



**Town of Arlington, Massachusetts**  
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## **School Committee Minutes 10-24-2000**

Approved December 12, 2000  
Arlington School Committee  
Regular Meeting Minutes  
Tuesday, October 24, 2000  
7:30 PM

**Present:** Wm. A. Cary, Jr., Chair      **Martin J. Thrope**  
Joani LaMachia, Vice Chair      **Denis J. Sullivan**  
Michael T. Healy, Secretary      **Barbara C. Goodman**  
David W. McKenna

**Kay Donovan, Joanne Gurry, Marilyn Bisbicos**

**Call To Order: 7:40 PM**

### **Public Participation**

Trish Orlovsky, an Arlington parent spoke in support of MCAS testing. In a statement to the committee (attached) she applauded the hard work of administrators, staff, and students; she also pointed out that the boycott of the MCAS by students last spring undermined teachers' hard work. She stated, "it is time for balanced, informed, dispassionate discussion about the rationale, implementation, and results of MCAS tests".

Lynn Culverhouse, a representative of CARE, commended Arlington School Committee for its resolution regarding the MCAS tests and offered support in the continuing opposition of the MCAS in their current form. She voiced concern that at the eighth grade open house parents were told by teachers that a lot of time would be spent practicing for the MCAS tests. The CARE group requested to be on the school committee agenda to participate in a discussion to address the inconsistency between the resolution and the reality of what is happening in our classrooms. Ms. Culverhouse invited Ms. Orlovsky or any other interested person to attend one of their meetings.

Arlington High School junior, Eleanor Hyde read a statement to the Committee (attached). In it she stated that she believed that the resolution passed by ASC was not made available to all Arlington teachers. The students would like to continue to work with the School Committee on education reform and requested to be on the next agenda.

Fran Newton, resident and parent thanked the committee members who have propagated the education reform act not MCAS, saying that we are losing sight of the fact that this is education reform; MCAS is a measuring standard. With the implementation of frameworks, there is now curriculum where there was none ten years ago. The Town of Arlington should be proud of what has happened here. If the testing and methodology need correcting so be it, but pursue education reform positively.

AHS parent, Mary Fuscone stated that she sees no evidence that the School Committee or School Department is in opposition to education reform; they are working very effectively with ed reform and the MCAS issue needs to be separated from ed reform itself. One can be opposed to MCAS as a high stakes test and still be in support of education reform.

### **Secretary's Report**

Mr. Healy reviewed correspondence.  
Ms. LaMachia presided as Chair while Mr. Carey made the following motion.

On a motion by Mr. Carey and seconded it was:

Voted to send retiring Town Manager, Don Marquis, a letter of thanks for his years of service to the Town of Arlington and for his support of education for the schools including the override and the debt exclusion. Unanimous.

### **MASC Resolutions/Discussion**

Mr. Carey referenced a letter from school committee members; one from Milton and one from Haverhill who are also working for Mass

Insight asking Arlington to vote to table both MCAS –related resolutions. The Chairman read the letter and declared that he does not want to see the resolution tabled. The committee then directed Ms. Goodman to vote on behalf of the committee on the following resolutions:

On a motion by Ms. Goodman and seconded by Mr. Sullivan it was:

Voted to support Resolution #1 MCAS resolutions as written. Roll Call: Unanimous

Mr. Carey read resolution #1 sponsored by Arlington, and resolution #2 sponsored by Amherst-Pelham.

Mr. Thrope noted that neither resolution states that we are opposed to education reform and both are aimed at MCAS specifically.

On a motion by Mr. Sullivan and seconded by Mr. Healy it was:

Voted to support Resolution #3 – Special Needs Cost Sharing Formula. Unanimous.

On a motion by Mr. Thrope and seconded it was:

Voted to support Resolution #5 – Medicaid Reimbursement Funding with the provision that the resolution that we support at the convention be general in its language as opposed to specific to any one community. Unanimous

On a motion by Mr. Thrope and seconded it was:

Voted to support Resolution #4 – Support Services Funding. Unanimous.

On a motion by Mr. Healy and seconded it was

Voted to support Resolution #6 – Funding Formula. Unanimous

### **Report on Subcommittee**

#### **Curriculum & Instruction**

Ms. Goodman reported that the subcommittee met last week to discuss three issues; where we are in the process of aligning curriculum with the state standards; where we stand in the development of the middle school curriculum guide; and how do we go about making decisions in what goes into our curriculum.

Dr. Gurry summarized a draft position paper on ‘Teaching To The Standards Or The MCAS?’

- .. We assert that there is a law and that we have responsibilities and obligations
- .. We have complied completely in aligning, realigning and continuing to align our curriculum
- .. We acknowledge that frameworks are sequential, linear, hierarchical statements of what students should know and be able to do
- .. We acknowledge that the frameworks have come under criticism for being overly focused, narrowly focused.
- .. We assert that we take a balanced view, it has eliminated some units but has also reduced redundancy; it has also encouraged us to have a clearer progression of skills
- .. We refuse to accept criticism about the frameworks process or the MCAS.
- .. We accept responsibility for implementing our part of education reform that is inherent in the Frameworks.
- .. Writers of the frameworks and MCAS.

Our school is not determined by the MCAS or the Frameworks; our school year is determined by what we think is good for all students; achieving at a high rate of success, being competitive, confident, and inclusive. No one would take the SAT’s or even a drivers test without practice; these are high stakes tests and we assert it is not only unfair but even handicapping not to provide our students with some practice of the demands of MCAS type questions. We will continue to respond fully to all legal mandates, resolutions, and regulations. We shall by example show our students the value of responsibility and accountability.

