

Chair's Statement - SC Meeting 1/29/19

re: Superintendent Maryann Perry retirement announcement

I knew Maryann Perry's retirement announcement was imminent, and I hope this puts into context not only her absence from last week's meeting, but also my challenge in explaining that absence. I also hope you can appreciate, as I followed the growing, vitriolic comment stream on social media, why I felt it would have been cruel to subject her to what I anticipated, and what proved to be, a hostile working environment on the heels of what amounted to a trial at Tuesday night's Fin Comm meeting. She has protections as an employee of this district, and an angry mob is not a good recruiting tool for her replacement.

While I was hopeful that only the School Committee's presence might ultimately help diffuse the situation, and refocus the committee on district business, that was clearly not the case. Still, the decision to excuse the Superintendent from the meeting shortly beforehand was made independently and consistent with the planning and thought I do as Chair for any meeting. Ultimately, I take responsibility for excusing her, and in turn the Admin Team who followed suit. I still believe it was the right thing to do.

As far as the other attendees of our meetings, the Administrative Team is not required to attend, but do so at our request to support our discussion and agenda items. Working together has been a priority for this administration, especially in times of crisis. As for the Principals, their attendance is also not mandatory. We are lucky to be in a district where they care enough about the work, and are supportive of one another and the team, that they also choose to attend.

I want to thank Maryann for her almost seven years in this district. I have put in the time to truly get to know her and many of the countless, never thanked people who work tirelessly each and every day for our students despite dwindling resources and higher expectations. I have seen firsthand the long hours, late nights, and weekends of service to this district and our children. I understand why Maryann often calls them her own, because she cares, infinitely more than the job requires, and often at the expense of her own family. I am genuinely grateful for the work that both of us have accomplished together under her leadership and guidance and as part of a team.

A team that has: made great strides in re-aligning our curriculum and putting into place a renewal plan that takes us through 2020; embedded social and emotional learning into our classrooms with the addition of PBIS; supported student learning that enabled incredible growth in state testing and accountability standards; identified and fought for

the funding of previously unaddressed capital projects; spearheaded a Feasibility Study for a new school; bolstered our technology infrastructure; took Village School from Level 2 status to Level 1 in less than two years during the ascension of a new principal who was properly mentored and supported. And the high school, which had been the source of so much concern and strife, with genuine school culture issues to excessive principal turnover, to a warning of losing its accreditation, is a ship that has been righted, thanks in no small part to you identifying the right person to take the helm and ensuring he was hired. These accomplishments did not happen in a vacuum and despite of you.

Every leader faces criticism, but unfortunately, the message outside the Marblehead bubble, shared by those who work with us and other districts is that the Town has a reputation for being unforgiving, difficult, demanding, and reactionary. One need only look at the multitude of homegrown social media pages for minute-by-minute analysis of the “idiots in charge,” both paid and unpaid, and the “stupid decisions” that we make. We are brutalized day in and day out.

Thankfully, the converse is a multitude of supportive, reasonable community members who understand the complexities of the changing nature of our student populations and public education, who ask great questions and want to talk through those challenges rationally.

To the community, we will likely begin a Superintendent search immediately, but until a replacement is found we need this Superintendent in place to continue the work of the district. We need a functioning, productive school committee to spearhead that search and to address important and timely issues, particularly this budget season. So you will have to be patient. I know we can agree that more chaos for teachers and staff is not in the best interest of our students.

My school committee seat will be up in and May, and I will retire from this position as well. I ran two times unopposed. That’s the case for most of us, at least those who weren’t appointed to fill vacancies left open by others who couldn’t make it through their three year term. The fact is that most elected or appointed positions in town rarely have turnover or contested races. So if you believe you can do better, and contribute to this community, then I encourage you to step up with an open mind and a positive attitude. You will find you have a lot to learn. I sincerely hope that moving forward this community can come together over a shared vision of what our schools can be.

As for Maryann, I hope that we will have more opportunity for reflection, discussion and ultimately celebration of your retirement. I wish you the best.