

MEMORANDUM

To: Members of the School Committee
From: Kenneth Hoffman KH
Date: October 24, 1975
Subject: Progress report of the Educational Program Study Committee

This brief report on the activities of the (citizens) Educational Program Study Committee is designed to do three things:

- I Inform the School Committee of the organization of our activities and the timetable for their completion.
- II Apprise the School Committee of the status of our major activities
- III Transmit to the School Committee data which we have gathered in the course of our work which bear directly on matters currently under discussion within the School Committee.

We hope that the nature and organization of our activities and the data we transmit reflect accurately the original charge to our committee:

"The first charge to this committee will be to define the educational program now offered in the Lexington Public Schools, and to describe its strengths and weaknesses or problems. The committee shall define an educational program which best represents community priorities (at the elementary level first). This study will provide an opportunity for parents, teachers, and other representative citizens of the town to express their concerns and add another dimension to the information being solicited by the Committee before a decision is reached relative to the School Building Survey."

and that they also reflect two amendments to our charge which were transmitted orally to us by the School Committee at our meeting last April:

To keep in contact with the School Committee as our work progresses.

To not limit our work to issues raised in discussions of school closings, even though we are expected to make an input to those discussions prior to the first decision by the School Committee.

I

Organization and Timetable

The task given to the Educational Program Study Committee is a sizable one. Completion of the task with any degree of thoroughness would appear to require another year's work, perhaps more. In saying this, it is important to be clear about two things: (i) We intend to submit by January 1976 an interim report, which will deal primarily with the educational programs in the elementary schools. One component of this report will be framed so as to form part of the basis for the School Committee's first decisions on school closings. It will speak to the educational costs/advantages of closing/not closing schools; (ii) If our work is to carry on for another year or longer, some rotation or augmentation of our membership may become necessary.* This is not an issue now. It is something which we might discuss with the School Committee after our January report has been submitted and discussed.

At present, our activities remain divided into the four areas which we have identified for the School Committee in previous progress reports:

- Surveys (questionnaires)
- Interviews
- Pupil Performance Data
- Educational Programs (curricula)

We work through subgroups of our committee whose interests and expertise match with these areas, and we coordinate and review the activities of the subgroups in the main committee. The outputs from these four activities which bear on elementary school programs will be pulled together

* Anticipation of such an eventuality does not reflect any waning of interest on the part of our committee members. It simply reflects a practical fact: in spite of the generous help we have received (and will receive) from School Administration staff and citizen volunteers, the man-hours of work invested by our ten committee members already number in the thousands.

and placed in a proper context for next January's interim report. Two obvious things should be said, to keep these brief descriptions in perspective. There is considerable overlap in the issues addressed by the four subgroups and in the memberships of the subgroups. Even though our first report will deal primarily with elementary school programs, it is neither sensible nor feasible to restrict our current activities entirely to that educational level.

II

Status of Major Activities

A. Surveys.

Last spring, a survey employing three different questionnaires was distributed to elementary school students, junior and senior high school students, teachers and administrators at all levels. (Copies of the three questionnaires were given to School Committee members.) The answers to multiple choice questions were tabulated on the computer at the High School. The answers to open-ended questions are being recorded, grouped and summarized by members of our committee. This has proved to be an extremely time-consuming task, given that some 15,000 open-ended answers are involved. But, it has also proved to be quite informative with regard to what pupils and teachers are concerned about. This work is not yet finished, but we felt that the School Committee might get a clearer picture of one of our activities by seeing some of the summaries which have been completed. Thus, the first enclosure with this report contains:

- A summary of the 1800 elementary school student responses
- A summary of the 690 junior high school student responses
- A compendium of the junior high student responses to open-ended questions.

These summaries are also being shared with the central office staff and with the relevant principals.

Work has begun on a Citizens' Survey, which will attempt to determine citizen attitudes on various aspects of educational programs and to play a part in helping us to identify citizens' priorities in education. We have invited the School Committee to meet with us on October 30 to

obtain their inputs to the questions to be put to citizens. We shall solicit the inputs of various other groups as well.

B. Interviews.

During the last part of October and the first part of November, five two-person teams will conduct a series of interviews with the principals, teachers, students and parents in the eleven elementary schools. Each team will be assigned two schools, (in one case three, obviously) and will spend a day in each school plus an evening with each parent group. Many aspects of the educational program will be discussed. The teams will attempt to develop a "picture" of each school, encompassing a feeling for the atmosphere of the school, the special characteristics of the educational programs, etc. As a preliminary to these interviews, those principals who are directors of major program areas for the school system have been interviewed to obtain accurate pictures of the town-wide frameworks for the elementary school programs for which they are responsible.

C. Pupil Performance Data.

Our subgroup on performance data has had a number of discussions with Dr. Monderer, to learn what performance and intelligence tests have been (or will be) used in the schools, what data are kept on each student, how these data are used to place students, and what analyses of these data are carried out regularly by Pupil Personnel Services. We have also discussed with him several additional questions which are on our minds, and he has provided us with the substantial amount of data needed to obtain answers to these questions. Basic skills have been our primary (but not exclusive) concern in this area. We are carrying out statistical analyses aimed at answering at least these three questions:

1. Is the average level of achievement (in basic skills) of children in the Lexington Public Schools going up, going down, or holding steady? Why?
2. Are there significant IQ-corrected differences between the achievements of children in the various Lexington elementary schools?
3. How well is our school system doing, as measured by pupil progress in various basic skill areas?

All of this work is being carried out with full cognizance of the sensitivity of some of the information and the limitations of standardized testing.

