

LEXINGTON SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEETING

Thursday, September 20, 2012

Jonas Clarke Middle School, Auditorium

17 Stedman Road

Present: Dr. Paul Ash, Superintendent, Margaret Coppe, School Committee Chair; Alessandro Alessandrini, Vice Chair; Members: Mary Ann Stewart, Bonnie Brodner and Jessie Steigerwald; and Sam Alpert, Student Representative

The Minutes were taken by Jean Curran, Recording Secretary

The Meeting convened at 7:00 p.m.

I. Call to Order and Welcome:

The Chair called the meeting to order and informed everyone that the meeting this evening was not live but would be available on demand. She then stated the reason for tonight's meeting and invited public comment.

There were no public comments.

II. Superintendent's Announcements:

Dr. Ash was pleased to report that Boston Magazine came out with Boston's Best Schools 2012 and Lexington was ranked Number 2 out of 348 schools. Lexington students did extremely well in MCAS this year and in a few months a comprehensive report will be coming out. He was also proud to announce that Lexington High School 10th graders scored first in English Language Arts, and scored high in Mathematics and Science. The SAT scores were the highest in the state based on the median score which takes into account all students. He congratulated everyone for all their hard work in getting the students to these high levels.

III. Members' Reports / Members' Concerns:

Mary Ann Stewart announced that the flu clinics would begin in Cary Hall on October 10th for seniors and October 27th for families and again on November 7th.

Margaret Coppe reported as Liaison to the Lexington Education Foundation that this year's Trivia Bee is scheduled for November 14th. She stated last year the Committee entered a team of High School students to compete on their behalf and inquired of Sam Alpert if he would be willing to recruit three students for the team.

Sam Alpert stated that it sounds wonderful and he would be happy to recruit.

IV. Agenda:

1. Discussion of Special Education

Margaret Coppe announced that tonight's meeting time was moved due to curriculum night at some schools in order for parents to be able to attend this evening's meeting. She apologized to those who could not make tonight's meeting, but appreciates everyone

working with the Committee. She then announced that they will have an update and discussion from staff members. Before turning the meeting over to Linda Chase, Director of Student Services and Laura Dudley, Coordinator BCBA Student Services (SPED) for their presentations to the Committee she read a prepared statement on behalf of the Committee. Jessie Steigerwald stated that she was not participating in the statement.

After the prepared statement was read, members of the Committee began with inquiries to Dr. Ash, Linda Chase and Laura Dudley regarding (i) clarifying the difference between time out rooms versus seclusion rooms and the reasons for such procedures and whether they still exist; (ii) Estabrook EBP (CARE) Program; (iii) how and when the district decides to send children out of district; (iv) the New York Times OpEd article and the subsequent follow-up article which noted a number of inaccuracies to the first article; (v) DCF and the filing of 51A Reports; (vi) DCF investigations and what they entail and what is happening now regarding the third reported case; (vii) Dr. Ash's decision not to file a 51A Report originally; (viii) whether or not legal advice was given on this matter and who was the attorney for the Committee; and (ix) SPED Advisory meeting that took place this morning.

Dr. Ash then invited Linda Chase and Laura Dudley to come forward and present an overview of the programs and practices to support students with emotional needs. Linda Chase talked about the range of needs which could cause children to exhibit challenging behaviors and how the district responds to their needs. She spoke about how (i) some students may have disabilities but their needs are such that they are not eligible for special need services, (ii) students who have behaviors that are chronic in nature and how they look at those students to determine if they need special education or other types of protocol supports to meet their needs, (iii) students who have disabilities but don't require special services but need some sort of accommodation and may exhibit challenging behavior, (iv) students who display inappropriate or disruptive behaviors and need classroom management, and (v) students whose needs go beyond that and how their needs require behavioral specialists.

Linda further noted that the district employs behavioral specialists, a consulting psychiatrist from Massachusetts General Hospital, and consulting psychologists. She spoke about the various programs offered throughout the district in all nine schools and how a small number of children are unable to be educated in district and are sent to out-of-district placement. The process through which a student is determined to need out-of-district services was reviewed.

Laura Dudley, ADA Coordinator who oversees behavior protocol addressed the Committee regarding Applied Behavior Analysts (ABA) and how they look at behavior instruction, the analysis drivers and the district protocols. ABAs are requested by teachers to go into classrooms and observe student and teacher behavior, collect data and create behavior plans. She went on to explain how the behavior plan is crafted, implemented and monitored. There are four full-time and one part-time Board Certified Behavior Analysts. She then explained the Crisis Prevention & Intervention (CPI) Training Curriculum which provides school based mental health professionals and other

educators with training on how to best fill crisis team member roles and responsibilities as they relate to the four stages of crisis management (a) preparedness, (b) prevention, (c) response, and (d) recovery. Teams meet with parents regarding their child's behavioral plan and have regular meetings regarding the IEP or Behavior Plan for their child.

