

**MARTHA'S VINEYARD REGIONAL HIGH SCHOOL ADVISORY COUNCIL
MARTHA'S VINEYARD REGIONAL HIGH SCHOOL COMMITTEE
PUBLIC FORUM**

Tuesday, June 27, 2017, 5:30PM

**Martha's Vineyard Regional High School
Performing Arts Center**

MVRHSAC: Co-Chairs Sarah Dingley, & Rufus Peebles, Lisa Bonneau, Anne Bresnick, Karen Burke, Jacque Callahan, Mike Innes, Ann Metcalf, Michelle Moore, Debra Swanson,

MVRHSC: Chair – Kris O'Brien, Amy Houghton, Michael Hoyt, Kim Kurke, Robert Lionette, Kelly McCracken, Skip Manter, Janet Packer,

Others: About 100 members of the public including:

AISC – Chair Michael Marcus, Colleen McAndrews, Lisa Reagan,
Staff: Principal – Sarah Dingley, Assist. Prin. - Elliott Bennett,
CTE Director – Barbara-jean Chauvin, Guidance – Mike McCarthy,
PAC Director – Charlie Esposito, SpEd Co-Director Hope MacLeod,
Donna Bishop, Kansas Brew, Jeff Caruthers, Nell Coogan, Justine DeOliveira,
Leigh Fairchild-Coppoletti, Leslie Frizzell, Caroline Fyler, Louis Hall,
Mike Joyce, Corinne Kurtz, Mary McDonald, Kathy Perotta, Julie Schmidt,
Sean Schofield, Dan Sharkovitz, Erin Slossberg, Ruda Stone, Mary Vivian,
David Wilson,

Supt.'s Of: Superintendent - Matt D'Andrea, Asst. Supt. – Richie Smith,

Students: Katie Morse, Lizzie Williamson,

Parents: Katrina Arayo, Jessica Estrella, Manny Estrella, Cindy Flanders, Emily Hassan, Mary Holmes, Alexis Garcia, Gail Gardner, Celia Gillis, Alicia Knight, Beth Kostman, Mollee Lewis, Sheila Morse, Judy Maynard, Jennifer Randolph, Chuck Robinson, Lara Robinson, Jeanne Rogers, Heidi Rydzewski, Sherry Sidoti, Tara Sykes, Kathleen Tackabury, Gwyneth Wallace, Anne Williamson,

NAACP: Lorna Andrade, Carmen Amadeo, Carrie Tankard,

Community: Arnie Cook, Ewell Hopkins, Emily Husson, W.D. McLaurin, Peter Meleney, Joy Robinson-Lynch, Daniel Williams,

Press: MVTV – Dusko Stavic, Vineyard Gazette – Heather Hamacek,

Secretary: Marni Lipke *Late arrivals or early departures (see * in text)

• The Martha's Vineyard Regional High School Advisory Council (SAC) and the Martha's Vineyard Regional High School Committee (MVRHSC) meetings were called to order and the Public Forum opened at 5:33PM. (*Recorder's Note: Some discussions are summarized and grouped for clarity and brevity.*)

School Improvement
Opening Remarks

(Agenda Item #1)

- Supt. Matt D'Andrea introduced the School Advisory Council, explaining its mixed membership of staff, parents, students and community members, and its mission to draft the School Improvement Plan (SIP) dealing with issues in the School.

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- He acknowledged everyone's common goal to get the best possible education for students. He looked forward to hearing comments and exchange thoughts, asking everyone to be respectful of others, to speak in generalities for positive change, and not to address specific persons or incidents in the open forum.

- Prin. Sarah Dingley alluded to the media around a controversial retirement and loss of student murals. Administration was being as public as possible, sending out statements whenever appropriate. Administrator, Committee or Council member silence should not be interpreted negatively but rather in terms of the limitations on what could be shared publicly.

- The School Improvement Plan had three goals to be implemented during the next school year (see 6/5/17 Minutes p. 3 #E).

- A new schedule with a daily flex-time period designed for community building, enrichment and academic intervention was piloted this spring to positive student feedback.

