that allows them entry into all athletic home ticketed events.

–Senior citizens can buy a Spartan Senior Lifetime Pass (non-transferable) for \$25.

Non-pass pricing is as follows:

Age 0-12: Free

Students: \$5

Adult: \$8

Senior: \$5

Ms. Liscinsky made a motion that "we" accept the Uxbridge Public Schools athletic ticketing pricing as presented. Mr. Casper seconded the motion. The Committee voted 6-0 in favor of the motion. The motion passed.

Mr. Maharay asked Mr. Aicardi if he was comfortable with this proposal. Mr., Aicardi said yes.

Ms. Liscinsky asked if this pricing would be posted on the school website. Dr. Baldassarre said it could be.

Mr. Shinnick asked if the administration had any idea on what revenue this structure would produce, Mr., Aicardi answered that they did not at the moment but since the intent at this time was to let the revenue sit in an account specifically only allowed for athletics, they could use this year to understand its impact.

Mr. Rubin had previously shared with the Committee a memo with revision recommendations he and the UHS school council would like for the UHS handbook. The memo is attached.

Mr. Shinnick asked if the cell phone policy was a policy that had been considered before. Dr. Baldassarre said that Mr. Rubin wanted a school-wide response to the issues because there are a lot of variants to the issue across classrooms and this allows a clear direction for administration on how to handle any issues.

Mr. Maharay wondered if there have been any studies conducted in regards to school achievement that compared schools that permitted cell phones to those that did not.

Mr. Desruisseaux asked for a motion that would approve the handbook changes as presented.

Ms. Liscinsky moved the motion. Mr. Maharay seconded the motion. The Committee voted 7-0 in favor of the motion. The motion passed.

• Liaison / curriculum council / school adjustment counselor job descriptions approval (6:29-7:03)

Dr. Dwyer stated that she and union representatives worked together to look over the responsibilities of the teacher leaders and came up with a job description for that role. The position will be called a Liaison since they act as a facilitator.

Dr. Dwyer stated that the curriculum council had been inactive since the pandemic. She said this is a critical role since the district needs to be reviewing its curriculum on a regular basis. She has created a rotating schedule of curriculum areas that they will be reviewing over the next five years. She has created a curriculum council; however, she stated that she was unable to pay people to be on the council because that money grouping is based in the liaison positions so instead she will be providing the council with professional development in specific content areas.

Mr. Maharay asked how the district would be able to determine whether the council was succeeding or not. Dr. Dwyer responded that during administrative walkthroughs the administration would be able to see if the instructional practices are being implemented in the

classrooms. She gave examples of things they would be looking for such as noisy classrooms and small group learning. Ms. Liscinsky asked if this would be part of a teacher's evaluation process. Dr. Dwyer said she believes it should be.

Mr. Casper asked if the number of participants would be limited. Dr. Dwyer said it is restricted to only teachers in the specific content area that is being addressed at that specific time.

Mr. Maharay asked if the Committee could get feedback on how the program is progressing half way through the upcoming year.

Mr. Casper asked if the use of a rotating schedule of specific content areas kept the district from addressing potential district needs that might not be scheduled. Dr. Dwyer said that is possible, but they could work in needs that might not have been scheduled at that time. She emphasized that the first content area that will be addressed is ELA and that right now that is the district's biggest need.

Dr. Baldassarre discussed the job description proposal for adjustment counselors. He stated that there currently is no official description for the position. He stated the district currently has two adjustment counselors at Taft, two adjustment counselors at Whittin, and three adjustment counselors at the high school. In addition to needing a job description he stated that the district needs a data collection system that can help it be able to address the particular issues that are disrupting learning. He said that it is a goal to be able to have every student have access to counseling and comprehensive support when they need it. He stated that the principals, the counselors, and the union president have reviewed the proposed description.

Mr. Maharay asked how students are identified for needing counseling and how the counselor interacts with teachers moving forward. Dr. Baldassarre said that the high school has been using universal screeners to help identify needs. He said that the proposed referral form will be the biggest piece towards finding need and that it will be rolled out to all faculty and staff. He said the adjustment counselor is a liaison to the teachers.

Mr. Casper asked if Dr. Baldassarre could expand on how universal screeners are being used. Dr. Baldassarre explained that surveys are often used to help identify needed areas. Mr. Casper asked how often the surveys are administered. Dr. Baldassarre said one particular survey is conducted once a year and he believes there was a second that was administered at the beginning and end of the year. He also said they could do more if they needed to.

