

9/18/11

*Introductory notes by Theodora Martin*

The following pages represent a partial release of public documents obtained on August 12, 2011 through a public records request made by Menemsha MacBain on June 9, 2011. She made the request after the School Committee's June 7th announcement of the extension of Dr. Paul Ash's contract. Her request was for all emails and hard copy letters received by the School Committee concerning the retirements of Michael Fiveash and Karen Girondel, Dr. Ash's contract, Dr. Ash's performance, and teacher morale.

The first document is Menemsha MacBain's August 1, 2011 appeal to the state when the School Committee did not comply with her request (mailed August 2nd). The appeal contains copies of all correspondence between Menemsha MacBain and the School Committee or their records keeper, Dr. Paul Ash. It contains the complete history of multiple requests made by Menemsha MacBain along with the corresponding responses.

Following that is a set of correspondence released by Dr. Ash after the School Committee received notice from the Massachusetts Supervisor of Records that an appeal had been received. It is more complete than what had been offered previously but still incomplete. The appeal is ongoing, as there are clearly still some documents missing, and the School Committee did not provide a log of withheld documents or the specific exemptions under which they were withheld. When more documents are released, they will be posted.

Public Records Delivered

*Please note the following:*

Page numbers were added by hand after receipt of the documents.

The attachments, provided in a separate folder mixed in with hard copy letters, were delivered without source identification. A number of references to attachments within the emails do not have any corresponding documents in the Letters and Attachments section.

*Some Items of Interest:*

Dr Ash states that he does not collect staff attrition data or conduct exit interviews, pages 19, 30.

Concerns were raised regarding adequate notice of the vote on the Superintendent's contract and/or Open Meeting Law compliance.  
pp. 101 (response on p. 100), 279, 282, 288-289, 296, 305, 314, 336.

Approximately 60 emails requested or suggested a delay of the June 7th vote on the extension of Paul Ash's contract.

pp. 95, 96, 98, 104, 105, 111, 121, 126, 127, 129, 130, 131, 135, 140, 145, 149, 151, 154, 156, 161, 163, 167, 171, 173, 176, 191, 194, 195, 200, 202, 206, 208, 209, 213, 214, 216, 220, 222, 225, 227, 229, 239, 242, 252, 260, 263, 271, 337, 338, 342, 346, 354, 357, 360

p.101 inferred from subject line on p.100 but attached letter is missing;  
pp. 133, 158, 181, 240 (2<sup>nd</sup> header), inferred from subject line but incoming email is missing

p. 211 attached letter is in Letters and Attachments

p. 265 attached letter missing (same one referred to on p. 101)

Mary Ann Stewart wrote to at least 24 people in advance of the June 7th meeting saying "[we] hope you will consider viewing the proceedings via live broadcast on LexMedia..."

pp. 121, 123, 125, 128, 130, 131, 133, 134, 139, 141, 143, 144, 148, 151, 153, 156, 158, 162, 241, 251, 260,

explicitly because "our meeting space has limited seating capacity" on pp. 168, 171, 172

Dawn McKenna's Open Meeting Law Violation Complaint contains a public records request (p. 275). The School Committee Records Keeper (Paul Ash) did not comply with that public records request as required by Massachusetts state law.

Mary Ann Stewart wrote to over 20 people who had asked for or suggested a delay of the Ash contract vote to tell them, "By now you are probably aware that the School Committee took it's [sic] vote in an Executive Session last Wednesday, June 1 to extend Dr. Ash's contract through June 30, 2015." This is at variance with the School Committee's response to the Open

Meeting Law Violation Complaints filed by Eid-Reiner and McKenna and supports both Eid-Reiner's and McKenna's claims.

pp. 174, 182, 190, 192, 199, 201, 205, 209, 211 (missing header), 214, 216, 219, 221, 224, 226, 238, 249, 337, 341, 345, 357, 360

In his Minuteman piece "Our Schools" (Letters and Attachments p. 32), Dr. Ash refers to a large state survey. Although he does not identify it here, he cited it by name in the School Committee meeting of June 7th as the TeLLS survey. It was conducted in 2008 and published in 2009; the results are available online at [www.masstells.org](http://www.masstells.org). The TeLLS results for Lexington are not exactly as he reports them. We did not have district-wide participation except at the elementary school level; the two largest schools in Lexington - LHS and Diamond - did not have enough participation to meet the standards set by TeLLS. Also, what Ash calls "high levels" of scoring for Leadership were only 3.29, barely above the average score of 3 on the scale from 1 to 5 used in the survey.

*Also of interest:*

Website used by Menemsha MacBain in filing her initial request, the same information later sent to her by Dr. Ash as an FYI:

"A Guide to the Massachusetts Public Records Law"

<http://www.sec.state.ma.us/pre/prepdf/guide.pdf>

August 1<sup>st</sup>, 2011

Supervisor of Records  
Office of the Secretary of the Commonwealth  
McCormack Building, Room 1719  
One Ashburton Place  
Boston, MA 02108

Re: Massachusetts Public Records Request Appeal

Dear Supervisor of Records,

I am writing to file an appeal regarding a request I made for public records from the Lexington School Committee on the 9<sup>th</sup> of June 2011.

As background, the Lexington School Committee voted in an executive session, without proper notice, to extend Superintendent Paul Ash's contract. A paper notice was posted two days after the vote to add the contract to the online agenda for an open meeting on June 7<sup>th</sup>. I wanted to see what input from the public the School Committee had received surrounding this decision. After I filed my request, two other Lexington citizens filed Open Meeting Violation Complaints regarding this vote, which will advance to the Attorney General's office in the next month or so.

My request has been met with delay, misinterpretation, stonewalling, and finally, an attempt to characterize the documents in question as all falling under the mantle of confidentiality. I requested incoming emails from the general public, as you will see in the enclosed documents. I believe it is a gross misrepresentation to claim they are personnel files.

I therefore respectfully appeal to you for the release of any letters or emails received by the school committee between March 9<sup>th</sup> and June 9<sup>th</sup> 2011 regarding the extension of Dr. Paul Ash's contract, his job performance, teacher morale, as well as letters or emails regarding the forced retirements of Dr. Fiveash and Mme Girondel from Lexington High School.

I will be moving to Germany on August 8<sup>th</sup>, so the primary contact in the United States for this appeal will be Theodora Martin, 60 Liberty Ave., Lexington, MA 02420, 781-863-0503, [theomar@verizon.net](mailto:theomar@verizon.net). I will remain available via email.

Sincerely,

Menemsha MacBain  
60 Liberty Ave,  
Lexington, MA 02420  
[menemsha.macbain@gmail.com](mailto:menemsha.macbain@gmail.com)

Encl. All written correspondence between the School Committee and myself, as well as from Dr. Paul Ash regarding my request.

*Note: These documents are presented chronologically. As many emails contain copies of previous emails, I have either started them on new pages or put dividing lines between them to make each exchange clearer. I have also numbered them in GREEN. Although I have included all emails here for your review, the heart of the matter is contained in my summarizing letter to the School Committee of July 12, 2011, which is Document #14 below.*

1.)

From: Menemsha MacBain <menemsha.macbain@gmail.com>  
To: Lexington School Committee <school-com@comet.ci.lexington.ma.us>  
Date: Thu, Jun 9, 2011 at 10:00 AM  
Subject: Request for public information

Dear members of the School Committee,

I am writing you to request copies, either electronic or hard, of all correspondence received by the school committee in the past two months relating to Dr. Paul Ash's performance, the extension of his contract, the recent forced retirements of Mme Girondel and Dr. Fiveash from the High School, as well as letters regarding teacher morale, including a May 26th letter from anonymous faculty members. I understand that these are all a matter of public record.

I understand that you have ten days to respond to this request, however if at all possible I would like to see copies before the last School Committee meeting next Thursday. I will willingly pay any and all copying fees,

Thank you,

Menemsha MacBain  
60 Liberty Ave,  
Lexington, MA 02420  
1-781-354-6224

August 1<sup>st</sup>, 2011

Page 3 of 23

2.)

From: Mary Ann Stewart <f.m.a.stewart@gmail.com>  
To: Menemsha MacBain <menemsha.macbain@gmail.com>, Lexington School  
Committee <school-com@comet.ci.lexington.ma.us>  
Date: Thu, Jun 9, 2011 at 11:54 AM  
Subject: Re: Request for public information

Dear Menemsha,

Thank you for contacting the School Committee.

I have spoken with Dr. Ash about how best to comply with your Public Records Request by next Wednesday's School Committee meeting. Dr. Ash will be speaking with staff to get an estimate on the time it will take to collect the items, as well as an estimate of the associated costs. As soon as I have that information I will let you know.

Sincerely,  
Mary Ann.

Mary Ann Stewart  
Chair | Lexington School Committee

3.)

From: Menemsha MacBain <menemsha.macbain@gmail.com>  
To: Mary Ann Stewart <f.m.a.stewart@gmail.com>  
Date: Thu, Jun 9, 2011 at 11:59 AM  
Subject: Re: Request for public information

Dear Mary Ann,

I am confused as to why Dr. Ash is in any way involved in collecting this information, as he is not a member of the school committee, and also as most of the correspondence is about him.

Sincerely,

Menemsha MacBain  
60 Liberty Ave,  
Lexington, MA 02420  
1-781-354-6224

---

4.)

From: Mary Ann Stewart <f.m.a.stewart@gmail.com>  
To: Menemsha MacBain <menemsha.macbain@gmail.com>  
Date: Thu, Jun 9, 2011 at 11:59 PM  
Subject: Re: Request for public information

Thank you for your message. I am currently attending a conference out of state through Sunday, June 12, 2011. I will respond to your message next week.

5.)

From: Menemsha MacBain <menemsha.macbain@gmail.com>  
To: Mary Ann Stewart <f.m.a.stewart@gmail.com>  
Date: Thu, Jun 9, 2011 at 11:59 AM  
Subject: Fwd: [School-com] Request for public information

Dear members of the School Committee,

I sent this to Mary Ann Stewart but she is out for the weekend, could anyone else please explain this to me?

Menemsha MacBain  
60 Liberty Ave,  
Lexington, MA 02420  
1-781-354-6224

[Please Note: a copy of my email sent to Mary Ann Stewart on June 9<sup>th</sup> at 11:59 AM followed]

---

6.)

From: Mary Ann Stewart <f.m.a.stewart@gmail.com>  
To: Menemsha MacBain <menemsha.macbain@gmail.com>, Lexington School Committee <school-com@comet.ci.lexington.ma.us>  
Date: Thu, Jun 9, 2011 at 1:08 PM  
Subject: Re: Request for public information

Dear Menemsha,

I will try to clarify. I contacted Dr. Ash because he is responsible for contacting staff, not the School Committee.