- Improved communications: teacher/student, MVRHS/student, MVRHS/parents, and to the community as a whole, including gmail tagging, google classroom, more relevant, live website, etc. required choosing the best way to disseminate information, whether making it very accessible or sending it out to blast email inboxes.

- The school community would explore ways and hold public conversation on how to reduce student anxiety and stress.

- Disciplinary data showed a significant drop in suspensions over the last five years. Ms. Dingley's philosophy was not only to change suspension procedures, but also to create a pro-active culture that would reduce the number of infractions in general.

- 22% of students earned detention by engaging in significant tardiness or class cutting. Measures to incentivize students out of hallways and into classrooms included, withdrawing student privilege to academically make up cut classes, and robo-calls informing parents of absences and class cuts.

- To combat a sharp increase in absences, Administration and faculty were looking to create a culture where students wanted to come to school.

- Intensifying freshmen transition, talking about expectations, anti-bullying, inclusion, peer-to-peer discussions, turning off all electronics to be more present in classes, etc.

- Looking for ways within the school day to increase student leadership and voice, including the flex block, a student government leadership class, and training 30 students to be facilitators in a cohesive overlap with staff.

- 45 staff took part in restorative justice training, to build community, use large and small circles and address learning after consequences.

- An unexpected number of English Language Learner (ELL) students over-burdened the current department, so Prin. Dingley was instituting new measures, dedicating a large classroom,

looking to hire staff and translators, working with newcomers in a separate class before integrating them into content.

- Forum Facilitators were Asst. Supt. Richie Smith and MVRHSC Vice Chair Amy Houghton.

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- Ms. Houghton explained that the MVRHSC welcomed public input in meetings and with individual representatives. Its duties were restricted to hiring the Superintendent, setting and overseeing the budget, and crafting policy.
- Asst. Supt. Richie Smith emphasized that parents entrusted schools with what was most precious to them, their children, and great emotion was involved if schools were perceived as not honoring that trust. A common response to passionate exchanges was to either ‘circle the wagons’ or surrender neither of which were helpful. It was hoped that tonight would strengthen the High School’s work with its students, through open listening and positive comments. He requested that:
 - comments and concerns be addressed through the facilitators and only be taken from those standing at microphones,
 - comments and concerns be voiced in respectful generalities without personal criticism,
 - in view of time restraints each person could only be heard once.

Public Comments

Mr. Ewell Hopkins – parent of 2 students and elected Oak Bluffs official, had two concerns:

- 1) a need for [two different channels of communications: one for parents with children and another for concerned community members and organizations](#); and
 - 2) [law enforcement role in the school](#).
- SAC members responded that the School Resource Officer (SRO) was presented as non-authoritative, community relationship building and they were curious to see how the role had evolved. Some had found the officers an amazing and caring resource.

Ms. Gwyneth Wallace – parent and alumna spoke to unclear communication and perceived lack of transparency with the community which this forum went a long way towards ameliorating. She suggested [Facebook as the best way to communicate](#). She praised her children’s experience in the MVRHS particularly in the Alternative Education Program and liked the pro-active, upbeat change and would continue to put her faith in the MVRHS. She referenced a rumor that Prin. Dingley had been hired to fix major disciplinary problems and [pleaded for more guidance counselors versus more administrators](#).

- Several SAC members were on the selection committee to hire a new principal and attested that leadership rather than discipline was their primary concern. Ms. Dingley was the unanimous choice from the start. She was asked about discipline and the Committee had been impressed with her philosophical response. They noted that some of this controversy stemmed from the present drive to actually enforce the code, as fairly as possible.
- Prin. Dingley explained some of the complexities of communications, for example how to set clear expectations about behavior at a dance while being positive and inviting.

Ms. Lara Robinson – parent, advocated that retiring teacher Ms. Elaine Weintraub’s should be heard, and respected (see 6/5/17 Minutes p.6-7 #D), in that her story matched many of her

experiences with unprofessional behavior, a drive to punish before understanding, criminalizing children in the court system and its harmful impact on them. She asked that [staff find out why a student was cutting a class before giving consequences](#).

