

Hanover School Committee Meeting Minutes
June 18, 2021
Hybrid Meeting
8:30 AM

Present: Mrs. Leah Miller, Mrs. Libby Corbo, Mr. Pete Miraglia, and Mrs. Ryan Hall

Absent: Mrs. Ruth Lynch

Also Present: Matthew Ferron, Thomas Raab, Patricia Smith, Keith Guyette, Daniel Birolini, Jane DeGrenier, Michael Oates, Matthew Plummer

Call to Order: Meeting was called to order at 8:31 AM by Mrs. Miller.

Public Comment: None

Approval of Minutes: None

Report of the Superintendent presented by Mr. Ferron:

Tolerance/Inclusivity Statement:

Cheryl Wade: My pronouns are SHE/HER/HERS and I have been married to my partner, a woman, for almost 11 years. I share this with you as I share it with my fellow staff members at Hanover High School and my students. I do so without reservation and without fear because in the 8 years that I have worked with the District I have always felt accepted, equal, supported, and most importantly safe. Not only do I have the pleasure of teaching at HHS, but I also have the honor of being the Diversity Club GSA advisor. I believe that I speak for all of my members, past, and present, when I say they also feel accepted, equal, supported, and safe due to the manner in which they are treated by their fellow students, staff, and administration. All administration and staff lead by Principal Matt Paquette are dedicated to ensuring just that. This was never more clear than over this past weekend and Monday morning upon entering the building. I was one of the first people Mr. Paquette called after the incident last Friday afternoon and we were in communication all weekend. His first concern was the well-being of our students. On Monday morning, we were greeted with rainbow flags and ribbons, words of encouragement and support, and of course Principal Matt Paquette and Superintendent Matt Ferron. I have received countless emails, texts, phone calls, and have had personal conversations with staff and students both from the LGBTQ+ Community and their allies. Students in the LGBTQ+ Community overall felt troubled by the incident but also uplifted by the support they received. It has been pleasantly overwhelming. Over the years, Mr. Paquette has been an unwavering supporter of the LGBTQ+ Community and we have spent countless hours discussing and taken action on activities, programs, issues, and concerns of our LGBTQ+ students. Oftentimes, members of the club were present and he is completely open to include them in our discussions and listen to their thoughts, concerns, and ideas. We have collaborated on events, recognition awards, speakers, and gender-neutral bathrooms. Mr. Paquette has set the tone for our building with his words but more importantly with his actions. I will close with a quote from an email Mr. Paquette received from a student and he shared with me. I believe this quote speaks to the atmosphere in the building that has been cultivated and nurtured by Principal Paquette. The sender of this email is talking about this past Monday and in part states: "My best friend of 12 years who is outwardly gay said there is something in the air today. It makes me feel happy and proud. I am glad to see that hate is not tolerated at our school. "Thank you again for all your efforts." I could not have said it better myself. Thank you!

Mrs. Miller: Thank you for coming and sharing. It was really important for us to hear.

Questions/Comments: None

Mrs. Miller noted that public comment will be at the end of the meeting and clarified that the 5th member of the School Committee, Mrs. Lynch, would have been there but she was away on vacation and unavailable this week.

Mrs. Miller: Just wanted to share a little bit about the School Committee's role with the public because I realize it may be confusing after the last year of COVID land where our communications were so frequent. The School Committee is the governing body of the school district and as such we are considered a public board. As a public board, we are required by law to submit to open meeting laws. We are not the reactionary arm of the school district – we are set up as a deliberation board and we are to deliberate publicly. The definition of deliberation is to engage in long and careful consideration. We are supposed to publicly deliberate issues that relate to our three areas of control – policy, budget, and superintendent supervision.

When a quick response is needed due to incidences that occur at school, the Building Administration is the one to handle those responses. It would then role up to the District Administration if more involvement is needed. They are not under the constraints of the open meeting law. The School Committee is not the one to react quickly – we were not set up for that purpose. We also have no jurisdiction over the discipline of students – that too falls on the Building Administrator and in rare cases the Superintendent.