The staff member will be able to collect everything within ten days and has a much better understanding of how quickly our server can complete the search for the items requested.

Dr. Ash wants to know if the information you requested can be collected before the School Committee Meeting this Wednesday (5 days).

Also, an estimate of the costs incurred in any case.

Mary Ann.

Sent from my Verizon Wireless BlackBerry



August 1<sup>st</sup>, 2011

Page 6 of 23

7.)

From: Menemsha MacBain <menemsha.macbain@gmail.com>  
To: Mary Ann Stewart <f.m.a.stewart@gmail.com>  
Date: Fri, Jun 10, 2011 at 8:42 PM  
Subject: Re: Request for public information

Dear Mary Ann,

Thank you for clearing that up, I look forward hearing the estimate and am interested in seeing everything.

Menemsha MacBain

---

8.)

From: Dr. Paul Ash <pash@sch.ci.lexington.ma.us>  
To: Mary Ann Stewart <f.m.a.stewart@gmail.com>, Menemsha MacBain <menemsha.macbain@gmail.com>  
Date: Mon, Jun 13, 2011 at 7:27 AM  
Subject: Fwd: Re: Fwd: [School-Com] Request for public information

Dear Ms. Macbain [sic]:

We have received your request for certain public records. I have asked the technology department to look into your request and to prepare an estimate of cost to retrieve the records. In the meantime, I have attached the anonymous open letter to the Lexington School Committee you requested.

Dr. Ash

[Note: The anonymous open letter mentioned here had been posted to the news website Lexington Patch between my original request and receipt of this email. Dr. Paul Ash is the Superintendent of Public Schools in Lexington, MA, and not a member of the School Committee.]

---

9.)

From: menemsha.macbain@gmail.com  
To: pash@sch.ci.lexington.ma.us  
Date: on, Jun 13, 2011 at 9:43 AM  
Subject: Re: Re: Fwd: [School-Com] Request for public information

Dear Dr. Ash,

Thank you very much for looking into this and for sending along the open letter. I look forward to seeing the rest of them.

Menemsha MacBain

10.)

[Note: This email refers to a telephone conversation that took place between Mary Ann Stewart and myself on June 17<sup>th</sup>, 2011 at 5:43 PM. Ms. Stewart called me on my cell-phone to clarify what I was asking for. She told me that Dr. Ash's performance review and contract were available online and I explained that I wanted incoming correspondence from the general public regarding his performance and contract. She kept asking if I meant from the public, and I said yes. She replied that that would be a lot of emails and would be expensive, and I confirmed that was what I wanted.]

From: menemsha.macbain@gmail.com

To: school-com@comet.ci.lexington.ma.us, f.m.a.stewart@gmail.com

Date: Sat, Jun 18, 2011 at 2:45 PM

Subject: Re: Request for public information

Dear Ms. Stewart and members of the School Committee,

I had a couple thoughts after we finished our conversation last night. It is perfectly fine with me if you need a couple of extra days to work up an estimate, however in that case, I would like to extend my request to cover emails and letters received to date, if at all possible.

Since I know you are statutorily required to provide me with a fee estimate (or explanation for why you cannot) within ten days, I wonder if it mightn't be more convenient to you if I resubmit my request so that you might have ten days starting today to send the estimate. If such is the case, I have a rewritten version of my request written according to the suggested form and dated today that I can send to you.

I understand that printing and copying fees may become expensive, but I have a number of people who willing to help me pay. I hope however, even in light of that information, that the estimate remains reasonable.

We are really very curious to see all of the information, and therefore we are all for you having the time to do the job thoroughly.

Sincerely,

Menemsha MacBain  
60 Liberty Ave,  
Lexington, MA  
781-354-6224

11.)

From: Dr. Paul Ash <pash@sch.ci.lexington.ma.us>  
To: Mary Ann Stewart maryann@redoniondesign.com, Miriam Sousa  
<msousa@sch.ci.lexington.ma.us>, Menemsha MacBain  
<menemsha.macbain@gmail.com>  
Date: Tue, June, 21, 2011 at 4:13 PM  
Subject: Fwd: Re: Fwd: [School-Com] Request for public information

Dear Ms. MacBain:

I am writing to you to update you on our efforts to comply with your public records request. Regarding your requests:

1. On June 13, I sent you a copy of the anonymous letter you requested;
2. I contacted the Technology Department to determine the cost of retrieving all electronic documents that have the word "morale" in them, which are not private due to attorney/client privilege (if any);
3. The only document relating to my performance evaluation is located on the LPS website - Please look under "Recent reports" at <http://lps.lexingtonma.org/>;
4. To the best of my knowledge, there are no letters or emails from the school department regarding "forced retirements of Mme Girondel and Dr. Fiveash;" and
5. I have attached a copy of my contract extension.

As soon as the Ms. McKenna, who is the Technology Director, returns from vacation next week, we will return to the work of identifying all email or letters regarding teacher morale.

I have attached a copy of the State's Public Records Guidelines. I have also attached my 2009-2012 employment contract and memorandum of agreement that extends the contract through 2015.

Sincerely,

Dr. Ash

FYI...

Dear members of the School Committee,

I am writing you to request copies, either electronic or hard, of all correspondence received by the school committee in the past two months relating to Dr. Paul Ash's performance, the extension of his contract, the recent forced retirements of Mme Girondel and Dr. Fiveash from the High School, as well as letters regarding teacher morale, including a May 26th letter from anonymous faculty members. I understand that these are all a matter of public record.

I understand that you have ten days to respond to this request, however if at all possible I would like to see copies before the last School Committee meeting next Thursday. I will willingly pay any and all copying fees,

August 1<sup>st</sup>, 2011

Page 9 of 23

Thank you,  
Menemsha MacBain  
60 Liberty Ave,  
Lexington, MA 02420  
[1-781-354-6224](tel:1-781-354-6224)

[Enclosed were the Massachusetts Public Records Guidelines, and copies of Dr. Ash's contract as of 6/15/09 and 6/16/11. These were too big to include here, and will be forwarded to the Supervisor of Records in another email]

August 1<sup>st</sup>, 2011

Page 10 of 23

12.)

From: Menemsha MacBain <menemsha.macbain@mail.mcgill.ca>  
To: school-com@comet.ci.lexington.ma.us  
Date: Wed, June 22, 2011 at 4:22 PM  
Subject: Fwd: Re: Fwd: [School-Com] Request for public information

Dear School Committee,

I am writing to you again regarding the request for public information that I made on June 9th at 10:00AM (below). I am also forwarding you Dr. Ash response which details what he perceives as his efforts to comply with my request.

His response, on day 13, neither provides me with a written estimate of cost nor does it cite an exemption for why he cannot do so, as Massachusetts law requires to be done within 10 days. Nor have I received any such email from the School Committee, itself, the body to which I made my request.

He also demonstrates that he does not indicate the nature of my request. In his email (below) I have inserted my own comments in italics and in red, detailing the ways in which his response misinterprets and misrepresents my original request.

Dr. Ash clearly has a conflict of interest when it comes to fulfilling this request, as he personally benefits from the continued non-release of this information; these documents combined with other information put his salary and job security are at stake.

I therefore ask that Dr. Ash recuse himself from any involvement in the collection and release of his documents.

An appropriate response to my request is now three days overdue, and I would like an itemized good faith estimate that accurately represents my request within a week.

Sincerely,

Menemsha MacBain  
60 Liberty Ave  
Lexington, MA  
[781-354-6224](tel:781-354-6224)

**For your review, my original request:**

Dear members of the School Committee,

I am writing you to request copies, either electronic or hard, of all correspondence received by the school committee in the past two months relating to Dr. Paul Ash's performance, the extension of his contract, the recent forced retirements of Mme

Girondel and Dr. Fiveash from the High School, as well as letters regarding teacher morale, including a May 26th letter from anonymous faculty members. I understand that these are all a matter of public record.

I understand that you have ten days to respond to this request, however if at all possible I would like to see copies before the last School Committee meeting next Thursday. I will willingly pay any and all copying fees,

Thank you,

Menemsha MacBain  
60 Liberty Ave,  
Lexington, MA 02420  
[1-781-354-6224](tel:1-781-354-6224)

**On Tue, Jun 21, 2011 at 4:00 PM, Paul B.**

**Ash <[pash@sch.ci.lexington.ma.us](mailto:pash@sch.ci.lexington.ma.us)> wrote:**

Dear Ms. MacBain:

I am writing to you to update you on our efforts to comply with your public records request. Regarding your requests:

1. On June 13, I sent you a copy of the anonymous letter you requested;

*This letter was actually published by the Lexington Patch only a few hours after I submitted my request for it (on June 9th). As signs of compliance go, this was a fairly empty gesture, though I did ask for it.*

2. I contacted the Technology Department to determine the cost of retrieving all electronic documents that have the word "morale" in them, which are not private due to attorney/client privilege (if any);

*I specifically also requested hard copies. There seems to have been no effort made to isolate any such materials.*

3. The only document relating to my performance evaluation is located on the LPS website - Please look under "Recent reports" at <http://lps.lexingtonma.org/>;

*I did not request documents regarding his "performance evaluation" but rather letters and emails about his performance.*

4. To the best of my knowledge, there are no letters or emails from the school department regarding "forced retirements of Mme Girondel and Dr. Fiveash;" and

*A point of confusion here seems to be that Dr. Ash somehow thinks I requested letters or emails sent FROM the school department. My request was for letters and emails received BY the school committee. I also believe I further clarified this with Mary Ann Stewart in our phone conversation of the 17th, where she repeatedly asked if I meant emails and letters from the public and I said yes.*

*I know for a fact that there are letters and emails from the public on this issue; my mother sent at least one, and I know of several others. My mother's email even used the word "forced," though a release of records in the spirit of the request should not require the exact wording. Pedantically searching for an exact match to this phrase may have hindered his search.*

5. I have attached a copy of my contract extension.

*Again, I did not request his contract extension, but rather letters and emails ABOUT the contract extension which were received by the School Committee.*

As soon as the Ms. McKenna, who is the Technology Director, returns from vacation next week, we will return to the work of identifying all email or letters regarding teacher morale.

*Is the only person capable of entering search terms the Technology Director? And also, I would like her to be identifying all email or letters regarding each of the subjects specified in my request, not just the one.*

I have attached a copy of the State's Public Records Guidelines. I have also attached my 2009-2012 employment contract and memorandum of agreement that extends the contract through 2015.

