

LEXINGTON SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEETING

Wednesday, June 15, 2011

**Cary Hall — Auditorium and Ellen Stone Room
1605 Massachusetts Avenue**

Present: Superintendent Paul Ash, School Committee Chair Mary Ann Stewart, School Committee Members Sandro Alessandrini, Bonnie Brodner, Margaret Coppe and Jessie Steigerwald. Student representative Noah Coolidge arrived during the second portion of the meeting. The minutes were taken by Leora Tec.

School Committee attorneys Robert (Bob) Fraser and Colby Brunt, of Stoneman, Chandler & Miller, LLP and Town Counsel Kevin Batt, of Anderson & Kreiger, LLP were in attendance.

The meeting was convened at 6:40 p.m.

I. Call to Order (Cary Hall Auditorium) (Chair Stewart)

(Superintendent Paul Ash was not present for this portion of the meeting. He joined the meeting after the Executive Session).

The Chair reviewed the complaint procedure set out in the Open Meeting Law. She explained that the Executive Session minutes would first be reviewed, followed by the complaints.

II. Review of Executive Session Minutes

Chair Stewart noted that Town Counsel and School Committee Counsel recommended that the School Committee vote to approve and release the minutes from both the Open Sessions and the Executive Sessions.

Motion to approve and release Open Meeting minutes of Tuesday, April 26, 2011
(Steigerwald, Alessandrini). **The motion passed 5-0.**

Motion to approve and release Executive Session minutes of Tuesday, April 26, 2011
(Brodner, Coppe). **The motion passed 5-0.**

Motion to approve and release Open Meeting minutes of Monday, May 16, 2011
(Alessandrini, Steigerwald). **The motion passed 5-0.**

Motion to approve and release the Executive Session minutes of Monday, May 16, 2011
(Steigerwald, Coppe). **The motion passed 5-0.**

Motion to approve and release Open Meeting minutes of Monday, May 25, 2011 (Brodner, Alessandrini). **The motion passed 5-0.**

Motion to approve and release Executive Session minutes of Monday, May 25, 2011 (Coppe, Alessandrini). **The motion passed 5-0.**

Motion to approve and release Open Meeting minutes from Wednesday, June 1, 2011 (Coppe, Alessandrini). **The motion passed 4-0-1** (Steigerwald). **Ms. Steigerwald clarified that the reason for her abstention was her absence from that portion of the meeting.**

Jessie Steigerwald offered an amendment to the Executive Session minutes of Wednesday, June 1, 2011: Replace “to extend” with “to offer to extend.”

Motion to approve and release Executive Session minutes of Wednesday, June 1, 2011 as amended (Alessandrini, Brodner). **The motion passed 5-0.**

III. Open Meeting Law Complaints

Chair Stewart explained that Counsel recommends that the School Committee go into Executive Session to discuss the two Open Meeting Law complaints. The Chair has determined that with respect to litigation an open session may have a detrimental impact upon the School Committee’s defense of its actions.

Motion to go into executive session for purposes of discussing the Open Meeting Law complaints and to discuss strategy with respect to administrative litigation to return to an open session after discussion (Coppe, Alessandrini). **Alessandrini-aye, Brodner-aye, Coppe-aye, Steigerwald-aye and Stewart-aye.**

IV. Executive Session (Ellen Stone Room)

V. Return to Open Session and Welcome (Chair Stewart, Cary Hall Auditorium)

The meeting was reconvened at 8:07 p.m.

Chair Stewart explained that in Executive Session the School Committee began to craft an appropriate response to the two Open Meeting Law complaints filed by Mr. Eric Eid-Reiner and Ms. Dawn McKenna. The Committee has also begun to identify ways to improve with respect to minutes, agenda and other allegations contained in the Open Meeting Law Complaints. The Chair outlined the structure of the rest of the meeting. She explained the nature of a School Committee meeting including the roles of both the Superintendent and the School Committee. She explained that there will be no public comment during the main portion of the meeting tonight as the agenda is very full.

VI. Public Comment

Pam Hoffman (Rangeway), a long time Lexington resident and past Estabrook PTA President, former Estabrook Site Council member, and former Town of Lexington Appropriation

Committee member, thanked members of the School Committee and LPS staff for their dedication and tireless efforts to make the Lexington Public Schools the best system possible.