Ms. Goodman explained that the subcommittee agreed that the process we would take with this proposed position paper is to have all members of the committee take time with it and give feedback to Joanne. It will be distributed to principals and department heads, and then to teachers. It will then be shared with the community, the school councils, and the newspapers clarifying where the Arlington School Committee stands on this issue. Mr. Sullivan observed that the message he received at the AHS open house is that we are not teaching to the MCAS. At the Ottoson he believed there was a mixed message and that parents and students feel pressure relative to the MCAS.

Mr. Thrope had a problem with the statement “the children may know the answer but they may not know the requirements of the MCAS in answering the question”. He is disturbed with the thinking that there is only one way to answer any given question. Mr. Healy echoed Mr. Thrope’s concerns and stated that this is what is wrong with the MCAS.

Ms. LaMachia thanked Joanne for writing the paper; stating that the real importance of a piece like this is that it can help us as a point of departure to dialogue with the community. Our role as school committee members and as public officials is to articulate and to clarify what the issues are.

Ms. Goodman pointed out that ed reform is asking us to change for the better in terms of the curriculum, professional development and high standards, but it is asking for it to be done too quickly. It is our duty and responsibility to have this kind of statement to guide parents and staff through this change. Ms. Goodman thanked Dr. Gurry for creating the statement.

### **Notice of Grant Award-Sanborn Foundation**

Supt. Donovan reported that the Sanborn Foundation awarded Arlington Public Schools \$56,000.00 for the smoking cessation program.

Representatives of the foundation will speak at the next meeting.

### **Report on Bishop School Celebration**

Steve Carne, principal of Bishop School reported that the celebration on Sunday was very successful. The efforts of many people contributed to the success of the day. Among the many people to thank include; the Administration, the school committee, members of the PTBC, speakers, selectmen, the town-wide elementary orchestra and fifth grade chorus; all will be receiving a thank you in the mail.

### **Request From Metropolitan Council For Education Opportunity**

Mrs. Donovan informed the committee that Steve Pereira of METCO was unable to attend and would be scheduled for a future meeting.

### Report on PTBC

The Committee heard an update on the schools from Mr. Thrope.

.. **Hardy School** - asbestos removal is near completion, 25 vents and skylights were removed and the project continues to be on time and on budget.

.. **Bishop School** – has received its permanent occupancy permit.

.. **Brackett School** – dialogue continues on the noise abatement issue. The tower light has been placed on a timer, Edison has been contacted and asked to shut it off the remaining light in question.

### RECESS

### Report on Joint School Committee/School Council Workshop

Ms. LaMachia reported that the School Committee and School Councils worked in groups on challenges, strengths, and weaknesses in the system. The next step is to meet with school councils to prioritize system goals and to also establish and define a timeline for receiving school improvement plan. Ms. Goodman would like some baseline data for the next workshop. Supt. Donovan stated that we could provide information to answer questions at the next joint meeting. At that meeting we could set priorities for the school systems; the school councils could then set their own school improvement plans to submit to the school committee and give a report on their accomplishments at the end of the year.

### Report on Subcommittees (continued)

.. **Policy & Procedure** – Mr. Healy reported that the subcommittee met with Jim Hardy from MASC who presented sections A & B of the policy manual for review. Mr. Healy stated that each school committee member would receive their sections along with a sheet of instructions, as well as be assigned a ‘buddy’ from the subcommittee to consult with on any questions or concerns. Each member will return the edited sections at the next regular meeting (November 14th ). The next meeting with Jim Hardy will be on November 28th; all members are invited to attend the subcommittee meetings. Ms. Goodman emphasized that each committee member is responsible for recommending any changes, not at a later time when the manual is ready for a vote of approval. Mr. McKenna pointed out that this manual should be a major goal for the committee and that other subcommittees must bear in mind that this is the committee’s priority.

.. **Safety Task Force** – Ms. LaMachia met with the task force this evening and discussed five items.

§ Discussion about Reorganization and Oversight on Safety and Security

§ Coordinates & Affiliations

§ Existing Programs, including Town-School Programs

§ New Programs

§ Assignments.

The Task Force will meet twice a year to share information and report back as a group. Judie Phelps and Kay will work on a document that would be a summary of all of our safety programs. It would include a contact person, the grades it impacts and the goal of the program.

### Report of Board Of Education

.. We have received the first section of MCAS results. The elementary and middle school scores look fine, but because of the boycott at the high school last spring, there are approximately 40 zeros that have been averaged into our scores.

.. MCAS scores are due out on November 15th

.. A tentative retest schedule has been set by the Commissioner for students who do not pass the 10th grade MCAS

.. Board of Education and the Lt. Governor made a recommendation that each district write an individual success plan for each student at all grade levels. Arlington could be eligible for a \$55,000.00 grant, but in order to receive the money an individual success plan is required for every student who did not pass the MCAS.

### New Business

Ms. LaMachia stated that as part of the high school accreditation process the State has plans to move from tracking to heterogeneous grouping. She would like to refer this to the Curriculum & Instruction subcommittee and have Charlie McCarthy speak to this issue.

Arrangements will be made by the Superintendent to ask the Board of Education to schedule a future board meeting in Arlington. (per request of Mr. Carey)

On a motion by Mr. Sullivan and seconded by Mr. Thrope it was:

Voted to enter executive session for the purpose of negotiations and a personnel issue.

Roll Call: Unanimous

### **Executive Session 10:00 – 10:30**

On a motion made and seconded it was unanimously Voted to adjourn at 10:30 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Karen Tassone