*None of these points offers a written estimate of cost, or cites a specific exemption as to why such an estimate could not be provided (as the state requires). Nor do I see how any of the steps he has taken is going to produce such an estimate.*

Sincerely,  
Dr. Ash

*[ Dr. Ash also originally enclosed a copy of my original request as an "FYI" ]*

13.)

From: Dr. Paul Ash <pash@sch.ci.lexington.ma.us>  
To: Mary Ann Stewart [maryann@redoniondesign.com](mailto:maryann@redoniondesign.com)  
CC: school-com@comet.ci.lexington.ma.us  
Date: Thu, June, 30, 2011 at 11:06 AM  
Subject: Request for public information

Dear Ms. MacBain:

I am writing as a follow-up to my June 21, 2011, email response to your request for public records. In my previous email to you (below), I indicated that I had contacted our Technology Department to determine the cost of retrieving all electronic documents that have the word "morale" in them, which are not private due to attorney/client privilege (if any).

In searching for email correspondence relevant to your request, I instructed our Technology Department to search the electronic mailboxes of the "School Committee" and "Paul Ash" for all email correspondence sent or received between April 1, 2011, and June 9, 2011, containing the word "morale" and to exclude any and all privileged email correspondence from School Counsel and Town Counsel. Technology Department staff members spent a total of three hours completing this search, which yielded 300 pages of relevant email messages. Based on the rates used by the Town of Lexington, the cost for producing the documents you requested is as follows:

1. Technology Department Personnel Time (lowest paid person capable of loading and searching electronic mailboxes):

3 hours X \$34.63 = \$103.89

2. Data Output/Photocopying:

300 pages X \$.20/page = \$60.00

The total cost is \$163.89. If you still are interested in receiving the documents you requested, please send a check in the amount of \$163.89, made payable to the Town of Lexington, to the Keeper of the Records, Office of the Superintendent of Schools, 146 Maple Street, Lexington, MA 02420.

Sincerely,  
Paul B. Ash  
Superintendent of Schools



August 1<sup>st</sup>, 2011

Page 14 of 23

14.)

Letter Sent by Certified Mail on July 12, 2011 by Menemsha MacBain, to the members of the School Committee. This packet included past correspondence to be completely clear about what I was requesting and why Dr. Ash's response was inadequate.

60 Liberty Ave.  
Lexington, MA 02420  
781-354-6224  
menemsha.macbain@gmail.com

July 11, 2011

Members of the Lexington School Committee

Mary Ann Stewart, chairwoman  
Sandro Alessandrini  
Jessie Steigerwald  
Margaret Coppe  
Bonnie Brodner

*sent individually to each member at their home address via USPS*

Re: Public Records Request

Dear Members of the School Committee,

I am writing to you regarding my public records request of June 9<sup>th</sup>, 2011, which has not yet been answered appropriately.

My request was clear and defined – I want to know what input you had from the public prior to and during your consideration of Dr. Ash's contract extension. This request, however, has been met with a delayed and inadequate response from Dr. Ash.

In my email of June 22<sup>nd</sup> (enclosed), I explained how the actions taken by Dr. Ash in response to my original request misrepresented what I asked for, and failed to comply with Massachusetts laws regarding Public Records requests. I also asked for Dr. Ash to recuse himself from responding to my request as his involvement presents a clear conflict of interest.

No one from the School Committee has acknowledged receipt of the June 22<sup>nd</sup> email or responded to my concerns. Instead, Dr. Ash himself sent me a further email on June 30<sup>th</sup> (also enclosed). In this email, he did not address any of my concerns, and ignored three of four areas of my request. Though he provided me with an estimate of cost, he did so for

August 1<sup>st</sup>, 2011

Page 15 of 23

letters and emails containing the word "morale." I also requested letters and emails received by the School Committee regarding (1) the retirements of Mme. Girondel and Dr. Fiveash, (2) Dr. Ash's performance, and (3) Dr. Ash's contract. These requests remain unaddressed.

Not only does his response disregard the majority of my original request, it also demonstrates a lack of good faith effort. He claimed to provide an estimate for letters and emails including the term "morale," but he searched only for emails containing that specific term. A search that reflected the spirit of the query would also have looked for other key terms, such as "climate" or "atmosphere."

I understand that it is summer, and that you are all busy people, but I expect a response from one of you that demonstrates an understanding of my public records request and a willingness to comply with its spirit, as well as the laws of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. I feel that otherwise I will have to file an appeal with the State Supervisor of Records, which would be the second state agency reviewing the conduct of the School Committee.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Menemsha MacBain

Encl: My June 22nd email to the School Committee  
Dr. Ash's response of June 30<sup>th</sup>

Cc: Carl Valenti [sic], Lexington Town Manager  
Dr. Paul Ash, School Superintendent

**My email of June 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2011:**

Dear School Committee,

I am writing to you again regarding the request for public information that I made on June 9th at 10:00AM (below). I am also forwarding you Dr. Ash response, which details what he perceives as his efforts to comply with my request.

His response, on day 13, neither provides me with a written estimate of cost nor does it cite an exemption for why he cannot do so, as Massachusetts law requires to be done within 10 days. Nor have I received any such email from the School Committee, itself, the body to which I made my request.

He also demonstrates that he does not indicate the nature of my request. In his email (below) I have inserted my own comments in italics and in red [*In this letter, grey*], detailing the ways in which his response misinterprets and misrepresents my original request.

Dr. Ash clearly has a conflict of interest when it comes to fulfilling this request, as he personally benefits from the continued non-release of this information; these documents combined with other information put his salary and job security are at stake.

I therefore ask that Dr. Ash recuse himself from any involvement in the collection and release of his documents.

An appropriate response to my request is now three days overdue, and I would like an itemized good faith estimate that accurately represents my request within a week.

Sincerely,

**Menemsha MacBain**  
60 Liberty Ave  
Lexington, MA  
[781-354-6224](tel:781-354-6224)

**For your review, my original request:**

**Dear members of the School Committee,**

I am writing you to request copies, either electronic or hard, of all correspondence received by the school committee in the past two months relating to Dr. Paul Ash's performance, the extension of his contract, the recent forced retirements of Mme Girondel and Dr. Fiveash from the High School, as well as letters regarding teacher morale, including a May 26th letter from anonymous faculty members. I understand that these are all a matter of public record.

I understand that you have ten days to respond to this request, however if at all possible I would like to see copies before the last School Committee meeting next Thursday. I will willingly pay any and all copying fees,

Thank you,

Menemsha MacBain  
60 Liberty Ave,  
Lexington, MA 02420  
[1-781-354-6224](tel:1-781-354-6224)

**On Tue, Jun 21, 2011 at 4:00 PM, Paul B. Ash**  
<[pash@sch.ci.lexington.ma.us](mailto:pash@sch.ci.lexington.ma.us)> wrote:

Dear Ms. MacBain:

I am writing to you to update you on our efforts to comply with your public records request. Regarding your requests:

1. On June 13, I sent you a copy of the anonymous letter you requested;

*This letter was actually published by the Lexington Patch only a few hours after I submitted my request for it (on June 9th). As signs of compliance go, this was a fairly empty gesture, though I did ask for it.*

2. I contacted the Technology Department to determine the cost of retrieving all electronic documents that have the word "morale" in them, which are not private due to attorney/client privilege (if any);

*I specifically also requested hard copies. There seems to have been no effort made to isolate any such materials.*

3. The only document relating to my performance evaluation is located on the LPS website - Please look under "Recent reports" at <http://lps.lexingtonma.org/>;

*I did not request documents regarding his "performance evaluation" but rather letters and emails about his performance.*

4. To the best of my knowledge, there are no letters or emails from the school department regarding "forced retirements of Mme Girondel and Dr. Fiveash;" and

*A point of confusion here seems to be that Dr. Ash somehow thinks I requested letters or emails sent FROM the school department. My request was for letters and emails received BY the school committee. I also believe I further clarified this with Mary Ann Stewart in our phone conversation of the 17th, where she repeatedly asked if I meant emails and letters from the public and I said yes.*

*I know for a fact that there are letters and emails from the public on this issue; my mother sent at least one, and I know of several others. My mother's email even used the word "forced," though a release of records in the spirit of the request should not*

*require the exact wording. Pedantically searching for an exact match to this phrase may have hindered his search.*

**5. I have attached a copy of my contract extension.**

*Again, I did not request his contract extension, but rather letters and emails ABCD & the contract extension which were received by the School Committee.*

**As soon as the Ms. McKenna, who is the Technology Director, returns from vacation next week, we will return to the work of identifying all email or letters regarding teacher morale.**

*Is the only person capable of entering search terms the Technology Director? And also, I would like her to be identifying all email or letters regarding each of the subjects specified in my request, not just the one.*

**I have attached a copy of the State's Public Records Guidelines. I have also attached my 2009-2012 employment contract and memorandum of agreement that extends the contract through 2015.**

*None of these points offers a written estimate of cost, or cites a specific exemption as to why such an estimate could not be provided (as the state requires). Nor do I see how any of the steps he has taken is going to produce such an estimate.*

**Sincerely,  
Dr. Ash**

*[ Dr. Ash also originally enclosed a copy of my original request as an "FYI" ]*

**Dr. Paul Ash's response of June 30<sup>th</sup>, 2011:**

Dear Ms. MacBain:

I am writing as a follow-up to my June 21, 2011, email response to your request for public records. In my previous email to you (below), I indicated that I had contacted our Technology Department to determine the cost of retrieving all electronic documents that have the word "morale" in them, which are not private due to attorney/client privilege (if any).

In searching for email correspondence relevant to your request, I instructed our Technology Department to search the electronic mailboxes of the "School Committee" and "Paul Ash" for all email correspondence sent or received between April 1, 2011, and June 9, 2011, containing the word "morale" and to exclude any and all privileged email correspondence from School Counsel and Town Counsel. Technology Department staff members spent a total of three hours completing this search, which yielded 300 pages of relevant email messages. Based on the rates used by the Town of Lexington, the cost for producing the documents you requested is as follows:

1. Technology Department Personnel Time (lowest paid person capable of loading and searching electronic mailboxes):

3 hours X \$34.63 = \$103.89

2. Data Output/Photocopying:

300 pages X \$.20/page = \$60.00

The total cost is \$163.89. If you still are interested in receiving the documents you requested, please send a check in the amount of \$163.89, made payable to the Town of Lexington, to the Keeper of the Records, Office of the Superintendent of Schools, 146 Maple Street, Lexington, MA 02420.

