

Chair R. Cohen called the meeting to order at 5:35 p.m. in the central office conference room.

Present: A. Bonavita, B. Burbank, C. Mineo, S. Reed, W. Rua, & D. Juzba (arrived at 5:45 p.m.)
S. Lemanski, R. Clickstein, A. LeClair, & Attorney Russell Dupere

Guest: A.J. Christopher, school committee candidate

R. Cohen began the meeting by stating that the workshop was scheduled in order to discuss the new state gender identity law regarding graduation gowns. He then turned the meeting over to Mr. Lemanski, who explained that black gowns were worn by all members of the Class of 2017 at their graduation ceremony last year. He further explained that students and staff had input into the selection of the black gowns with seniors voting overwhelmingly for that color rather than voting for gowns of plain brown, plain orange, or a combination of both colors.

Attorney Dupere noted that the core issue regarding the new state gender identity law is not to offend the sensibility of some students. In addition, the Mass. Department of Elementary and Secondary Education has sent out an advisory advising that the environment of schools should be gender neutral. Consequently, many districts have opted for graduates to wear gowns of one (1) color, which can be worn by both male and female students. However, he noted that some districts have decided to keep two different colors for their graduation gowns. He further pointed out that many districts made their decision regarding the color of graduation gowns without school committee approval. Attorney Dupere said he believes that the school committee should vote on the color of graduation gowns with input from the school administration, students, and Superintendent of Schools.

During discussion, it was the consensus of the Committee that black gowns do not represent the pride of Agawam High School. According to Attorney Dupere, the downside of having two colors is that some students will feel uncomfortable having to choose between a color that is predominately worn by female students and another that is predominately worn by male students.

Next, Mr. Lemanski showed the Committee several samples of graduation gowns that were solely brown, solely orange, or a combination of both colors. A lengthy discussion then took place regarding the sample gowns, as well as other options. Prior to the conclusion of discussion, Attorney Dupere recommended that the Committee select one color of gown (or combination of colors) and make that selection permanent, so the issue of graduation gowns will not have to be addressed each year. He also recommended that the color options be just brown, just orange, or a combination of both colors in keeping with Agawam High School's colors of orange and brown, thereby maintaining tradition.

Prior to adjournment, Chair R. Cohen stated that Mrs. Ferioli will compose a resolution regarding the color of graduation gowns, which she will forward to Attorney Dupere for his input. The resolution will be placed on the November 14, 2017, school committee agenda under New Business. The Committee will then suspend the rules to vote on the resolution that night, as graduation gowns must be ordered no later than mid-November. Sample gowns will be brought to the November 14th meeting so Committee members can make their final selection that night.

There being no further business, on a motion made by W. Rua, 2nd by D. Juzba, the Committee voted to adjourn.

Vote: 7 – 0

Time: 6:16 p.m.

Alexis Ferioli
Executive Secretary to the Superintendent & School Committee

Diane Juzba, Committee Secretary