Michaela Shtilman-Minkin (LHS class of 2011) stated that she helped 2011 LHS classmate Amy Patterson in completing a survey regarding teacher morale at the high school.

The Chair interrupted to clarify that this is not an appropriate topic for Public Comment, as it is an agenda item coming up shortly.

Jessie Steigerwald requested that the Chair permit Ms. Shtilman-Minkin to speak now as it was stated there would be no time for public comments later in meeting.

The Chair asked if a majority of Committee members also wished to hear from the speaker; a majority indicated that they did.

Ms. Shtilman-Minkin read a statement about the results of the recent student survey of high school teachers. She acknowledged that the survey is not scientific and they received a response rate of 70%. They included all comments with the survey and explained the methodology behind the survey.

Ilene Benghiat (Sunny Knoll Avenue) expressed concern about teachers not having a voice and the fact that they may be afraid to speak out for fear of retribution. She suggested an ombudsman may be a good solution.

The Chair thanked the speakers and announced the end of Public Comment.

Jessie Steigerwald objected to closing Public Comment, seeing citizens still waiting to speak.

Margaret Coppe suggested that perhaps people already standing at the microphone could speak before closing Public Comment.

The Chair explained that the Committee had heard from the public through emails, letters and nearly two hours of public comment the week before. She stated this is an opportunity for the Committee to discuss the issue.

Margaret Coppe asked that the Committee agree to take the statements from the five people at the microphone and requested that each of those people take only two minutes each.

The Chair asked for a majority of the Committee to also agree to extend Public Comment. A majority indicated that they agreed.

Sandro Alessandrini agreed to allow these five people to speak and called for civility.

Bonnie Brodner also agreed, requesting the audience not react to speakers so there would be more time to hear people.

Stephanie (Last name?), an LHS student, read some results from the student survey. She said students asked many non-teachers for comments and almost all decided not to comment; the speaker read several comments made by one non-teacher respondent .

Deborah Zilberman (Parker Street) called for building trust between all parties and stated the importance of each party being able to openly share their concerns without fear of retribution. She suggested an outside facilitator be hired to better foster an atmosphere of trust.

Susan Kenyon (Parker Street) expressed faith in ways to improve the situation and she thanked the Committee for their tireless work. She also thanked the students who conducted the survey. Ms Kenyon called for civil and respectful discourse and an independent committee to introduce a new model of relationship building.

Olga Gutttag (Former School Committee member, Emerson Road) talked about providing adequate public notice of important issues and asked the School Committee to establish clear procedure in this regard.

Dawn McKenna (Hancock Street) identified herself as one of the complainants who filed an Open Meeting Law violation with the Attorney General's Office. She appreciates the work of the Committee and expressed concern related to process, especially regarding the extension of Dr. Ash's contract.

VII. Superintendent's Announcements

1. Cary Memorial Library Summer Reading Program — "One World, Many Stories." Dr. Ash shared part of a letter from Ruth Nadelman Lynn about the summer reading program at Cary Memorial Library.
2. Lexington Education Foundation Program Grants. Dr Ash thanked the LEF for grants totaling \$280,233. A list has been made available to the public and the School Committee.

VIII. Members' Reports / Members' Concerns

Margaret Coppe: The School Committee thanks Leora Tec who has been our secretary for 5.5 years.

Sandro Alessandrini: I have had good feedback about cutting the elementary music fee in half and about acquiring Elmos.

Bonnie Brodner: The Lexington Human Right's Committee is holding an event on Sunday, November 6th, 2011 at 2:00 p.m. at Cary Hall about the 1960s and 1970s in Lexington. They are looking for people who have material from this era that has to do with Lexington. Please contact the Lexington Historical Society if you have such materials.

Jessie Steigerwald: Congratulations to Noah Coolidge, the School Committee student representative who won a book award. Thanks to everyone who has participated and who has reached out to us. A lot of teachers are here tonight. Thank you for constantly being present. Thanks to the parents who make an effort to thank the teachers. She noted Harvy Simkovits' suggestion for a bi-monthly meeting where schools could be discussed and said that is what

School Committee is. She also noted it is very difficult to give weight to the two anonymous notes School Committee received and stated it is better to come out and to speak.