Sincerely,  
Paul B. Ash  
Superintendent of Schools

August 1<sup>st</sup>, 2011

Page 20 of 23

15.)

From: Sandro Alessandrini <alessandrini@comcast.net>  
To: Menemsha MacBain <menemsha.macbain@gmail.com>  
CC: school-com@comet.ci.lexington.ma.us, Dr. Paul Ash  
<pash@sch.ci.lexington.ma.us>  
Date: Mon, Jul 18, 2011 at 10:31 AM  
Subject: Thank you for your letter

Dear Ms McBain [sic],

Sorry to get back to you so late but I'm writing you to let you know that all the members of the School Committee received your letter.

We are in the process of addressing your requests and thank you for your patience.

Hope you're having a nice summer.

All the best,  
Alessandro Alessandrini  
Lexington School Committee/Vice Chair

Mr. Alessandrini also called after sending this email to apologize for misspelling my name.

16.)

Ms. Jessie Steigerwald also called in response to my certified letter on July 13<sup>th</sup>, 2011. She got my voicemail. Due to family commitments I was unable to return her call until 4:30 PM on July 29<sup>th</sup>, 2011, when we talked for approximately half an hour about the progress of my request, as well as requests like it. She told me that there about 100 emails regarding the posted agenda item of Paul Ash's contract for the June 7<sup>th</sup> school committee meeting. To the best of my knowledge, most of those emails simply requested a delay of the vote on Dr. Ash's contract, which no one realized had already taken place in executive session.

Ms. Steigerwald explained to me that such requests normally go through the Chair, Ms. Mary Ann Stewart, and as far as she knew my request was still being handled by Dr. Ash. According to Ms. Steigerwald, Dr. Ash was in contact with School Committee counsel, Bob Fraiser regarding my request.



August 1<sup>st</sup>, 2011

Page 22 of 23

17.)

From: Mary Ann Stewart <MaryAnn@redoniondesign.com>

To: Menemsha MacBain <menemsha.macbain@gmail.com>

CC: [school-com@comet.ci.lexington.ma.us](mailto:school-com@comet.ci.lexington.ma.us)

Date: Mon, Aug 1, 2011 at 4:56 PM

Subject: Certified Letter/ Public Records Request

Dear Ms. MacBain,

The issues you have raised in your correspondence to the School Committee and Dr. Ash's response to your records request have been reviewed by School Counsel.

I have been advised that Dr. Ash's response is in compliance with the requirements of the Public Records Law and that his performance of his duties in a ministerial task such as being the Keeper of the Records is not a conflict of interest.

I have also been informed that the recent changes in the regulations regarding the evaluation of educational personnel, including superintendents, make much of what you have requested "personnel information" and is "...not subject to disclosure under the public records laws. See 603 CMR 35.09 (6).

All that remains is for you to decide if you will pay the estimated costs associated to reproduce the emails you requested, which include copies of three hard-copy letters that members of the School Committee received (one, as you noted, from Theodora Martin and two others, which are unsigned).

Sincerely,

**Mary Ann Stewart,**

**Chair | Lexington School Committee**

When writing or responding, please be aware that the Massachusetts Secretary of State has determined that email is a public record and may not, therefore, be kept confidential.

August 1<sup>st</sup>, 2011

Page 23 of 23

18.)

From: Menemsha MacBain <menemsha.macbain@gmail.com>

To: Mary Ann Stewart <MaryAnn@redoniondesign.com>Menemsha MacBain  
<menemsha.macbain@gmail.com>

CC: [school-com@comet.ci.lexington.ma.us](mailto:school-com@comet.ci.lexington.ma.us)

Date: Mon, Aug 1, 2011 at 4:56 PM

Subject: Certified Letter/ Public Records Request

Dear Ms. Stewart,

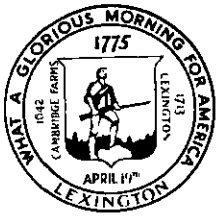
I have repeatedly asserted that I do not want Dr. Ash's evaluation itself. As I clarified in our phone conversation of June 17th, and then again in my email of June 21st, and finally in my last letter, mailed July 12th, what I wanted were letters and emails FROM THE PUBLIC regarding his job performance, as well as emails and letters from the public on several other subjects. As the signature on your own emails now states "When writing or responding, please be aware that the Massachusetts Secretary of State has determined that email is a public record and may not, therefore, be kept confidential." I have been informed that dozens of emails on Dr. Ash's contract and job performance were received in the week between the 1st and 8th of June alone, all falling under the umbrella of public comment.

I really do not understand why a reasonable response to my simple request should be so impossible.

I am willing to assume the costs for the partial response that I have been offered, as I believe that, at this point, something is better than nothing at all. However, please do not take this acceptance to mean that your response has been in any way satisfactory. A check will be delivered to the LPS office today, and I expect the documents to be delivered promptly.

Sincerely,

Menemsha MacBain



# Lexington Public Schools

146 Maple Street ♦ Lexington, Massachusetts 02420

Paul B. Ash, Ph.D.  
*Superintendent of Schools*

(781) 861-2550  
email: [pash@sch.ci.lexington.ma.us](mailto:pash@sch.ci.lexington.ma.us)  
fax: (781) 863-5829

August 11, 2011

Ms. Menemsha MacBain  
60 Liberty Avenue  
Lexington, MA 02420

Dear Ms. MacBain:

I am in receipt of your check dated August 2, 2011, in the amount of \$163.89 for the estimated cost of searching and outputting approximately 300 pages of written correspondence received by the School Committee for the two month period between April 1, 2011, and June 9, 2011, as requested in your email of June 9, 2011.

As communicated to you in my email messages of June 21, 2011, and June 30, 2011, the technology department conducted a search for all records that pertained to your request, excluding those documents exempted by law, and estimated there to be approximately 300 pages. Please note, the actual search for relevant documents yielded 363 pages of email messages, 44 attachments to the email messages, and 5 letters.

The documents you requested are enclosed.

Sincerely,

Paul B. Ash, Ph.D.  
Superintendent of Schools

Enclosures: 363 Pages of Email Messages  
44 Attachments to the Email Messages  
5 Letters

cc: Mary Ann Stewart, Chair  
Lexington School Committee

EMAILS

-----  
From: "jess@shininghours.com" <jess@shininghours.com> April 13,  
2011 10:10:49 PM  
Subject: [School-com] LHS retirements?  
To: pash@sch.ci.lexington.ma.us  
"School-com@comet.ci.lexington.ma.us" <School-  
com@comet.ci.lexington.ma.us>

Dear Paul,

Quick question re: LHS retirements. I don't know if this is the week when they get announced - but I have word of three & while one was announced in a straight-forward manner (Steve Bogart), two are being discussed by children in a way that suggests to their parents (2 called me tonight) they aren't simple retirements. Please let us know your preference if we are contacted. Direct questions to you? Questions to Natalie?

While I usually suggest people send questions to you or to the general School Committee address, it doesn't feel that productive for people to reach out to School Committee as we don't play a role in this or have any information about it.

If you want to provide us with helpful talking points, great.

As aside to my SC colleagues, one is Steve Bogart, drama department. Separately, I had two calls from LHS parents whose children told them the "famous" Latin teacher announced retirement/leaving, possibly under some unhappy circumstance...

... and another senior teacher (don't know which department) also leaving - not retiring. (Possibly foreign language.)

Thank you,

Jessie

-----  
School-com mailing list  
School-com@comet.ci.lexington.ma.us  
<http://comet.ci.lexington.ma.us/mailman/listinfo/school-com>

-----  
From: "jess@shininghours.com" <jess@shininghours.com> April 13,  
2011 10:17:21 PM  
Subject: Re: [School-com] LHS retirements?  
To: school-com@comet.ci.lexington.ma.us  
pash@sch.ci.lexington.ma.us

Dear Paul & Colleagues,

To be clear, as I re-read after sending -- I'm just trying to capture the sense that was relayed by callers as a heads up. Could be conjecture - whatever. But both callers said they heard about it from their children & they were seeking clarification whether it was retirements or dismissals. So, kids could have it wrong -- could be gossip, confusion, misinformation, etc.

-- Jessie

On 04/13/2011 11:10 PM, jess@shininghours.com wrote:

- > Dear Paul,
- >
- > Quick question re: LHS retirements. I don't know if this is the week
- > when they get announced - but I have word of three & while one was
- > announced in a straight-forward manner (Steve Bogart), two are being
- > discussed by children in a way that suggests to their parents (2
- > called me tonight) they aren't simple retirements. Please let us know
- > your preference if we are contacted. Direct questions to you?
- > Questions to Natalie?
- >
- > While I usually suggest people send questions to you or to the general
- > School Committee address, it doesn't feel that productive for people
- > to reach out to School Committee as we don't play a role in this or
- > have any information about it.
- >
- > If you want to provide us with helpful talking points, great.
- >
- > As aside to my SC colleagues, one is Steve Bogart, drama department.
- > Separately, I had two calls from LHS parents whose children told them
- > the "famous" Latin teacher announced retirement/leaving, possibly
- > under some unhappy circumstance...

2

>  
> ... and another senior teacher (don't know which department) also  
> leaving - not retiring. (Possibly foreign language.)  
>  
> Thank you,  
>  
> Jessie  
>  
> -----  
> School-com mailing list  
> School-com@comet.ci.lexington.ma.us  
> http://comet.ci.lexington.ma.us/mailman/listinfo/school-com  
>

-----  
School-com mailing list  
School-com@comet.ci.lexington.ma.us  
http://comet.ci.lexington.ma.us/mailman/listinfo/school-com

-----  
From: "Paul B. Ash" <pash@sch.ci.lexington.ma.us> April 14, 2011  
6:39:29 AM  
Subject: Re: [School-com] LHS retirements?  
To: school-com@comet.ci.lexington.ma.us  
Attachments: Attach0.html 14K  
Attach1.txt 1K

Dear School Committee Members

Yesterday morning, Steve Bogart, who is the Drama teacher, decided to retire at the end of this school year. When he met with Natalie Cohen, he emphasized that his decision had nothing to do with us. He spoke about his personal ambitions for the rest of his life and decided now was the right time to retire. I know people like conflict and may be looking to find that LPS was any way involved. We were not. Jeff Leonard confirmed that Steve's desire to leave is totally personal.

There are two other likely retirements LHS retirements, Dr.

4

Michael Fiveash (Latin) and Karen Girondel (French). Due to a decline in Latin enrollment, Natalie Cohen assigned Dr. Fiveash to teach Latin 1, in addition to higher level classes. Dr. Fiveash threatened to resign if he had to teach Freshman. Natalie reasoning to assign Dr. Fiveash a Freshman class was sound and I fully support her. It is likely Dr. Fiveash will retire after 38 years.

