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District reviews MCAS and school assessment

BY KEITH KENT
COURIER CORRESPONDENT

WINCHENDON — The most recent meeting of the School Committee was a very informative as MMHS Principal Josh Romano explained the current 2016 high school MCAS scores, and district director of pupil services Kristina Mecelicaite updated members on the current assessment with the state.

Romano first provided committee members with an MCAS presentation providing a four year spread representing both

English language arts and math, and a breakdown of each regarding advanced, proficient, needs improvement, and failure.

Explaining there has been a consistent trend over the last four years, 95 percent of students passed with only two failing in the 2016 ELA-MCAS, with number of Advanced in ELA slightly dropping to just two less than the previous year.

Romano emphasized, "As it is such a small pool of people, a small change can have a big

impact on the numbers."

Romano further explained the big areas are advanced, proficient, or total passed, and a total of 96 percent of students had passed.

For math, Romano was pleased to announce more than one-third of students who took the MCAS test placed in the advanced category. A total of four students failed to pass the test. The advanced and proficient portion of students together was up to 61 percent with the total passing at 93 percent.

In the category of MCAS biology, Romano was pleased to say scores were significantly improved, especially in advanced and the proficient areas.

"Our advanced and proficient areas combined went from 53 percent in 2015, to 62 percent in 2016, with the total passed increasing from 87 percent up to 90. Now there is still a big window there to bring these kids from needs improvement up to proficient, and that's where I think we are going to get a lot of

our improvement scores from," explained Romano.

Romano then moved on to the "composite performance index." Romano explained to committee members, "The school receives a score for each student based on their individual MCAS scores. A student who receives a proficient or advance receives a 100. A high needs improvement is worth 75 points, and a low needs improvement is worth 50, a high failing is worth 25 points, and a low failing score

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is worth zero points. The state averages those scores, and that gives you the schools CPI. The maximum score for a school is 100, which would mean 100 percent of students received a proficient on the MCAS test.”

In ELA Romano was please to say, “The CPI score was 93.9, and the target was 75.

With ‘High Needs’ Roman explained the state took all the old sub groups once reported and combined them into one category. It now means any student who is labeled as an English language learner or a student with disabilities in a special education plan, or economically disadvantaged students, such as students with a reduced or free lunch is included in a high needs category. Of the 28 students in the ELA pool, the CPI was 90.2, with the CPI for math coming in at 83.9, with a target of 75. High Needs students were 76.8 representing 50 percent of students who took the test. In biology MCAS, 53 total students took the test, with 24 high needs students representing 45 percent of the testing pool. The CPI was 84.9, with all students combined equaling 82.3 for biology.

There are a total of nine CPI areas that count toward the accountability report. Romano informed members that the school is on target in seven of the nine, above target in one, and improved in below target in one; which was white students in the ELA MCAS.

Student growth percentile is a measure of how a student’s performance has changed from one year they took the MCAS, to the next year they took the MCAS, compared to students across the state who had a similar score the previous time. Romano said, “It is a score of one to 100, and the idea is if your SGP was a 76, you improved more than 76 percent of the students in the state with a similar scoring history.”

Romano then informed the members that students going from grade eight MCAS to grade 10 MCAS,

improved more than 32 percent of students around the state. School Committee Member Lawrence Murphy then informed fellow committee members, “The reason for the SGP is because schools and teachers were not getting credit for the work that they were doing with their failing students” who were behind, with Romano adding, “Yes, that is exactly it.”

Romano also said that while SGP for ELA was average, the SPG for math was very good.

In an extremely positive note, Romano informed members due to holding students accountable, the number of students parents that he needed to call to inform them their children were not on track to graduate went from 22 in 2015, to just two in 2016.

“The message has gotten to the kids, I mean business, and they are going to have to perform if they want to get that diploma, they have to show it has to mean something,” he said. The committee congratulated Romano for the improvements, with Romano giving credit to all the teachers.

The second presentation, was preceded by Mecelicaite being honored by Superintendent Steven Haddad with the Blue Devil Cool award for her dedication and work for the district and its students. Her presentation provided an update to the School Committee on the status of the state assessment.

Thursday, Dec. 1 was the last day of the six professionals, combining for more than two centuries of experience in various fields sent by the state department of education to do site visits in Winchendon. Mecelicaite said, “I believe their expertise was really deep, and that they are very good at doing this work. This entire process was quite positive for all of us.”

Focus groups worked on six different categories of Leadership & Governance, Curriculum and Instruction, Assessment, Human Resources and Professional Development, Student Support, and Financial Management.

Committee members, students, parents, and teacher representatives were interviewed from all the schools, and town management. Mecelicaite also indicated many documents were examined, and all classes at both Toy Town and Memorial schools were visited, along with many middle and high school classes.

She said, “I would really call it a comprehensive review. They were asking questions in a way that we could talk about positive things, and they were not out to get us in any way. With all their accomplishments, I did not feel like I was below them in any way, and they treated us very well in that sense. They were very gracious and thanked us.”

School Committee member Janet Corbosiero said, “They pointed out that every person who they spoke to was friendly, made them feel welcome, and it was lovely to hear they felt good about being here.”

On positive comment Mecelicaite sharing one comment by DESE representatives was, “We know that people have been looking at Winchendon in previous years, but we find a different climate and atmosphere this time around.”

Mecelicaite in closing said, “This was just one great all around team effort.”

Haddad added, “The process started in October. It wasn’t all good, but it was very eye opening. We have really had a chance to look at our district, what we did well, and what we need to do better. As hard as we all had to work, it pays off in great dividends down the road.”

The district assessment report could take between the next two and three months to finish and be sent back to the district.

In other news, the School Committee welcomed new member Felicia Nurmsen to the committee filling the position recently vacated by former and member Greg Vine who left for employment.

There will be a Red Cross blood drive at MMHS on Monday, Dec. 12, from 8 a.m.-1 p.m.. To make an appointment, please email Stephanie Rondeau at srondeau@winchendonk12.org.