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- Mr. Smith responded that legally and ethically for the good of staff and students, specific incidents and personnel matters could not be discussed in public.

Ms. Lisa Reagan, parent of graduates and School Committee member, spoke to her extended family's experience with the comprehensive nature of the MVRHS from alternative education to GEDs, to college preparation and the drive to be all things to all students. She urged the community to get involved and praised the staff and volunteer MVRHSC and SAC members for their continuing new ideas, and dedication.

Ms. Cindy Flanders, parent, looked back on the previous four years of revolving door of administrators, when there were seldom consequences for actions and students were not encouraged to set high goals. She expressed gratitude for the amazing teachers that helped her children and for Prin. Dingley's and the Superintendent's leadership and vision. She supported: regulation of bathrooms (often inappropriately used to smoke and vape), and electronic devices. She suggested: finding a way to [engage students in these conversations](#), [a more honest look at cutting and tardiness patterns](#), [holding staff and administrators as accountable as students](#), [more transparency with procedures](#), [examining real or perceived unequal treatment for students in special programs like athletics and Minnesingers](#). She thanked them for an amazing graduation and for enforcing expectations to create a better individual and community.

Ms. Annie Cook, mentor, aunt, artist, musician and activist wanted to offer ideas, teaching and substituting to the MVRHS but had found access difficult, feeling that there were 'gatekeepers' that restricted who she could talk to, and/or whether she was fairly and objectively considered. She respected the parents who were speaking out in a small community.

- Prin. Dingley responded that Administration was looking at substitutes hiring and process. Ms. Houghton suggested she go to Principal coffees and bring ideas to the SAC and MVRHSC during public comment.

Ms. Leigh Fairchild-Coppoletti, MVRHS history teacher, spoke enthusiastically about the new restorative justice potential, and was excited about implementing it next year.

Ms. Heidi Rydzewski, parent, thanked Prin. Dingley for the Forum and the discipline statistics, advocated for [more consistent communications](#), and for [a clearer understanding of the SRO role](#). She looked forward to the successful changes by the time her next child was in the MVRHS.

Ms. Alicia Knight, parent, alumna and daughter of alumna, emphasized the common theme of feeling not listened to or seen and suggested [the forums be repeated regularly](#). She echoed [concerns on punitive discipline before understanding the issues](#). She loved the idea of a [wide variety of students engaged in this conversation](#). She was also excited by the idea of a [Health or Socio-emotional subcommittee to research programs before making changes](#). She echoed the call

for more resources for the Guidance Department. Ms. Knight asked to see the senior exit survey, and suggested a survey for underclassmen.

- SAC spoke to the difficulty of measuring programs success during changing administrations and hoped for better monitoring in the future. They had lengthy discussions on how to recognize a diversity of growth, not just the top 20 academic students but those with other skills, improvement, compassion, civic responsibility, etc.

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Mr. Bill Engler, parent, was less concerned with MVRHS competitiveness since the world was competitive but expressed anxiety around the pervasive atmosphere of discipline, in student speeches, in pressure to name names, and discipline calls one month after a class cut. He advocated for [teaching gray rather than black and white blanket rules](#).

Dr. William McClauren, former education administrator, asked why there weren't students on the stage. He asked an Administrator to report on their meeting with the National Association for the Advancement of Colored Peoples (NAACP), and he recommended the MVRHS:

- [improve its public relations](#);
- [further analyze disciplinary data by gender, grade, cultural problems, etc.](#);
- [multiply data collections, e.g. entrance as well as exit surveys, and student evaluations of staff](#).
- Prin. Dingley and Asst. Supt. Smith met with the NAACP at their invitation on ways to restore the student artwork, and on a statement to be released to all parents. Other groups were also being contacted and effective remediation being deliberated.
- There were three or four students in the audience but getting student participation a week after school let out was difficult.
- [Mr. Smith volunteered Dr. McLauren as a community SAC member](#).