His long-time friend Karen Girondel (38 years of service) will also probably retire, in order to be with Dr. Fiveash. She said she cannot work without him.

Dr. Fiveash and Ms. Girondel are excellent teachers and will be missed.

Paul

"jess@shininghours.com" <jess@shininghours.com> writes:  
Dear Paul & Colleagues,

To be clear, as I re-read after sending -- I'm just trying to capture the sense that was relayed by callers as a heads up. Could be conjecture - whatever. But both callers said they heard about it from their children & they were seeking clarification whether it was retirements or dismissals. So, kids could have it wrong -- could be gossip, confusion, misinformation, etc.

-- Jessie

On 04/13/2011 11:10 PM, [jess@shininghours.com](mailto:jess@shininghours.com) wrote:

> Dear Paul,

>

> Quick question re: LHS retirements. I don't know if this is the week  
> when they get announced - but I have word of three & while one was  
> announced in a straight-forward manner (Steve Bogart), two are being  
> discussed by children in a way that suggests to their parents (2  
> called me tonight) they aren't simple retirements. Please let us know  
> your preference if we are contacted. Direct questions to you?  
> Questions to Natalie?



- >
- > While I usually suggest people send questions to you or to the general
- > School Committee address, it doesn't feel that productive for people
- > to reach out to School Committee as we don't play a role in this or
- > have any information about it.
- >
- > If you want to provide us with helpful talking points, great.
- >
- > As aside to my SC colleagues, one is Steve Bogart, drama department.
- > Separately, I had two calls from LHS parents whose children told them
- > the "famous" Latin teacher announced retirement/leaving, possibly
- > under some unhappy circumstance...
- >
- > ... and another senior teacher (don't know which department) also
- > leaving - not retiring. (Possibly foreign language.)
- >
- > Thank you,
- >
- > Jessie
- > -----
- > School-com mailing list
- > [School-com@comet.ci.lexington.ma.us](mailto:School-com@comet.ci.lexington.ma.us)
- > <http://comet.ci.lexington.ma.us/mailman/listinfo/school-com>
- >

-----

From: Jessica Steigerwald <jess@shininghours.com> April 14, 2011  
 6:55:27 AM  
 Subject: Re: [School-com] LHS retirements?  
 To: pash@sch.ci.lexington.ma.us  
 Cc: "school-com@comet.ci.lexington.ma.us" <school-com@comet.ci.lexington.ma.us>  
 Attachments: Attach0.html 15K  
 Attach1.txt 1K

Thank you Paul.

Jessie Steigerwald

"[jess@shininghours.com](mailto:jess@shininghours.com)" <[jess@shininghours.com](mailto:jess@shininghours.com)> writes:  
Dear Paul & Colleagues,

To be clear, as I re-read after sending -- I'm just trying to capture the sense that was relayed by callers as a heads up. Could be conjecture - whatever. But both callers said they heard about it from their children & they were seeking clarification whether it was retirements or dismissals. So, kids could have it wrong -- could be gossip, confusion, misinformation, etc.

-- Jessie

On 04/13/2011 11:10 PM, [jess@shininghours.com](mailto:jess@shininghours.com) wrote:

> Dear Paul,  
>  
> Quick question re: LHS retirements. I don't know if this is the week  
> when they get announced - but I have word of three & while one was  
> announced in a straight-forward manner (Steve Bogart), two are being  
> discussed by children in a way that suggests to their parents (2  
> called me tonight) they aren't simple retirements. Please let us know  
> your preference if we are contacted. Direct questions to you?  
> Questions to Natalie?  
>  
> While I usually suggest people send questions to you or to the general  
> School Committee address, it doesn't feel that productive for people  
> to reach out to School Committee as we don't play a role in this or  
> have any information about it.  
>  
> If you want to provide us with helpful talking points, great.  
>  
> As aside to my SC colleagues, one is Steve Bogart, drama department.  
> Separately, I had two calls from LHS parents whose children told them  
> the "famous" Latin teacher announced retirement/leaving, possibly  
> under some unhappy circumstance...  
>  
> ... and another senior teacher (don't know which department) also  
> leaving - not retiring. (Possibly foreign language.)  
>  
> Thank you,  
>  
> Jessie  
> -----  
> School-com mailing list  
> [School-com@comet.ci.lexington.ma.us](mailto:School-com@comet.ci.lexington.ma.us)

-----  
From: Julia Sleeper Millon <Julia.Millon@Colorado.EDU> April 25,  
2011 1:47:10 AM  
Subject: [School-com] Lexington Public Schools  
To: school-com@comet.ci.lexington.ma.us

To whom it may concern,

I am contacting you to voice my opinion and concern regarding the Lexington Public School System, in particular Lexington High School. I graduated from LHS in 2009, and even though I only took one class from Dr. Fiveash, I can tell you with certainty that I have never learned so much from a single professor in all of my years in the Lexington Public School system. He genuinely cares about his students, and wants us to learn all that he has to offer, as does Mme. Girondel. I am shocked and appalled that LHS would let these teachers go, especially when numerous students sing their praises daily. I also find it interesting that, instead of focusing on areas that the school clearly lacks skilled professors in, such as the math department, the school is deciding to send off two of the best professors in the entire faculty.

My parents chose to move to Lexington and send me to Lexington High School because of the amazing reputation it has around the country. I am sad to say that, due to these decisions, I will not be recommending LHS to any future students. The integrity of LHS is on a downhill slide, and as an alumni it is very sad to see.

Sincerely,  
Julia Millon  
julia.millon@colorado.edu

-----  
School-com mailing list  
School-com@comet.ci.lexington.ma.us  
<http://comet.ci.lexington.ma.us/mailman/listinfo/school-com>

-----  
From: "Mary Ann Stewart" <MaryAnn@redoniondesign.com> April  
26, 2011 1:49:33 PM  
Subject: RE: [School-com] Lexington Public Schools  
To: "Julia Sleeper Millon" <Julia.Millon@Colorado.EDU>  
<school-com@comet.ci.lexington.ma.us>

8

Dear Julia,

Thank you for writing to the School Committee.

It was a personal decision that Dr. Fiveash and Mme. Girondel take their full retirements at this point in time. Like you, we are very grateful to have had these wonderful, dedicated teachers serving our students so well for so long! I know you will join us in wishing them all the best in future endeavors. Doubtless they cherish memories of students like yourself as much as you cherish memories of these excellent teachers.

Sincerely,  
Mary Ann.

Mary Ann Stewart,  
Chair | Lexington School Committee

-----Original Message-----

From: school-com-bounces@comet.ci.lexington.ma.us  
[mailto:school-com-bounces@comet.ci.lexington.ma.us] On Behalf Of Julia Sleeper Millon  
Sent: Monday, April 25, 2011 2:47 AM  
To: school-com@comet.ci.lexington.ma.us  
Subject: [School-com] Lexington Public Schools

To whom it may concern,  
I am contacting you to voice my opinion and concern regarding the Lexington Public School System, in particular Lexington High School. I graduated from LHS in 2009, and even though I only took one class from Dr. Fiveash, I can tell you with certainty that I have never learned so much from a single professor in all of my years in the Lexington Public School system. He genuinely cares about his students, and wants us to learn all that he has to offer, as does Mme. Girondel. I am shocked and appalled that LHS would let these teachers go, especially when numerous students sing their praises daily. I also find it interesting that, instead of focusing on areas that the school clearly lacks skilled professors in, such as the math department, the school is deciding to send off two of the best professors in the entire faculty. My parents chose to move to Lexington and send me to Lexington High School

because of the amazing reputation it has around the country. I am sad to say

that, due to these decisions, I will not be recommending LHS to any future students. The integrity of LHS is on a downhill slide, and as an alumni it is very sad to see.

Sincerely,  
Julia Millon  
julia.millon@colorado.edu

-----  
School-com mailing list  
School-com@comet.ci.lexington.ma.us  
<http://comet.ci.lexington.ma.us/mailman/listinfo/school-com>

-----  
School-com mailing list  
School-com@comet.ci.lexington.ma.us  
<http://comet.ci.lexington.ma.us/mailman/listinfo/school-com>

-----

From: andrei radulescu-banu <bitdribble@gmail.com> April 6, 2011  
11:29:49 PM  
Subject: [School-com] Email on the LexingtonPublicSchools-  
MA\_scs@gcnotify.com list about,  
To: school-com@comet.ci.lexington.ma.us  
Cc: pash@sch.ci.lexington.ma.us  
Attachments: Attach0.html 7K  
Attach1.txt 1K

Dear School Committee,

A few days ago an email was sent to Lexington school parents through the [LexingtonPublicSchools-MA\\_scs@gcnotify.com](mailto:LexingtonPublicSchools-MA_scs@gcnotify.com) list, to advertise two film screenings for "Race to Nowhere", and an after-film conversation.

In fact, it's unclear if the goal of the email is simply advertisement for the movie showings, or to endorse a particular view against the federal Race to the Top program - or to talk of the movie in the context of district policy about stress. The email begins:

"Race to Nowhere (PG-13), the acclaimed film about the epidemic of unhealthy academic

12

stress among students across America, is coming to Lexington at the end of April. The film features the stories of students, educators, and parents caught up in the high-pressure academic culture that interferes with students' ability to learn and live balanced lives."

I find it strange that academics is now, of all things, seen as impairing the students' disability to learn. I say this because I look at our 6th grade curriculum, and find no class for biology, chemistry and physics. And in high-school, biology is only in 10th grade, chemistry in 11th and physics is an option for 12th grade. We also don't have any foreign language classes in elementary school. Surely there's area for academic improvement there.

The School Committee and Dr. Ash have also recently discussed stress. The Committee has set as a district goal the following: "If we increase student pro-social behavior and resiliency, and reduce sources of unhealthy student stress, then student academic performance and well-being will improve".

<http://lhs.lexingtonma.org/Stress%20and%20Resiliency/bboard.html#goal3>

Now that is a very balanced statement, which mentions resilience and social behavior affecting stress. Also, the statement makes clear that it is only 'unhealthy' stress that should be reduced - and that the goal is still to increase academic performance. This is nowhere near what the advertising email expressed - which is, point blank, that academic study impairs the ability to learn.

\*

Please don't misunderstand me. I'm not proposing that we should organize for counter-balance "Waiting for Superman" screenings. I don't think that the school district should be expected to evenly advertise movies for all political views. And it's OK for the district to screen movies, once in a while. (Incidentally, "Waiting for Superman" is not a much better movie than "Race to Nowhere".)

