



# Northbridge Public Schools

## Northbridge School Committee

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### Northbridge Public Schools School Committee Meeting Agenda Tuesday, August 22, 2023 7:00PM Northbridge High School Media Center

#### I. Call to Order

The meeting started late at 7:10PM because of the Yondr presentation for parents that ran late.

#### II. Pledge of Allegiance

#### III. Attendance

Erin Donahue	Present
Jill Leonard	Present
Heather Alden	Present
Shannon Canoy	Present
Jonathan Canoy	Present

Also in attendance were Superintendent Amy McKinstry and Director of Finance Melissa Walker

#### IV. Statement of Audio and Video Recording: Will not be recorded as Richard Vallee cannot make the meeting.

#### V. Statement of Mission

#### VI. Introductions:

##### A. Kate Ryan Vokes - New PPS Director

Superintendent McKinstry introduced Director Ryan Vokes. Came to us from Millbury. She has been in education for 24 years and in the position of Director of Pupil Personnel Services for 10 years. In her short time here, she has set up a website for the Special Education department and is sending out newsletter to the staff and a newsletter to the parents of students in the special education program, including IEP and 504. School Committee asked to be added to the newsletters.

## B. Russell Cron - MS Asst. Principal

Superintendent McKinstry introduced Russell Cron as the new MS Vice Principal. Previously was the Highschool Team Chair. Has an extensive Admin Background. 26<sup>th</sup> year in education and administration. Has previously been a principal, vice principal, and dean of students. Team Chair was his dream job, but he enjoyed working with Principal Palmer Howes so much that when this position opened up, it was too good of an opportunity to pass up. He wants to bring a lot of positivity and connectivity to the Middle School to improve the culture, climate, and grades within the school. Proposed a friendly contest between the schools for who will have the best culture and grades.

## VII. Presentations: (7:15)

### A. District Strategic Plan - Year Three

In Year three of the Strategic Plan, Superintendent McKinstry reiterated that the plan was to keep working on the initiatives from last year. Not to add anything until they had solidified what they had started. Want to help the students become more empathetic and competent. First goal is Shared Leadership in the district. Empowering Teachers, Students, and Parents to all take a hand. Incorporate students more into making their own education and removing barriers for students.

They had another leadership Institute this summer to onboard the new leadership and help align everyone. Have discussed setting up a leadership swap so that they can all observe each other and help each other improve. Will be making a Directory of Staff Experts so that we can look inwards for experts to teach each other, rather than externally. Will be resuming the Learning Walks to make sure all of the alignments stick. The leadership team wants to increase the leadership opportunities for parents and students. They will be adding additional educations to any event they can co-op that are mandatory to get the information that the parents are asking about, but never showing up for.

DISC survey for LT team was sent out to figure where the leadership team is as a leaders, where they think they are, and what they can do to improve their capabilities. There is also a new Admin Manual that is detailing all of the processes, so everyone is on the same page and knows what to do in as many situations as possible.

Second goal is Inclusive Culture. Using Data Based Student Support Systems. Revised the BCAP(s) implementation. Will be working on more opportunities to capitalize on providing Parent Education. Will be increasing the communication training with the leadership team,

staff, and parents. Will reconvene the SEL task force and incorporate more Anti-bullying training. Will have family liaison at all of the schools to help improve family engagement in every grade level. There is a New Discipline Matrix that has been added to the handbook. The third goal is Teaching and Learning: Curriculum alignment and instructional practices. Continuation of staff training in the new programs. New Cell Phone program is being rolled out this year to increase attention in class and reduce the rate of bullying and social pressures. They are working on re-establishing District Data Dashboard to be visible on the NPS Website. CPT and PLC will utilize the districtwide Best Practices. WIN blocks will help provide data based intervention opportunities. Aligned and documented assessments and curriculum for all subjects over the summer. Also aligned effective attendance procedures.