Mr. Shinnick asked if there was a position in the district that has a specific person who is strategically thinking about these needs. Dr. Dwyer said no. Mr. Aicardi says that type of position is starting to gain momentum in school districts.

Mr. Shinnick asked if there were any other positions that might not have a job description. Dr. Baldassarre said that in fall he will be going through all positions with the union president.

Mr. Lenart asked if the way an adjustment counselor would be evaluated is included in the job description. Dr. Baldassarre said that their rubric for evaluation is through the Massachusetts Department of Education.

Mr. Desruisseaux entertained a motion that the committee approved the job descriptions for the teacher liaison, curriculum council, and the adjustment counselor positions. Mr. Maharay moved the motion. Mr. Casper seconded the motion. The Committee voted 7-0 in favor of the motion. The motion passed.

• **Budget (7:03-7:44)**

Mr. Aicardi said the goal of the agenda item was to give the Committee an update on the status of the FY23 budget. He said the administration will give the Committee a finalized recommendation at the July 13 meeting.

He said that, as of the previous Thursday, the school district is running \$285,000 in deficit. He stated that state law requires the school district to bring the budget into alignment. He said that because of certain payments that will still need to be made, the district will not fiscally close out the FY23 budget until late August. He clarified that because of this, the school district can still make adjustments to the budget after its fiscal year has actually ended.

Mr. Aicardi gave an overview of how the deficit had evolved over the last several months and how he had addressed it with district administrative leaders in that time. He said that initially he asked them to use discretion with their spending and spending subsequently slowed. He said that in April the totality of the special education expenses hit the district's financial reporting system and he recommended the district suspend all discretionary spending, which it did. Because of this, the district does not have a significant amount of encumbrances left to address.

Mr. Shinnick said he was interested in learning what the district's strategy will be in order to forecast better next year.

Mr. Maharay asked if the budget had any built-in contingency. Mr. Aicardi said no.

Dr. Aicardi gave an overview of some of the comparisons between FY22 and FY23:

1. He stated that the FY22 budget had a general fund surplus of \$723K because the school committee used the full school choice amount it had originally intended to use and voted to return the \$723K to the town. Dr. Baldassarre said that he heard overtures that if the school department needed that money in the future, they would have access to it.
2. He shared that when they developed the FY24 budget, he applied a vacancy factor to the teacher and support salary lines that is intended to produce a more accurate representation of those budget areas. (Areas that had been areas of surplus for FY22 and FY23.)
3. He also pointed out that transportation services and the 9000 accounts had a significant surplus in FY22, but a deficit in FY23. He said that when you combine those FY23 accounts (transportation and 9000 accounts) what they see from one year to another is the special education "tsunami" that began showing up in the second half of FY23. Mr. Maharay asked for a little more specificity about why the district had had such a wide swing. Mr. Aicardi said the district ended up having a large number of students start going to out of district placements (in February and March) and it took about 3-4 weeks for the costs associated with those students to start showing up in the financial system.

Mr. Maharay asked how districts reconcile that external decisions and mandates are being made that forces districts to reconcile a budget. Dr. Baldassarre stated that when he develops a budget he increases all current placements by 5% and then puts in a budgetary cushion for future placements and assessments. He said that districts have to simply try and make a reasonable projection on certain things they don't necessarily know.

Dr. Baldassarre said many towns have a special education stabilization fund that allows districts to access that account when unbudgeted expenses occur. Uxbridge does not have this. The only accessible accounts it has are circuit breaker and school choice accounts.

Mr. Aicardi said that as of that moment he would recommend the Committee take out another \$150k of school choice and another \$125K from circuit breaker to balance the budget. However he was not comfortable asking them to tackle that vote until they have had time to explore all the different situations. He did caution that they are still closing out encumbrances, so that number could increase.

He said that the Committee should think about its philosophy when using reserve funds such as circuit breaker and school choice at the end of the year. He said that sometimes they might need to use more or less than what they had anticipated, so it is important to think about how their decisions might affect the sustainability of those funds.

Ms. Liscinsky asked how often the subcommittee for finance met and whether it was regularly meeting. She felt it would be helpful to have the subcommittee meet regularly (monthly) to be able keep everyone up to date on the finances and diminish the chance for surprises.