Also, the district can very well express itself about national education politics. The Superintendent's letter "Politicians could benefit from elementary lesson" was quite political, but well argued and a pleasure to read:

<http://www.wickedlocal.com/lexington/news/opinions/x911070453/Our-Schools-Politicians-could-benefit-from-elementary-lesson#axzz1InxVXXG>

But what I'd like to ask, though, is that emails sent to the [LexingtonPublicSchools-MA\\_scs@gcnotify.com](mailto:LexingtonPublicSchools-MA_scs@gcnotify.com) list be reviewed for content to ensure they express clearly which statements are town policy, which are the opinions of the email writers, and which are advertisements.

Cc: Lex School Committee <school-com@comet.ci.lexington.ma.us>  
Attachments: Attach0.html 7K  
Attach1.txt 1K

Paul:

This does not address my 2 questions at all.

Do you have answers to what I believe are 2 critical questions?

Patrick

Begin forwarded message:

**From:** "Paul B. Ash" <[pash@sch.ci.lexington.ma.us](mailto:pash@sch.ci.lexington.ma.us)>

**Date:** May 5, 2011 2:07:13 PM EDT

**To:** [patrick.mehr@gmail.com](mailto:patrick.mehr@gmail.com)

**Subject:** Re: A sign of serious problems?

Patrick:

In all three cases, the employees have said they are voluntarily leaving. That's true.

Paul

**Patrick Mehr** <[patrick.mehr@gmail.com](mailto:patrick.mehr@gmail.com)> writes:

[wickedlocal.com/lexington/news/x1826251131/Two-longtime-Lexington-High-teachers-call-it-a-career](http://wickedlocal.com/lexington/news/x1826251131/Two-longtime-Lexington-High-teachers-call-it-a-career)

<http://www.wickedlocal.com/lexington/news/x1826251131/Two-longtime->

12

Lexington-High-teachers-call-it-a-careerPaul:

This is very distressing, and possibly the sign of serious problems at LHS and LPS that "data" cannot flag -- unless "data" includes what we learn from serious exit interviews with departing teachers (if they are willing to be candid).

Two questions re "Now [teachers] don't stay":

1. How has the rate of departures of teachers changed over the past 10-20 years at LHS and LPS?
2. What do exit interviews with departing teachers tell us about why they leave? Have the reasons changed over time?

Patrick

-----

From: Patrick Mehr <patrick.mehr@gmail.com> May 5, 2011  
5:02:26 PM  
Subject: [School-com] Re: A sign of serious problems?  
To: pash@sch.ci.lexington.ma.us  
Cc: Lex School Committee <school-com@comet.ci.lexington.ma.us>  
Attachments: Attach0.html 12K  
Attach1.txt 1K

Paul:



I don't understand your answers.

1. What does "No" mean? What has the % turnover each year been for teachers (i.e. # departing teachers as a % of total # of teachers employes that school year) year by year over the past 10-20 years? We need to know whether that turnover rate has increased -- as Michael Fiveash told the Minuteman --, and if so by how much and (as per #2 below) why.

2. What are the reasons why teachers leave the LPS? Do we believe our exit interviews provide meaningful information, i.e. are departing teachers candid in the exit interview? Can you share the exit interview questionnaire and how results are processed?

Patrick

On May 5, 2011, at 2:29 PM, Paul B. Ash wrote:

Question 1 No

Question 2 Yes. I have no evidence there has been a change since I started work in Lexington.

Paul

Patrick Mehr <[patrick.mehr@gmail.com](mailto:patrick.mehr@gmail.com)> writes:

Paul:

This does not address my 2 questions at all.

Do you have answers to what I believe are 2 critical questions?

Patrick

12  
Begin forwarded message:

**From:** "Paul B. Ash" <[pash@sch.ci.lexington.ma.us](mailto:pash@sch.ci.lexington.ma.us)>

**Date:** May 5, 2011 2:07:13 PM EDT

**To:** [patrick.mehr@gmail.com](mailto:patrick.mehr@gmail.com)

**Subject:** Re: A sign of serious problems?

Patrick:

In all three cases, the employees have said they are voluntarily leaving. That's true.

Paul

**Patrick Mehr** <[patrick.mehr@gmail.com](mailto:patrick.mehr@gmail.com)> writes:

[wickedlocal.com/lexington/news/x1826251131/Two-longtime-Lexington-High-teachers-call-it-a-career](http://wickedlocal.com/lexington/news/x1826251131/Two-longtime-Lexington-High-teachers-call-it-a-career)

<http://www.wickedlocal.com/lexington/news/x1826251131/Two-longtime-Lexington-High-teachers-call-it-a-career>Paul:

This is very distressing, and possibly the sign of serious problems at LHS and LPS that "data" cannot flag -- unless "data" includes what we learn from serious exit interviews with departing teachers (if they are willing to be candid).

Two questions re "Now [teachers] don't stay":

1. How has the rate of departures of teachers changed over the past 10-20 years at LHS and LPS?

2. What do exit interviews with departing teachers tell us about why they leave? Have the reasons changed over time?

Patrick

-----

From: Patrick Mehr <patrick.mehr@gmail.com> May 5, 2011  
 8:35:04 PM  
 Subject: [School-com] Re: A sign of serious problems?  
 To: pash@sch.ci.lexington.ma.us  
 Cc: Lex School Committee <school-com@comet.ci.lexington.ma.us>  
 Attachments: Attach0.html 16K  
 Attach1.txt 1K

Paul:

The fact that you would have to "[spend] staff time" to answer these basic questions (not about "retirees" by the way, but about ALL teachers leaving us, for example Caitlin Smith a few years ago who left LHS for Concord-Carlisle HS) shows that we do not have an effective way in place to track the number of departures, let alone the reasons for

departures.

I hope the SC is as concerned as I am by this lack of visibility into this critical issue.

People, be they parents -- as you will learn from my friends with whom we are meeting soon --, or teachers, vote with their feet.

Patrick

On May 5, 2011, at 9:12 PM, Paul B. Ash wrote:

Patrick:

I have no intention of spending staff time answering your specific questions. I told you that I have not seen any change in the number of retirees in the past six years. Their reasons are personal.

Paul

Patrick Mehr <[patrick.mehr@gmail.com](mailto:patrick.mehr@gmail.com)> writes:

Paul:

I don't understand your answers.

1. What does "No" mean? What has the % turnover each year been for teachers (i.e. # departing teachers as a % of total # of teachers employes that school year) year by year over the past 10-20 years? We need to know whether that turnover rate has increased -- as Michael Fiveash told the Minuteman --, and if so by how much and (as per #2 below) why.

Begin forwarded message:

**From:** "Paul B. Ash" <[pash@sch.ci.lexington.ma.us](mailto:pash@sch.ci.lexington.ma.us)>

**Date:** May 5, 2011 2:07:13 PM EDT

**To:** [patrick.mehr@gmail.com](mailto:patrick.mehr@gmail.com)

**Subject:** Re: A sign of serious problems?

Patrick:

In all three cases, the employees have said they are voluntarily leaving. That's true.

Paul

**Patrick Mehr** <[patrick.mehr@gmail.com](mailto:patrick.mehr@gmail.com)> writes:

[wickedlocal.com/lexington/news/x1826251131/Two-longtime-Lexington-High-teachers-call-it-a-career](http://wickedlocal.com/lexington/news/x1826251131/Two-longtime-Lexington-High-teachers-call-it-a-career)

<http://www.wickedlocal.com/lexington/news/x1826251131/Two-longtime-Lexington-High-teachers-call-it-a-career>Paul:

This is very distressing, and possibly the sign of serious problems at LHS and LPS that "data" cannot flag -- unless "data" includes what we learn from serious exit interviews with departing teachers (if they are willing to be candid).

Two questions re "Now [teachers] don't stay":

1. How has the rate of departures of teachers changed over the past 10-20 years at LHS and LPS?

2. What do exit interviews with departing teachers tell us about why they leave? Have the reasons changed over time?

Patrick

-----  
From: Jessica Steigerwald <jess@shininghours.com> May 6, 2011  
9:29:42 AM  
Subject: [School-com] Exit interviews?  
To: pash@sch.ci.lexington.ma.us  
Cc: School Committee Committee <school-com@comet.ci.lexington.ma.us>

Dear Paul,

Can you tell us how we use exit interviews? Do we? Can we?  
Many people consider them an important source of data for organizations seeking continuous improvement.

I would like LPS to have adequate resources to take advantage of an exit interview

process, and would like to hear your thoughts.

Jessie Steigerwald  
School-com mailing list  
School-com@comet.ci.lexington.ma.us  
<http://comet.ci.lexington.ma.us/mailman/listinfo/school-com>

-----

From: Jessica Steigerwald <jess@shininghours.com> May 6, 2011  
10:57:08 AM  
Subject: [School-com] Re: Exit interviews?  
To: pash@sch.ci.lexington.ma.us  
Cc: School Committee Committee <school-com@comet.ci.lexington.ma.us>  
Attachments: Attach0.html 5K  
Attach1.txt 1K

Dear Paul- my question isn't about any specific instance - now or in the past. But In a data driven culture, Why would anecdotal be fine for this aspect of our personnel vs. a paper completed on exit,  
- some form of information collection could make as much sense for us as for any other large organization.  
I am interested to read about possible update from LEA, especially Since Phyllis wanted to have them included in your evaluation! Makes sense for them to check in with members...

Jessie Steigerwald

On May 6, 2011, at 10:46 AM, "Paul B. Ash" <[pash@sch.ci.lexington.ma.us](mailto:pash@sch.ci.lexington.ma.us)> wrote:

Jessie:  
I would have to speak with the each of nine the principals if we decide to conduct a formal review. I do not think that is necessary. From my perspective, almost all resignations and retirements are routine and the reasons are very clear.

Teachers are very forthcoming as to why they leave. It is very rare that the reason(s) for departures are a mystery. If I thought teachers were leaving due to factors we could control (except non-rehires), I would be alarmed. I seriously do not see a problem here. Actually, during the past six years, the number of hires has decreased from about 80ish to 50 to 60.

Regarding your point that we would benefit from teacher feedback, we do have such a process. Two years ago, we conducted with MTA and LEA an anonymous survey of all teachers. The survey was quite comprehensive (morale, supplies, leadership, curriculum, etc.) Phyllis and I just discussed repeating the survey again this spring or fall. Personally, I like the use of all-staff anonymous surveys better than just exit interviews. The results help principals learn about their schools and help me support them.