Heather Alden commented that the directory of staff experts is a great idea to help with teacher and talent retention, because it helps the teachers feel appreciated and recognized for the skills they have cultivated and classes they have taken.

Erin Donahue asked if the SWISS program being used in NES will be used at the other schools to be able to track incidents of discipline, as it was an easy to read and understand report the program gave. Scott Connery stated his old district used it, and can help getting it set up at the High School, but it is somewhat time consuming to get all of the data into the easy to read graphs that had been previously made.

Consent Agenda (7:45)

A. School Committee Meeting Minutes: July 18, 2023

A motion was made Heather Alden by to approve minutes. It was seconded by Jonathan Canoy.

Erin Donahue	Yes
Jill Leonard	Yes
Heather Alden	Yes
Shannon Canoy	Yes
Jonathan Canoy	Yes

The motion was passed with a vote of 5-0

B. Warrant 24-04	8/03/2023	\$132,342.46
C. Warrant 24-05	8/10/2023	\$30,529.10
D. Warrant 24-06	8/17/2023	\$138,457.94

A motion was made by heather Alden to approve the three warrants. It was seconded by Jonathan Canoy.

Erin Donahue	Yes
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Jill Leonard	Yes
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Heather Alden	Yes
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Shannon Canoy	Yes
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Jonathan Canoy	Yes
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The motion was passed with a vote of 5-0

#### VIII. Discussion (7:50)

##### A. NPS District Handbook - 2023-2024

###### a. Includes New Cell Phone Program/Rules

Outside of the Cell Phone Plan, a majority of the changes to the handbook were minimal. Most of them were edited or added to in order to provide clarity on the meaning where they had been ambiguous. Redundancies were removed from the book, and some of the sections, such as the online security section, were replaced with links leading to the information on our website. This helped reduce the handbook from 93 pages to mid 40s and better link the flow of the sections. A flow Chart for discipline has been added, along with clearer language. Director Ryan Vokes went over the sections pertaining to Special Education, 504, and IEPs to make sure they were up to date. Biggest update is the cellphone policy, changing it to align with the Yondr program.

Shannon Canoy Brought up Dress code ambiguity and being led in a circle when trying to follow the links, not getting a direct answer. Eric Tracey replied that once each appendices for that section has been approved by the School Committee, the link will lead to the actual information.

Committee asked if we are trying to be ahead of the curve with curbing the technology instead of being reactive. Superintendent replied yes, we are trying to be ahead of the curve and that this is where the trend is going. 86% of the teachers find the cellphones very to extremely disruptive to learning. Superintendent stated she will send out videos about the effects cellphones can have on mental health.

Stated that if this fails, she will not keep pushing for this program, but if the trend shows better grades, attendance, and discipline, we will stick with the program, maybe even permanently. Explained that having a central reporting makes tracking infractions easier.

Erin Donahue talked about her daughter's chronic illness and needed to go to the nurse each day. Her daughter was not able to determine if something was wrong with herself and call for help with her phone, but the nurse who was trained was able to make a call to save her. Shared other stories about how cell phone usage would actually make response times take longer.

Shannon Canoy asked the Admins what they thought about the policy. Kate Ryan Vokes explained how all of the young elementary school students without cellphones were able to get out of the building, listen to directions, and assemble for emergency drills in only a few minutes, while the high school students took at least twice as long, at about 12 minutes at the fastest and were not listening to directions the entire time, since most had their phones out. There were times where there would be long lines for the bathroom and the students just using that time as time to be on their phones rather than in class.

Susan Palmer-Howes explained that ~75% of investigations at the Middle School were cell phone, vape, and social media related. Students were able to use the phones at lunchtime, and that was leading to a lot of students asking to be dismissed after lunch period. The pouches will be a more clear cut discipline line than pockets, as the students can't claim they were just making sure it wasn't falling out or moving packets because it was uncomfortable. It is either in the pouch or it is not, and there is no reason to remove it.