Mr. Aicardi said he will bring a budget transfer recommendation for the Committee's consideration to their next meeting.

• **RFP review for legal (7:44-7:49)**

Dr. Baldassarre said he had drafted an RFP looking for the Committee's approval to send to firms. He mentioned that there are not many firms in the state that do school business. He said he felt it is important to have a firm that is in close proximity to the district. He said that if the Committee approves the RFP he would send it out to firms within a reasonable physical distance to the district.

Mr. Casper asked if the July 14 proposed due date was enough time. Dr. Baldassarre said he did that purposely because responsiveness has always been an issue for his central office and he wanted to have firms that are able to respond to the questions the RFP asked within two weeks.

Ms. Liscinsky made a motion that they approve the RFP for legal as representation.

[Mr. Dion mentioned that the proposal says that the Committee would award the contract within 30 days of the proposal's submission and asked if that should instead say "closing date." Dr. Baldassarre said he would have to make an adjustment to change the anticipated start date and the duration. Mr. Shinnick asked if there was any existing notice requirement for the current firm. Dr. Baldassarre said they could not find an existing contract.]

Ms. Liscinsky amended her motion to "make the necessary revisions." Mr. Casper seconded the motion. The Committee voted 7-0 in favor of the motion. The motion passed.

• **New Business (7:49-7:50)**

Mr. Desruisseaux acknowledged the addition of Mr. Dion to the Committee. Mr. Shinnick thanked all who asked to be considered for the school committee appointment.

Dr. Baldassarre said that the school improvement plans would need to come before the Committee for approval before the next school year begins. He also said that at the July 13th meeting he would like to be able to hopefully get Committee approval for the next pupil services director appointment.

- **Old Business (7:51-7:59)**

Mr. Maharay said he would like to focus (in terms of his personal view) on academics, education (life skills) and wellness and asked that they start to coalesce around that.

Mr. Shinnick said he would like to focus on how they will partner with the town to help them understand what the district's needs are.

Ms. Liscinsky mentioned that in her old district they used to do a "roadshow" during budget season where the superintendent, some members of the school committee, and the finance director would go to each school and make presentations to parents. She also said they did that at the senior center. She said it helped everyone understand the issues the district was facing.

Mr. Desruisseaux said he felt the district should think about helping "market" their schools so people could learn what's really going on in our schools.

Mr. Shinnick shared that the Committee might want to consider another subcommittee that could focus on evaluating the school committee's performance and messaging.

- **Approve Minutes (7:59)**

No minutes to approve. Passed over.

- **Executive Session: (7:59-8:00)**

B. To conduct strategy sessions in preparation for negotiations with nonunion personnel or to conduct collective bargaining sessions or contract negotiations with nonunion personnel; (Superintendent Contract)

Mr. Desruisseaux entertained a motion to enter into executive session, by roll call vote to Conduct strategy sessions in preparation for negotiations with non-union personnel or to conduct collective bargaining sessions or contract negotiations with non-union personnel, superintendent contract and no further business to follow from there. Mr. Maharay moved the motion. Ms. Liscinsky seconded the motion. By roll call vote: Maharay: YES, Arlene: YES, Ben: YES, Dave: YES, Dion: YES, Barry: YES. The Committee voted 7-0 in favor of the motion. The motion passed.

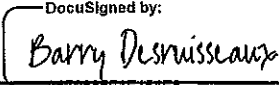
- **Adjournment**

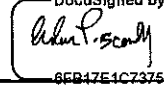
The Committee adjourned into executive session with no new business to follow at 8:00PM.

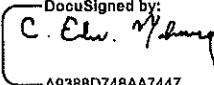
Uxbridge School Committee Meeting Minutes
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Respectfully Submitted,
Debbie Stark
Uxbridge School Committee Recording Secretary

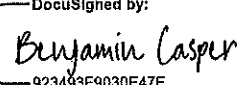
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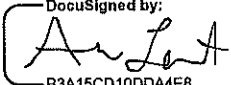
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Mr. Barry Desruisseaux, Chair

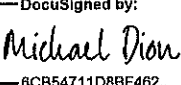
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Mr. David Shinnick, Member

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Mr. Michael Dion, Member

Link to memo on handbook recommendation changes:

<https://drive.google.com/drive/u/0/folders/1KqJr2Bpm6WFnCP9lM1KFcqPDumagajOL>