Ms. Ryan Searle, public attorney and alumna, was asked to come to the forum to speak to her experiences with students brought to Court for normal teenage behavior. She appreciated restorative justice but reported a disconnect between goal and practice, for example, having the SRO present during disciplinary action, resulted in court cases for students who had already apologized, been held accountable, and performed community service. She spoke of time, cost and consequences to families and to the court system. She also found the [Student Handbook vague and hard to navigate](#). She suggested [staff and faculty be held to the same standards as students](#).

- SAC Co-Chair Rufus Peebles, a practicing psychotherapist and non-practicing lawyer, noted four impossible jobs: statesmen, therapist, good parent, and high school principal.
- Ms. Houghton responded that the Student Handbook continued to evolve and that its regulations were by intention materially different from criminal law.

Ms. Jenn Randolph, Wampanoag Tribe domestic violence and sexual assault worker, reported a significant level of sexual harassment at the MVRHS. She was strongly in favor of strict discipline and supported teaching the difference between acceptable and unacceptable behavior as well as the prohibition on cell phones in class since abusers used victim's phones to track and control them. She also reported that children of color were sometimes singled out as troublemakers, accused of cheating, castigated for walking in big groups, etc. She echoed the request to [investigate why a student cut class before imposing discipline](#).

Ms. Emily Hassan – future parent, thanked the SAC, staff and MVRHSC, and pleaded for [more investment in guidance](#). She had been both helped and ignored in the Martha's Vineyard Public Schools (MVPS), and advocated for approaching everyone as a human being, whether student, teacher or administrator, each having to earn respect. She reported the Student Council was looked on as a joke and appealed for [more student engagement in conversations such as these, during the school day](#).

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Mr. Mike McCarthy alumna, MVRHS Guidance Director soon to be community member, expressed his complete agreement with Prin. Dingley's philosophy and support of students. He had never been in such accord with a principal. He supported the classroom ban on cellphones to promote interaction, listening and presence. He felt he could retire because she was Principal.

Ms. Jean Rogers, parent, reported that her children had a very hard year and she had gotten their input on what to say here. She felt the administration needed to listen to teachers and faculty, that teachers were being micromanaged, that administration was obsessed with cellphone use, that bathroom and locker room regulation was excessive, and that students were not being respectfully treated. She suggested [Principal coffees be scheduled in evenings as well as mornings](#).

Ms. Lizzie Williamson, rising MVRHS senior, highly praised Ms. Dingley, who was her Advanced Placement (AP) English teacher. Ms. Dingley had listened attentively to what students had to say. Ms. Williamson spoke to the safer school environment, student participation in safe rides hotlines, the Race/Culture retreat and other activities. She thanked everyone for the opportunity to work together.

Mr. Dan Sharkovitz, retiring MVRHS English Teacher, parent, taxpayer, reviewed his history at the MVRHS from the time he was hired Prin. Greg Scotten. He noted that Prin. Dingley had refused to take credit for some wonderful actions and quoted: love all, serve all.

Ms. Kate Hennigan, MVRHS English Teacher, reported that this quarter Prin. Dingley had gone to all freshmen and sophomore classes to talk with students about cell phone regulations and other issues, and that students were appreciative of that action. 87 members had signed a letter of support for Ms. Dingley.

• Ms. Houghton thanked everyone for their comments and attendance, reviewing a number of important issues: [communication](#), [school resource officer](#), [increased guidance](#), [student involvement](#), [staff accountability](#), and [monitoring program success](#). She asked everyone to carry the constructive respectful, empathic tone into the community and that people contact the Committee or Council members or administration with their feedback before blasting on Islander's Talk.

Adjournment

(Agenda Item #II)

The Public Forum ended about 7:45PM and the MVRHSC and SAC meetings adjourned.

Appendix A - Meetings

- MVRHSC - 5:00PM, Monday, September 11, 2017 - MVRHS LCR
- MVRHSAC - 4:00PM, Tuesday, September 12, 2017 - MVRHS LCR

Appendix C - Documents on File:

- Agenda 6/27/17
- Sign In Sheet 6/27/17
- To the Members of the School Committee...