#### B. Middle School Kitchen Serving Line

Purchase request to replace the Middle School Serving line, as half of the line does not heat and the other half does not cool. This means they need to have burners running under the warm items on one half of the line and ice baths to place the trays on in the other half, increasing the amount of work to keep the food at the correct and safe temperatures. Going through a known and trusted supplier, it would cost \$51,826. Did not get the grant this year from the state to cover the equipment, as we have received it previously. However, as universal meal funding has continued, and will continue, so the Revolver fund has enough money to pay for the replacement. It will take 4-6 weeks for the order to come in and be installed, so it can be done over a school break.

#### XI. Public Comment (8:05)

Brandon King, 75 Sheryl Drive. Loves the idea of the new cellphone policy, especially because all electronics, including headphones, smart watches, and Bluetooth devices will also be in the pouches. Because they will not have the access to their children, parents will

be distraught and will require crystal clear communications from the district. Addressed the connection in Erin Donahue's story and stated that students don't get that connection with the adjustment counselors as the counselor changes every year. Reported that parents always seem to be happy when their child is out of the middle school because of Bullying. There are also a lot of PRS complaints. States that he hopes the lack of access to phones during the day helps reduce instances of bullying. After the anti-bullying presentation which none of the other parents attended, which he admits was distressing, he tried to convince them that they needed to fill out the online form to make Bullying reports, and got chewed out by parents who felt he overstepped his bounds by telling them how to make the reports. Asked if there was a legal way to make the online form mandatory for bullying reporting, and closing off the other avenues.

Parents might also not be coming to the presentations about bullying and mental health because they don't see the results of the investigations and know what the punishments the bullies get, so they feel that the district is not doing anything. Wanted to know if there was a way to create a "punishment Rubric" and have that available for everyone to see so that they can understand what will happen to the perpetrators.

## XII. Action (8:15)

### A. Ireland Field Trip

A motion was made by Heather Alden to approve the field trip. It was seconded by Jonathan Canoy.

Erin Donahue	Yes
Jill Leonard	Yes
Heather Alden	Yes
Shannon Canoy	Yes
Jonathan Canoy	Yes

The motion was passed with a vote of 5-0

### B. 457 Cooperative and Master Plan Board Resolution

A motion was made by Heather Alden to approve offering the retirement plan option. It was seconded by Jonathan Canoy.

Erin Donahue	Yes
Jill Leonard	Yes
Heather Alden	Yes

Shannon Canoy                      Yes

Jonathan Canoy                      Yes

The motion was passed with a vote of 5-0

### XIII. Information

#### A. VDH - New rates

Melissa Walker informed the School Committee that the rates for VDH Legal Council have increased due to inflation, but it is still a better deal than many other districts are getting.

#### B. Early PTS grantees

Amy McKinstry has given Early Professional Teacher Status to Michelle Driscoll and Stephen Prario for their dedication, work ethic, and experience.

#### C. Kindergarten school choice has been closed - website updated

Had to wait for all the registrations from the town to go through, but School Choice for Kindergarten has been closed as they were bombarded with applications and filled quickly.

#### D. Governor's Budget Update

Massachusetts has voted to continue Universal Free Meals, and Chapter 70., which normally granted \$30 per person has increased to \$60 per person. We might not see that money directly this year as the budget was already made, and there has been an increase in Insurance liabilities for the buildings that the town manager may be using that money to cover. The money for the school is still going to a school expense. In future years, as the increase will be known, it will be worked into the school's budget and will be available for the school to use. In past years, District has qualified for Circuit Breaker funding, but not sure if they will get the funding this year.

### XV Adjournment (8:30)

A motion was made by Heather Alden to adjourn. It was seconded by Jonathan Canoy.

Erin Donahue                      Yes

Jill Leonard                      Yes

Heather Alden                      Yes

Shannon Canoy                      Yes

Jonathan Canoy                      Yes

The motion was passed with a vote of 5-0