IX. Agenda

1. Follow-Up Discussion on School Climate Survey, Including Morale.

The Chair noted that the School Committee had received numerous communications regarding this issue and this is the first opportunity the Committee has had to discuss it. As it is difficult to measure the scope of this issue, she is interested in hearing feedback from her colleagues and from Dr. Ash.

Dr. Ash thanked speakers for their comments and for coming out to the meeting. He reiterated that one of his core beliefs is caring and respectful relationships. Healthy organizations can have conflict and the environment created for the adults also affects the students. Dr. Ash then read prepared remarks regarding the issues of morale that have come up and addressed four areas for collaboration with the LEA.

Phyllis Neufeld (LEA President) read a statement supported by the LEA Executive Board. She said the LEA looks forward to collaborating with Dr. Ash on this important work. The issue of morale has received a lot of attention; LEA educators, School Committee members, and school administrators must work together to determine how widespread these issues are and to formulate a plan to address concerns in a safe environment. She stated the LEA looks forward to the next steps in this collaboration.

The Committee discussed the morale issue.

Bonnie Brodner: I am happy about the collaboration. Thank you to Dr. Ash and to Phyllis Neufeld.

Jessie Steigerwald asked Dr. Ash about a timeframe for the steps he outlined. She would like to know what resources exist, including outside resources for this in the budget. She feels there is a disconnect between the results of the evaluation and the opinions that have recently been expressed. She wants to ensure the Committee does a good job when evaluating Dr. Ash.

Sandro Alessandrini: Who is more independent than the union representative for teachers? Having Phyllis Neufeld involved is key. We have a great opportunity to be innovative here. Teachers have people work and administrative work. We can be innovative to help teachers with their administrative work so they can be more creative in their teaching. I hope we discuss morale and how to best educate the students. We have an opportunity to go forward and ask how to provide the best environment for the teachers to teach more creatively as their work load increases.

Margaret Coppe: The state mandated teacher evaluations will begin in 2013. I want to second that we need to put our trust in someone and Phyllis is a good place to start. The issue of trust is so important right now. Going outside the community to get a neutral person to facilitate might be a wise move. I lean towards that.

Jessie Steigerwald: We are trying to re-establish trust between teachers and the administration but also between the community and School Committee. I feel strongly that someone independent should look at the student survey and the TeLLs Survey. There is a complex relationship between the union president and the Superintendent. Regarding the culture of fear: it's not just teachers who are afraid, parents are also afraid. It's complicated.

Sandro Alessandrini: If there is an impasse then we should have an outside person come in. The School Committee does listen to people.

Jessie Steigerwald: We need to re-establish trust with the community. I'd like to know what Margaret thinks as someone who has been a member of the teachers' union.

Margaret Coppe: A good start is what Dr. Ash has produced here. We need to have measurable goals. Disagreement can result in things getting better.

Jessie Steigerwald: Schools are different than when we went to school and are evolving. This is an ongoing conversation. We need to put together a panel on standardization to educate the community. The Cambridge School Committee has a round table a couple of times a year. Preserving creativity in a time of standardization would be a possible round table topic. The conversation with parents should continue in a more informal setting. I agree with Margaret that we also need to figure out something around measurement.

Bonnie Brodner: Regular public hearings would be a good idea. Could we ask for a report in our first meeting in the fall?

Chair Stewart: I think we are hearing broad support for a structure to be determined with the Superintendent and the LEA president. We are very interested in being collaborative. We care about education and want to bring that into our own community.

2. New LPS Website. Presented by Thomas Plati, Director of Education Technology and Assessment. Mr. Plati thanked LEF for the technology grants that they have provided to LPS. An outside group called School Wires has been contracted to do the website. Web content coordinators for each school have been appointed. The new site will be visually pleasing and there will be online options for translation to many different languages. The new website is expected to go live in September. Mr. Plati requested feedback on what content should be included in the School Committee section of the website.

There were questions and comments from the Committee and from the audience.

3. K-5 Pro-Social Skills Program. Introduced by Dr. Ash. Bridge Principal Meg Colella and Estabrook Principal Sandra Trach explained the adoption of *Responsive Classroom* which will work in tandem with *Open Circle*.