Time-out rooms are multipurpose rooms or spaces within classrooms. The purpose is to give the child a quiet space to go to calm down and these timeouts might be part of a behavioral plan. Students themselves are able to ask to take a break throughout the day when they are feeling stressed, noting that they are always with a staff person either in the room or standing outside the room. The district follows DCF Guidelines.

There were questions and comments from the Committee regarding who assists a student in need of a timeout, at what point does the district decide upon removal of a child from school, how parents are notified, legal guidelines, CPI training and whether or not it is voluntary, are the programs funded properly, Massachusetts General Laws and seclusion rooms and whether LPS uses seclusion rooms, behavior plans, communication plans, what recourses are there for parents who feel their students are not responding to these plans, how often are plans assessed and how are they assessed; sufficient staffing numbers and is there a need to increase the budget.

Carol Pilarski, Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum, Instruction and Professional Development shared with the Committee that she has met with Len Swanton, K-12 PD Coordinator Curriculum, Instruction and Professional Development and they have decided to send out a survey to respond to these questions. Most of the questions delivered relate to curriculum and instructional strategies and pro-social skills.

Dr Ash addressed the Committee regarding the number of 51A requests he receives.

Margaret Coppe invited public comment:

Holly Boker, Treasurer SEPAC had a question regarding classroom techniques used by general educators before situations escalate. Laura Dudley responded that classroom teachers have a wide and varied range of strategies that are used.

Barbara Visovatti stated SPED staff is talented in speaking to ideal circumstances; however her experience is that those ideals do not actually occur. She referred to email exchanges between the k-8 supervisor and team leader about having a pre meeting without having the parents in attendance. She appreciates all of the descriptions of ideal circumstances but unless applied expertly, does not result in the implementation of expected behavior plans. Other families would say the same thing.

Dawn McKenna, 9 Hancock Street and Precinct 6 Town Meeting Member spoke to fiscal transparency and how she would like to see an independent investigation into the school department policies and leadership. She was also unhappy that the Committee scheduled a meeting when they knew four schools were having events this evening. Also, questioned whether the SEPAC meeting had been posted and whether or not the Statement read tonight was voted upon and then she asked if it were possible that all emails could be made public regarding the statement.

Margaret Coppe responded to Ms. McKenna's comments regarding the SEPAC meeting noting that it was posted and that she could have attended the meeting. She then stated that the statement read tonight was drafted by members of the Committee and sent to legal counsel for review and then distributed to the Committee members for their agreement to the statement. There was no formal vote taken by the Committee.

Jessie Steigerwald commented that she had concerns regarding the statement and had wanted to have a conversation before the statement was read. She then stated that if the Chair did not believe an investigation was necessary then perhaps SEPAC could hire outside investigation team.

Dr. Ash noted that one of the things that came out publicly at this morning's SEPAC meeting was the idea of a survey and he thought that was a good idea. He is interested in what parents have to say and noted that the administration is not perfect but they continue to strive to improve. He also stated that Committee speaking with legal is a good thing and he is comfortable with that.

Jennifer Yaar, SEPAC Co-Chair spoke to the survey idea and felt that at this time it needs to be formalized and they are looking to partner with the Committee regarding parental concerns and actions so that a vote could be taken in the future.

Wendy Ernst, 1 Cooke Road, stated that her son was restrained 10 years ago. She feels that there is a lot more training and protection going on from when her son was in the school system and wants to see more checks and balances in the system.

Bronte Abraham, 5 Colony Road, shared her thoughts regarding all the press on this issue and when budget issues arise, feels that SPED parents should be made aware of this issue.

Alessandro Alessandrini commented that more communication is needed and as we begin further discussions we all need to be careful not to alienate the staff and work together as a community to resolve these issues.

Bonnie Brodner stated that these discussions are just a beginning and a tool for all teachers and we need to find a balance.

Mary Ann Stewart noted that the Committee is speaking with one voice and they are interested in partnering with members of the community and working with Dr. Ash on continuous staff improvement.

Motion to Adjourn (Stewart, Steigerwald) **Motion was Approved** (5-0)

The Meeting Adjourned at 10:20 pm

Documents: Meeting Agenda; School Committee Statement regarding NY Times Op-Ed Article; LPS Problem Solving Contact Protocol; LPS Topics for Mandatory Training September 2012; and LPS Acronym List

Voted by the School Committee November 13, 2012