D. Educational Programs.

Here, what is intended by the term "educational programs" is primarily what used to be called (and maybe still is called) curriculum. We have not yet identified a subgroup in this area, because it is the concern of all of us. But, we shall do so shortly as the workload of interviewing, questionnairing and data-analyzing increases. The launching platform for the subgroup in this area will be teacher/pupil/principal responses on the strengths and weaknesses of various programs -- both through surveys and through interviews -- plus the interviews we have had with program directors and further ones to come with directors and specialists. This will be augmented by some of the analyses of performance data just after launch. And in the long mid-flight will come a substantial intellectual task: reading, talking, questioning, thinking.

Our goal is to carry out our charge rather precisely: to define what the programs are (at least the "major" ones) and to describe their strengths and weaknesses as perceived by various groups.

III

Data Inputs to Pending School Committee Decisions

We have two inputs to make at this time. Each is brief. But we believe each is informative, and hope the School Committee will agree.

A. The second enclosure with this report is a two-page summary of the responses which 450 members of the professional staff gave to the questions on last spring's survey which dealt with physical facilities and school size -- the impact of physical characteristics on education as perceived by the staff. Also included is a separate summary for elementary school teachers, cross-tabulating the responses with the sizes of the schools in which the teachers are currently employed. We expect to have much more to say on this subject in our interim report next January, but felt that the School Committee would appreciate seeing now a concise summary of the attitudes of the professional staff toward some of the issues raised by the School Facilities Study and the impending decision on school closings.

B. We would like to transmit to the School Committee the information from last spring's survey which bears on current discussion of the management of the school system. Although management per se does not fall within the scope of our charge, the effects of management upon the educational programs in the school system certainly do. Thus, we have read with interest the management study conducted for the School Committee by staff members of Arthur D. Little, Inc., as well as the response drafted by members of the central office staff. One thing which caught our eye in reading the ADL study was an apparently large gap between the ADL team's assessment of present teacher morale and the picture of morale which comes through in our survey. There also appears to be some discrepancy between their assessment of teacher attitudes about administration and ours. Since the ADL team seems to have coupled in a cause-and-effect way some conclusions about central administration and present teacher morale, we felt that the School Committee would want to be made aware at this time of our picture of morale as well as staff responses to questions about "management".

It is important to say that our review of the impact of teacher / administration relations on educational programs is far from over. In particular, we have no opinions to voice at this time about the strengths and weaknesses of "management". But our survey of teacher attitudes concerning administrative support, School Committee support, staff morale, teacher/administration relations and teacher/School Committee relations does tell us a considerable amount about what teachers' perceptions are. Furthermore, we feel that the opportunity to read in their own words 400 teachers' answers to three open-ended questions -

What are the strengths of the Lexington Public Schools?

What are the weaknesses of the Lexington Public Schools?

Is there anything else you would like to say?

gave us further insight into what is on teachers' minds and what the state of teacher morale is.

The briefest possible summary as to what we see from our survey would be this. Attitudes of the teaching staff toward administration and administrative support are basically positive (the principal exception stemming from a range of problems at the high school). Morale is generally high. The only potentially serious morale problem reflected in staff responses is a deep concern about the posture of the School Committee and an expressed feeling that the School Committee is not at present supportive of the staff.

* Morale and relationships among faculty/administration/parents/School Committee. More than half the staff feels relationships

and attitudes in their school foster the educational process (54%-75%), except those between School Committee and staff, where 56% feel it hinders.

	<u>Hinders</u>	<u>Fosters</u>
Student attitudes and expectations	27%	57%
Teacher/teacher relationships	9%	75%
Teacher/administrator	14%	61%
Teacher/parent	12%	59%
Parental involvement	9%	54%
School Committee/staff relationships	56%	13%
Staff morale	18%	68%

- * Support services throughout the school system were rated by staff. Of the two dealing specifically with morale and relationships, staff rated:

administrative support satisfactory/excellent 51%
in need of improvement 40%

(areas in need of improvement most often mentioned were departmental administration at the high school and the regrettably heavy, varied duties administrators are expected to carry which limit visits and personal interaction between central office staff and individual schools, restricts communication between specialists and administrators, and weakens curriculum coordination across the system. The lack of an assistant superintendent for elementary schools and a full-time reading coordinator were specifically noted.)

School Committee support satisfactory 10%
in need of improvement 78%

(the only other support service voted in need of improvement was in-service teacher training, by 48%. 38% felt it satisfactory, and 11% had no opinion.)

- * On the open-ended question asking staff to list the strengths of the educational program in their school, 15% specifically cited administrative support (leadership, encouragement, good relations, respect for professional competence) and 30% cited staff morale. These compare, for example, with 21% who cited specific academic programs and 41% who cited "teachers" as a strength.
- * On the similar question about weaknesses of the educational program, staff morale was barely mentioned. The percentages who mentioned "administration" or "School Committee" varied

with the educational level of the school -- with the lowest percentage at the elementary level and the highest at the high school. Junior high teachers were in between -- 12% cited administration (inefficient, inaccessible, etc.) and 15% the School Committee.

- * What was perhaps most striking was this. Over half the teachers (79% at the high school) availed themselves of the opportunity at some point on the questionnaire to voice their concern about the posture or the policies of the School Committee. The number of such comments about central administration was minuscule.

Let me emphasize again that we are not drawing any conclusions from these data and responses, except to frame a picture of teachers' perceptions. Nor are we attempting to influence School Committee decisions one way or the other. Our only interest in presenting these data at this time is to ensure that the School Committee has the information.