The incident at Hanover High School last week followed that exact path. The building Principal reacted extremely quickly and worked all weekend along with the Superintendent to investigate the incident. He sent a message out to the high school community regarding the incident over the weekend. The investigation process continued into this week – all the while we watched as Superintendent Ferron made sure the staff and students felt supported. The feedback we received as a committee is that was indeed the case.

I know we live in a world that moves at lightning speed and we all demand lightning speed answers, but sometimes that just is not possible nor prudent. Sometimes taking the time to let the process happen is a good thing. In this case, I for one am very grateful the school took the time to handle this incident with care for all. That being said, given the incidents of last Friday, I think it is time for the School Committee to meet and deliberate on an inclusion policy over the next couple of months. It has also shown me that we have some policy work to do as well. I look forward to doing this work, not in a rush, but in a careful way that this work deserves. We, as a board need to care for all students and all parents and make sure our policies reflect that.

For the School Committee to respond to such an incident, we would have to deliberate in public during a public meeting in which we need to give 48 hours' notice. We cannot speak as a committee without doing this. Individual members may speak as a citizen, but we cannot speak on behalf of the committee. We cannot deliberate outside of a public meeting.

Mr. Miraglia: I put together a statement that I would offer for approval or an amendment, so we as a board can speak with one voice and a single statement.

The Hanover School Committee strives to make an inclusive environment at all levels of our school community and to make our learning environment one that embraces diversity as a strength. There is no room for intolerance of any kind in our school community and we stand together to offer our love and support to our LGBTQ+ community at Hanover Public Schools, particularly at this time during Pride month. LGBTQ+ students and staff deserve a safe and inclusive place to be themselves to express their identity.

We recognize as a committee that we are responsible for thinking more broadly on issues of equality, diversity, and inclusivity and we will continue to prioritize these values with everything we do. We will also review policies and evaluate the opportunities to advance this ongoing work as we listen, learn, and grow together as a community. This is the challenging work we look forward to taking on for our students and families to ensure Hanover is a community that welcomes, supports, and celebrates everyone for being who they are and who they are meant to be.

Discussion/Comment:

Mrs. Corbo: Thank you, Pete, for taking a leap and making a statement. I want to be clear that this is not the inclusivity statement and we will be working on that as we move forward.

Mrs. Hall: My first thought is to take out “*particularly during this Pride month.*” I think the statement: There is no room for intolerance of any kind in our school community should not necessarily be at any particular time but at all times. By taking that out, it sends an important message to our students in our community.

Mr. Miraglia: Would you like to strike “*particularly at this time during Pride month*”?

Mrs. Hall: Yes. The other piece I wanted to add was “families” to the statement: “Our LGBTQ+ students, and staff, in our community deserve a safe and inclusive place to be themselves to express their identity.”

Mr. Miraglia: I have added the changes and will re-read the statement.

The Hanover School Committee strives to make an inclusive environment at all levels of our school community and to make our learning environment one that embraces diversity as a strength. There is no room for intolerance of any kind in our school community and we stand together to offer love and support to our LGBTQ+ community at Hanover Public Schools. LGBTQ+ students, staff, and families deserve a safe and inclusive place to be themselves and express their identity.

We recognize as a Committee that we are responsible for thinking broadly on issues of equality, diversity, and inclusivity and we will continue to prioritize these values with everything we do. We will also review policies and evaluate the opportunities to advance this ongoing work as we listen, learn, and grow together as a community. This is the challenging work we look forward to taking on for our students and families to ensure Hanover is a community that welcomes, supports, and celebrates everyone for being who they are and who they are meant to be.

Mrs. Miller entertains a motion to approve the statement as edited as Mr. Miraglia just read.
The motion was moved by Mr. Miraglia and seconded by Mrs. Corbo. The motion carried unanimously.

Mrs. Miller: We will get this out and posted for the public. It is okay that we do not have all five members here to approve the statement.