Paul

**Jessica Steigerwald <[jess@shininghours.com](mailto:jess@shininghours.com)> writes:**  
Dear Paul,

Can you tell us how we use exit interviews? Do we? Can we?  
Many people consider them an important source of data for organizations seeking continuous improvement.

I would like LPS to have adequate resources to take advantage of an exit interview process, and would like to hear your thoughts.

Jessie Steigerwald

-----  
From: "Mary Ann Stewart" <[MaryAnn@redoniondesign.com](mailto:MaryAnn@redoniondesign.com)> May



11, 2011 1:44:20 PM

Subject: RE: [School-com] Salon article on high school English  
To: "JJ Krawczyk" <jjkrawlexington@gmail.com>  
Cc: school-com@comet.ci.lexington.ma.us

Thanks for the link, jj, this was a great read - I have shared it widely!

Best,  
Mary Ann.

-----Original Message-----

From: school-com-bounces@comet.ci.lexington.ma.us  
[mailto:school-com-bounces@comet.ci.lexington.ma.us] On Behalf Of JJ  
Krawczyk  
Sent: Wednesday, May 11, 2011 9:14 AM  
To: school-com@comet.ci.lexington.ma.us  
Subject: [School-com] Salon article on high school English

An interesting read from the view of a college composition instructor:

[http://www.salon.com/life/feature/2011/05/10/death\\_to\\_high\\_school\\_english/index.html](http://www.salon.com/life/feature/2011/05/10/death_to_high_school_english/index.html)

=====

It's hard to blame anyone for not wanting to teach writing, which, while it might not involve manual labor or public floggings, is hard, grueling work. Often it demands maximum effort for minimum payoff, headache-inducing attention to detail, wheelbarrows full of grading, revision after revision, conferences with teary-eyed students. Who wouldn't prefer to talk about books or stories or poems? Problem is, the hard, grueling work to be done doesn't go away. Ask any college composition teacher.

=====

FWIW, the foundation set in the lower grades through middle school in Lexington, at least with my daughter, is really good. She does read 2-3 books (whole novels) a week though, which is probably a bit above the norm. ;)

JJ Krawczyk

---

**Date:** May 6, 2011 10:10:33 AM EDT

**To:** Mary Ann Stewart <[f.m.a.stewart@gmail.com](mailto:f.m.a.stewart@gmail.com)>

**Cc:** Paul Ash <[pash@sch.ci.lexington.ma.us](mailto:pash@sch.ci.lexington.ma.us)>, email list Lex TMMA <[lex-tmma@yahogroups.com](mailto:lex-tmma@yahogroups.com)>

**Subject:** Teacher departures a sign of problems in our schools?

Mary Ann:

After reading [wickedlocal.com/lexington/news/x1826251131/Two-longtime-Lexington-High-teachers-call-it-a-career](http://wickedlocal.com/lexington/news/x1826251131/Two-longtime-Lexington-High-teachers-call-it-a-career), I asked Paul Ash whether the number of teachers leaving our Schools has increased over time.

The Schools do not track that metric, nor know what exit interviews with departing teachers -- if conducted -- say about why teachers leave.

This is a serious gap in our efforts to keep the quality of our schools high.

What is the School Committee doing to understand why teachers -- and parents who send their kids to private schools -- vote with their feet re the quality of our schools?

Patrick Mehr

Pct 3

-----

From: Patrick Mehr <patrick.mehr@gmail.com> May 10, 2011  
11:45:51 AM  
Subject: [School-com] Re: Teacher departures a sign of problems in our  
schools?  
To: pash@sch.ci.lexington.ma.us  
Cc: Lex School Committee <school-com@comet.ci.lexington.ma.us>  
Attachments: Attach0.html 24K  
Attach1.txt 1K

On May 10, 2011, at 11:31 AM, Paul B. Ash wrote:

Patrick:

I have to focus school department energy on what is productive. As a consultant, I know you know that leaders need to focus on high leverage strategies and monitor those areas that are important.

Figuring whether our schools are indeed "excellent" (as we keep saying) is "important", and knowing, based on hard data, how many teachers (and families) vote with their feet and why, is indispensable to figure out whether our schools are indeed as "excellent" as we believe they are. MCAS scores and other such measures are too easy to do well on to mean much at all.

Since I do not believe we have a overall personnel problem,

How do you know that?

I see no value in spending staff time making your study a priority. As I told you in a prior email, teachers are very forthcoming about why they leave.

So where is the analysis of teacher exit interviews? Clearly you don't have it: if you did, you'd know what % of employed teachers leave the LPS each year.

It is very rare any teacher leaves because they are unhappy.

How "rare"? Do you have such data, or are you just giving your impression? My impression is that Girondel and Fiveash are in fact leaving because they are unhappy.

While there are always some cases in any organization, there have been very few in my six years in town.

How many? Who? Girondel and Fiveash are certainly not your run-of-the-mill teachers, so they could be the tip of an iceberg I, the SC and possibly you do not see.

For example, you mentioned that one teacher left LHS to go to Concord-Carlisle. I know for a fact that the major reason was to teach four classes, not five. If we were to go back to four classes, that would cost over 1 million dollars.

But maybe it's well worth it. \$1 million is small compared with what we could save for example if the Town Manager dealt with the health benefits spousal issue more actively.

I respect your right to ask questions.

Thank you. Your last few emails suggested otherwise (to me).

I just don't see a problem that is worthy of staff time, given other priorities.

I disagree.

And I look forward to the SC's answer to my question <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/lex-tmma/message/14065>.

Paul

Patrick:

I have no intention of spending staff time answering your specific questions. I told you that I have not seen any change in the number of retirees in the past six years. Their reasons are personal.

Paul

**Patrick Mehr <[patrick.mehr@gmail.com](mailto:patrick.mehr@gmail.com)> writes:**

Mary Ann:

I can't attend the SC tonight, so I emailed you.

Did you receive my May 6 email (below)?

When can we expect an answer?

Patrick Mehr

Pct 3

Begin forwarded message:

**From:** Patrick Mehr <[patrick.mehr@gmail.com](mailto:patrick.mehr@gmail.com)>

Patrick

Paul

Patrick Mehr <[patrick.mehr@gmail.com](mailto:patrick.mehr@gmail.com)> writes:

Paul:

You emailed this to me, not to Mary Ann.

"here" not "hear"

If you have the metric I am asking for -- % of employed teachers who leave the LPS each year, over the past 5-10-20 years, whatever time period you have the data for --, I don't understand why you don't share it.

If you don't track that metric -- as your previous email to me suggests --, there is a (serious) problem, which I'm asking the SC to look into.

Patrick

On May 10, 2011, at 11:16 AM, Paul B. Ash wrote:

Mary Ann:

Patrick sent me the same email. Here is what I said to him. I don't see a problem. Unless the committee directs me to answer him, I am not hear to answer Patrick's questions.

Paul

Patrick:

I have no intention of spending staff time answering your specific questions. I told you that I have not seen any change in the number of retirees in the past six years. Their reasons are personal.

Paul

**Patrick Mehr <[patrick.mehr@gmail.com](mailto:patrick.mehr@gmail.com)> writes:**

Mary Ann:

I can't attend the SC tonight, so I emailed you.

Did you receive my May 6 email (below)?

When can we expect an answer?

Patrick Mehr

Pct 3

Begin forwarded message:

**From:** Patrick Mehr <[patrick.mehr@gmail.com](mailto:patrick.mehr@gmail.com)>

**Date:** May 6, 2011 10:10:33 AM EDT

**To:** Mary Ann Stewart <[f.m.a.stewart@gmail.com](mailto:f.m.a.stewart@gmail.com)>

**Cc:** Paul Ash <[pash@sch.ci.lexington.ma.us](mailto:pash@sch.ci.lexington.ma.us)>, email list Lex TMMA <[lex-tmma@yahogroups.com](mailto:lex-tmma@yahogroups.com)>

**Subject:** Teacher departures a sign of problems in our schools?

Mary Ann:

After reading [wickedlocal.com/lexington/news/x1826251131/Two-longtime-Lexington-High-teachers-call-it-a-career](http://wickedlocal.com/lexington/news/x1826251131/Two-longtime-Lexington-High-teachers-call-it-a-career), I asked Paul Ash whether the number of teachers leaving our Schools has increased over time.

The Schools do not track that metric, nor know what exit interviews with departing teachers -- if conducted -- say about why teachers leave.

This is a serious gap in our efforts to keep the quality of our schools high.

What is the School Committee doing to understand why teachers -- and parents who send their kids to private schools -- vote with their feet re the quality of our schools?



Patrick Mehr

Pct 3

-----

From: "Paul B. Ash" <pash@sch.ci.lexington.ma.us> May 10, 2011  
11:57:15 AM  
Subject: [School-com] Re: Teacher departures a sign of problems in our  
schools?  
To: patrick.mehr@gmail.com  
Cc: school-com@comet.ci.lexington.ma.us  
Attachments: Attach0.html 22K  
Attach1.txt 1K

Patrick:

Our enrollment has been increasing. While some parents have chosen to enroll their children in non-public schools, we are not seeing flight from the Lexington Public Schools. Having said that, I am still interested in individual stories, which is why I look forward to the meeting you scheduled with a parent that chose to remove his/her child (children?) from LPS. Regarding your other questions, I don't see a personnel problem, because we regularly talk to teachers about their work satisfaction and collect information through anonymous surveys. These surveys have provided me with information from teachers on a whole range of issues (e.g, morale, leadership, professional development, supplies, etc.). In addition, the overall number of teachers leaving each year has been going down from about 80 my first year to about mid-50s now. While some

of that decline may be due to the economy, we don't see departures going up.

Paul

Figuring whether our schools are indeed "excellent" (as we keep saying) is "important", and knowing, based on hard data, how many teachers (and families) vote with their feet and why, is indispensable to figure out whether our schools are indeed as "excellent" as we believe they are. MCAS scores and other such measures are too easy to do well on to mean much at all.

Since I do not believe we have a overall personnel problem,

How do you know that?

I see no value in spending staff time making your study a priority. As I told you in a prior email, teachers are very forthcoming about why they leave.

So where is the analysis of teacher exit interviews? Clearly you don't have it: if you did, you'd know what % of employed teachers leave the LPS each year.

It is very rare any teacher leaves because they are unhappy.

How "rare"? Do you have such data, or are you just giving your impression? My impression is that Girondel and Fiveash are in fact leaving because they are unhappy.

While there are always some cases in any organization, there have been very few in my six years in town.