There were questions and comments from the Committee and the audience.

4. New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC) Two-Year Progress Report for Lexington High School. Presented by LHS Principal Natalie Cohen. Ms. Cohen gave the background of the NEASC study in Lexington. Communicating expectations for students was one area that needed to be improved. Ms. Cohen wrote a report and submitted it in

January of this year and stated that LHS has been reaccredited. She noted improved collaboration at the high school and the need for continued professional development support for teachers and that teachers need more time to work together.

There were comments and questions from the Committee.

Dr. Ash emphasized that the NEASC report was extremely complimentary.

5. Superintendent's End-of-Year Report. Presented by Dr. Ash. He stated this is an interim report, as these goals were established as 18-month goals in order for the goals and the budget to be proposed in sync in the future (January 2012). He stated that the faculty and the administration made significant progress on all of the School Committee's system goals.

Dr. Ash stated that for the fourth year in a row LHS has had the highest mean SAT scores in the state. LPS has been cited by Education Week and the National Staff Development Council as having a national model for professional development (PD). He thanked Carol Pilarski and Joanne Hennessy for their work on PD. Town Meeting approved the scope for the Bridge and Bowman renovation project (this was not one of our goals), we dealt with the PCB problem at Estabrook through collaboration among the community, the staff at Estabrook, the School Committee, the administration and outside experts. Every room at Estabrook is now below EPA guidelines. The MSBA has approved our plan to build a new Estabrook School. METCO Director Barbara Nobles has done a lot to improve academics and improve communication with Boston families. The DMC report looked at SPED services and next year we will have three committees to look at specific areas.

Dr. Ash then went through the goals set out by the School Committee. Almost all goals were attained including those around: curriculum review, professional development, websites and social and emotional competency. The only goal that was not met was the safety goal due to the fact that the company working with LPS to provide materials went bankrupt; he stated that this goal is expected to be completed by January 2012. Dr. Ash thanked the Central Office team, the principals and many others in the system who made attaining these goals possible.

There were comments and questions from the Committee and from the audience.

6. Vote to delegate full authority and responsibility to the Town Manager to agree to terms and conditions, as he deems fit, and to award and execute all contracts involving the feasibility study, design and construction of the new Estabrook School. Dr. Ash stated that this is formality; someone must be delegated to act in this capacity.

Motion to delegate full authority and responsibility to the Town Manager to agree to terms and conditions, as he deems fit, and to award and execute all contracts involving the feasibility study, design and construction of the new Estabrook School (Brodner, Alessandrini). The motion passed 5-0.

(Note: Item #s 7, 8 and 9 were taken up after item #1.)

Before discussing the field trips, Director of Student Services **Linda Chase** discussed children with medical needs attending field trips out of state or out of the country. She noted that these are considered on a case-by-case basis.

7. Vote to Approve Jonas Clarke Middle School Field Trip to LaGuácima de Alajuela, Costa Rica, March 8 through March 17, 2012.

There were comments and questions from the Committee on issues including: getting homework done and missing school.

Motion to approve Jonas Clarke Middle School Field Trip to LaGuácima de Alajuela, Costa Rica, March 8 through March 17, 2012 (Coppe, Brodner). The motion passed 5-0.

8. Vote to Approve Lexington High School Field Trip to Stockholm, Sweden; Helsinki, Finland and Tartu and Tallinn, Estonia, April 12 through April 22, 2012.

There were comments and questions from the Committee on issues including: cost and ratio of students to chaperones.

Motion to approve Lexington High School Choral Field Trip to Stockholm, Sweden; Helsinki, Finland and Tartu and Tallinn, Estonia, April 12 through April 22, 2012 (Coppe, Alessandrini). The motion passed 4-1 (Steigerwald).

9. Vote to Approve Lexington High School Science Team Trip to New Brunswick, Canada, July 24 through July 29, 2011.

Motion to approve Lexington High School Science Team Trip to New Brunswick, Canada, July 24 through July 29, 2011 (Steigerwald, Brodner). The motion passed 5-0.