Mrs. Corbo: The open meeting law is an important part of what we do as is public deliberation. We trust that our chair, as a leader, will make statements on our behalf and this happens in emails, responses to emails, and can be a small acknowledgment. When I asked on Sunday night that a statement be issued, that was my intent. It was not my intent to ask for any deliberation to occur quietly or behind the scene. All I was looking for was a small statement acknowledging support for our students before they entered the school on Monday. The open meeting law does require 48 hours' notice for deliberation. I was disappointed that we did not post a meeting on Monday as the Board of Selectman did and we waited until Friday to make a statement. I understand what you said about the role of our board being one of policy and not being reactionary. We do have policies and part of those policies is to use all appropriate communication and action techniques to ere and reduce the grievances of individuals and groups. It became clear early on that there were grievances of individuals and groups that I felt as a committee we needed to address immediately. Our silence sent a message that I am uncomfortable with. We encourage our students and our children to speak up and to say something when they see that something is not right. We encourage them to choose to do what is right or what is easy. We encourage them to have their voices be heard. As Martin Luther King said; “It is not the words of our enemies that we remember it is the silence of our friends.” Remaining silent all week sent a powerful message and that is regrettable. I hope that as a committee, the statement that Mr. Miraglia was kind enough to draft goes a long way. My apologies to anyone who misinterpreted our silence as a way of diminishing our commitment to diversity and inclusion in the schools. It is not what it was intended to be on my behalf.

Mrs. Miller: Interpreting our board's silence is not a fair statement. I want to make it clear that no one's silence meant that we were not appalled by this act, encouraged this act, or believed it was right in any way. We need to support our administration and Mr. Ferron.

Mr. Miraglia: The intent was to be positive, supportive to our students in the school community, and look forward.

Public Comment:

During the next 23 minutes, public comments were given by several concern parents and residents who expressed their concerns, ideas, and opinions about the timing of the response from the School Committee in regards to the flag incident at the high school. Please see the [6/18/21 School Committee Meeting](#) to see all comments in full.

Mrs. Hall: This has been a week of many emotions. There was an incident at the high school where the LGBTQ+ community felt targeted. We as a committee should have issued a statement as early as possible to ensure that they felt loved and supported in our schools regardless of the investigation. I am happy that Mr. Ferron and Mr. Paquette issued statements earlier this week. However, I feel the failure and lack of messaging from the School Committee as a whole and as an elected governing body of the schools and entire community was disappointing. Our statement did not need to address the specifics of an investigation or whether or not people believed that the flag should be there but a simple gesture to the targeted communities in our school that lets them know they are loved, safe, and supported. We failed on this one as a committee. We can do better. We need to do better moving forward.

Mr. Ferron: We have an anti-bias committee within the school district that does a lot of this work on trainings. Professional development, and other activities for our staff and students. We have a list of those things that we will be happy to share over the summer. There is a lot of work scheduled in the months ahead when we return. This work has been done and ongoing for a number of years. Our counselors, support staff, and teachers have been working to bring these issues to the adults and students in our school so we can learn to get better. Give us some time over the summer and we will be able to get that information out.

Additional Comments:

Any questions regarding the curriculum can email Mr. Ferron and he will forward them to the appropriate people.

Mrs. Corbo: I want to ensure the public that their thoughts and input are important to us. We have policies in our School Committee Handbook which states the School Committee has a dual responsibility for implementing statutory requirements pertaining to the public education and local citizens' expectations for the education of the community's youth. It also has an obligation to determine and assess the citizens' desires. The public will be kept informed of the progress and problems of the school system and the citizens will be urged to bring their aspirations and feelings about their public schools to the attention of this body which they have chosen to represent them in the management of public education. We also have a policy called: *Community Involvement and Decision Making*. A sentence from that policy states: *If the School Committee endorses the concept of community participation in the affairs of the schools is essential to the school system and the community are to maintain mutual confidence and respect and work together to improve the quality of education for students. It, therefore, intends to exert every effort to identify the desires of the community and be responsive through its actions to those desires.* We are a board that represents you and your voice. Please feel welcome to participate in your children's education.

Action Items: None

Motion by Miraglia to adjourn the open session at 9:17 AM. The motion was seconded by Corbo. The motion carried unanimously.

Respectfully Submitted by:

Tahnee Warner

Tahnee Warner

Executive Assistant/ Recording Secretary