10. Animals in Schools Policy – Second Reading. Presented by Margaret Coppe, Chair of the Policy Sub-Committee. Ms. Coppe noted that there are two town regulations governing animals in schools: the first is a Parks and Recreation policy that does not allow dogs or horses on school grounds and the second is a Board of Health requirement for a permit to hatch and maintain more than five chickens. The school nurses are opposed to live animals in schools in general.

There were questions and comments from the Committee.

Motion to dispense with the third reading of the animals in schools policy (Steigerwald, Alessandrini). The motion passed 5-0.

Motion to adopt the Animals in Schools Policy (Steigerwald, Brodner). The motion passed 5-0.

11. Vote to Accept a \$250 Donation to the Nick Barnett Science Olympiad Team.

Motion to accept a \$250 donation to the Nick Barnett Science Olympiad Team (Steigerwald, Alessandrini). The motion passed 5-0.

12. Vote to Accept a \$5,000 Donation to Lexington Children's Place.

Motion to accept a \$5,000 donation to Lexington Children's Place (Coppe, Brodner. **The motion passed 5-0.**

13. Vote to Accept a \$282 Donation to Lexington Children's Place from the LEXFUN Consignment Sale.

Motion to accept a \$282 donation to Lexington Children's Place from the LEXFUN Consignment Sale (Brodner, Alessandrini). **The motion passed 5-0.**

14. Vote to Approve School Committee Minutes of May 31, 2011.

Motion to approve School Committee Minutes of May 31, 2011 (Steigerwald, Brodner). **The motion passed 5-0.**

15. Vote to Approve School Committee Minutes of June 7, 2011.

Motion to approve School Committee Minutes of June 7, 2011 (Alessandrini, Steigerwald). **The motion passed 5-0.**

Ms. Steigerwald brought up the fact that minutes that were previously approved by consensus must be voted on with a motion.

Motion to approve the minutes from January 25, 2011, February 15, 2011 and March 1, 2011 (Coppe, Alessandrini). **The motion passed 4-0-1** (Brodner).

Motion to approve the minutes from March 15, 2011, March 21, 2011, March 23, 2011, March 30, 2011 and April 4, 2011 (Steigerwald, Brodner). **The motion passed 5-0.**

X. Motion to adjourn (Alessandrini, Coppe). **The motion passed 5-0.**

Documents: *Meeting agenda; letter from Ruth Nadelman Lynn, Children's Services Department Head, Cary Memorial Library, to Superintendent Paul Ash, re: "One World, Many Stories @ Cary Library"; program grants 2011-2012; Lexington Public School Web Site Update; memo from the elementary school principals, to Dr. Ash and the School Committee, re: "Transition from the Open Circle Program to the Responsive Classroom Program; letter from NEASC Commission on Public Secondary Schools to LHS Principal Natalie Cohen re: LHS accreditation; memo from Superintendent Paul Ash, to the School Committee, re: Interim Report on System Goals (July 1, 2010 through January 1, 2012) and supporting documentation; Documents related to Jonas Clarke Middle School Homestay in Costa Rica; Documents related to Lexington High School Choirs Concert Tour of Europe to Stockholm, Sweden; Helsinki, Finland; and Tartu and Tallinn, Estonia; Lexington Public Schools Field Trip Request Form for the Lexington High School Science Team Trip to New Brunswick, Canada; Animals in Schools Policy, Second Reading; letter from Daniel Mehr, class of 2003, to Superintendent Paul Ash, re: \$250 contribution to the Lexington High School Science Olympiad Team; memo from Liz Billings-Fouhy, Supervisor of Early Childhood Education to School*
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Committee Members, re: \$5,000 anonymous grant from an LCP family and letter from the family to Ms. Billings-Fouhy; memo from Liz Billings-Fouhy, Supervisor of Early Childhood Education to School Committee Members re: donation of \$282 from LEXFUN to LCP; Lexington School Committee minutes of May 31, 2011; Lexington School Committee minutes of June 7, 2011; letter from Lexington residents Britta McCarthy, Tom Sidely and Donna Heuchling, to Superintendent Paul Ash, The School Committee and the Administration, re: complaints about the school administration; "Save the Date" card from the Town of Lexington Human Relations Committee and Lexington Historical Society; statement of Dr. Ash concerning School Climate and the plan to gather more information.

Voted released – June 24, 2011