How many? Who? Girondel and Fiveash are certainly not your run-of-the-mill teachers, so they could be the tip of an iceberg I, the SC and possibly you do not see.

For example, you mentioned that one teacher left LHS to go to Concord-Carlisle. I know for a fact that the major reason was to teach four classes, not five. If we were to go back to four classes, that would cost over 1 million dollars.

But maybe it's well worth it. \$1 million is small compared with what we could save for example if the Town Manager dealt with the health benefits spousal issue more actively.

I respect your right to ask questions.

Thank you. Your last few emails suggested otherwise (to me).

I just don't see a problem that is worthy of staff time, given other priorities.

I disagree.

And I look forward to the SC's answer to my question <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/lex-tmna/message/14065>.

Patrick

Paul

Patrick Mehr <[patrick.mehr@gmail.com](mailto:patrick.mehr@gmail.com)> writes:

Paul:

You emailed this to me, not to Mary Ann.

"here" not "hear"

If you have the metric I am asking for -- % of employed teachers who leave the LPS each year, over the past 5-10-20 years, whatever time period you have the data for --, I don't understand why you don't share it.

If you don't track that metric -- as your previous email to me suggests --, there is a (serious) problem, which I'm asking the SC to look into.

Patrick

On May 10, 2011, at 11:16 AM, Paul B. Ash wrote:

Mary Ann:

Patrick sent me the same email. Here is what I said to him. I don't see a problem. Unless the committee directs me to answer him, I am not hear to answer Patrick's questions.

Paul

Patrick:

I have no intention of spending staff time answering your specific questions. I told you that I have not seen any change in the number of retirees in the past six years. Their reasons are personal.

Paul

Patrick Mehr <[patrick.mehr@gmail.com](mailto:patrick.mehr@gmail.com)> writes:

Mary Ann:

I can't attend the SC tonight, so I emailed you.

Did you receive my May 6 email (below)?

When can we expect an answer?

Patrick Mehr  
Pct 3

Begin forwarded message:

**From:** Patrick Mehr <[patrick.mehr@gmail.com](mailto:patrick.mehr@gmail.com)>

**Date:** May 6, 2011 10:10:33 AM EDT

**To:** Mary Ann Stewart <[f.m.a.stewart@gmail.com](mailto:f.m.a.stewart@gmail.com)>

**Cc:** Paul Ash <[pash@sch.ci.lexington.ma.us](mailto:pash@sch.ci.lexington.ma.us)>, email list Lex TMMA <[lex-tmma@yahoogroups.com](mailto:lex-tmma@yahoogroups.com)>

**Subject:** Teacher departures a sign of problems in our schools?

Mary Ann:

After reading [wickedlocal.com/lexington/news/x1826251131/Two-longtime-Lexington-High-teachers-call-it-a-career](http://wickedlocal.com/lexington/news/x1826251131/Two-longtime-Lexington-High-teachers-call-it-a-career), I asked Paul Ash whether the number of teachers leaving our Schools has increased over time.

The Schools do not track that metric, nor know what exit interviews with departing teachers

-- if conducted -- say about why teachers leave.

This is a serious gap in our efforts to keep the quality of our schools high.

What is the School Committee doing to understand why teachers -- and parents who send their kids to private schools -- vote with their feet re the quality of our schools?

Patrick Mehr

Pct 3

-----

From: Patrick Mehr <patrick.mehr@gmail.com> May 10, 2011  
12:09:21 PM  
Subject: [School-com] Re: Teacher departures a sign of problems in our schools?  
To: pash@sch.ci.lexington.ma.us  
Cc: school-com@comet.ci.lexington.ma.us  
Attachments: Attach0.html 25K  
Attach1.txt 1K

But you don't have exit interviews.

That 80 is now 50 is great, but rare data points -- say a Girondel or Fiveash being driven nuts by whatever we do that also keeps the best teachers from choosing Lexington as they used to -- that would tell us we have an unrecognized problem are not available because we don't do serious exit interviews.

Patrick

On May 10, 2011, at 11:57 AM, Paul B. Ash wrote:

Patrick:

Our enrollment has been increasing. While some parents have chosen to enroll their children in non-public schools, we are not seeing flight from the Lexington Public Schools. Having said that, I am still interested in individual stories, which is why I look forward to the meeting you scheduled with a parent that chose to remove his/her child (children?) from LPS. Regarding your other questions, I don't see a personnel problem, because we regularly talk to teachers about their work satisfaction and collect information through anonymous surveys. These surveys have provided me with information from teachers on a whole range of issues (e.g, morale, leadership, professional development, supplies, etc.). In addition, the overall number of teachers leaving each year has been going down from about 80 my first year to about mid-50s now. While some of that decline may be due to the economy, we don't see departures going up.

Paul

Figuring whether our schools are indeed "excellent" (as we keep saying) is "important", and knowing, based on hard data, how many teachers (and families) vote with their feet and why, is indispensable to figure out whether our schools are indeed as "excellent" as we believe they are. MCAS scores and other such measures are too easy to do well on to mean much at all.

Since I do not believe we have a overall personnel problem,

How do you know that?

I see no value in spending staff time making your study a priority. As I told you in a prior email, teachers are very forthcoming about why they leave.

So where is the analysis of teacher exit interviews? Clearly you don't have it: if you did, you'd know what % of employed teachers leave the LPS each year.

It is very rare any teacher leaves because they are unhappy.

How "rare"? Do you have such data, or are you just giving your impression? My impression is that Girondel and Fiveash are in fact leaving because they are unhappy.

While there are always some cases in any organization, there have been very few in my six years in town.

How many? Who? Girondel and Fiveash are certainly not your run-of-the-mill teachers, so they could be the tip of an iceberg I, the SC and possibly you do not see.

For example, you mentioned that one teacher left LHS to go to Concord-Carlisle. I know for a fact that the major reason was to teach four classes, not five. If we were to go back to four classes, that would cost over 1 million dollars.

But maybe it's well worth it. \$1 million is small compared with what we could



save for example if the Town Manager dealt with the health benefits spousal issue more actively.

I respect your right to ask questions.

Thank you. Your last few emails suggested otherwise (to me).

I just don't see a problem that is worthy of staff time, given other priorities.

I disagree.

And I look forward to the SC's answer to my question <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/lex-tmma/message/14065>.

Patrick

Paul

Patrick Mehr <[patrick.mehr@gmail.com](mailto:patrick.mehr@gmail.com)> writes:

Paul:

You emailed this to me, not to Mary Ann.

"here" not "hear"

If you have the metric I am asking for -- % of employed teachers who leave the LPS each year, over the past 5-10-20 years, whatever time period you have the data for --, I don't understand why you don't share it.

If you don't track that metric -- as your previous email to me suggests --, there is a (serious) problem, which I'm asking the SC to look into.

Patrick

On May 10, 2011, at 11:16 AM, Paul B. Ash wrote:

Mary Ann:

Patrick sent me the same email. Here is what I said to him. I don't see a problem. Unless the committee directs me to answer him, I am not hear to answer Patrick's questions.

Paul

Patrick:

I have no intention of spending staff time answering your specific questions. I told you that I have not seen any change in the number of retirees in the past six years. Their reasons are personal.

Paul

**Patrick Mehr** <[patrick.mehr@gmail.com](mailto:patrick.mehr@gmail.com)> writes:

Mary Ann:

I can't attend the SC tonight, so I emailed you.

Did you receive my May 6 email (below)?

When can we expect an answer?

Patrick Mehr

Pct 3

Begin forwarded message:

**From:** Patrick Mehr <[patrick.mehr@gmail.com](mailto:patrick.mehr@gmail.com)>

**Date:** May 6, 2011 10:10:33 AM EDT

**To:** Mary Ann Stewart <[f.m.a.stewart@gmail.com](mailto:f.m.a.stewart@gmail.com)>

**Cc:** Paul Ash <[pash@sch.ci.lexington.ma.us](mailto:pash@sch.ci.lexington.ma.us)>, email list Lex TMMA  
<[lex-tmma@yahogroups.com](mailto:lex-tmma@yahogroups.com)>

**Subject:** Teacher departures a sign of problems in our schools?

Mary Ann:

After reading [wickedlocal.com/lexington/news/x1826251131/Two-longtime-Lexington-High-teachers-call-it-a-career](http://wickedlocal.com/lexington/news/x1826251131/Two-longtime-Lexington-High-teachers-call-it-a-career), I asked Paul Ash whether the number of teachers leaving our Schools has increased over time.

The Schools do not track that metric, nor know what exit interviews with departing teachers -- if conducted -- say about why teachers leave.

This is a serious gap in our efforts to keep the quality of our schools high.

What is the School Committee doing to understand why teachers -- and parents who send their kids to private schools -- vote with their feet re the quality of our schools?

Patrick Mehr

Pct 3

-----

From: Patrick Mehr <patrick.mehr@gmail.com> May 15, 2011  
 11:35:07 AM  
 Subject: [School-com] Re: [lex-tmma] Fwd: Teacher departures a sign of  
 problems in our sch  
 To: Lex School Committee <school-com@comet.ci.lexington.ma.us>  
 Cc: 'email list Lex TMMA' <lex-tmma@yahoogroups.com>  
 pash@sch.ci.lexington.ma.us  
 Attachments: Attach0.html 43K  
 Attach1.txt 1K

Mary Ann:

Since your email (below) does not answer my question

"[Having] asked Paul Ash, [it turns out that] The Schools do not track [whether the number of teachers leaving our Schools has increased over time], nor know what exit interviews with departing teachers -- if conducted -- say about why teachers leave. [...] What is the School Committee doing to understand why teachers -- and parents who send their kids to private schools -- vote with their feet re the quality of our schools?" (<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/lex-tmma/message/14065>),

I suppose the real answer is NOTHING.

The 50 to 80 annual departures Paul cites do not constitute a time-line. My exchange with Paul on this was as "substantive" as your email below: Paul made claims not supported by facts or data, indicating that we track neither # teachers leaving the LPS over time, nor why.

I find it strange that you do not view this issue as within the SC's purview -- as part of evaluating our Superintendent's performance. How does the SC ensure that indeed "our schools are great", rather than just asserting it (as your email does) over and over again? Since excellent teachers leave and some families send their kids to private schools instead of to ours, could it be that we are doing certain things wrong that the SC is unaware of?

Can you share the results of the LEA teacher survey from two years ago?

It's Phyllis Neufeld, not Neufield.

Patrick Mehr  
Pct 3

On May 14, 2011, at 4:29 PM, Mary Ann Stewart wrote:

Patrick:

You are right to draw attention to the importance and excellence of our teachers, but it would be severely limiting to underestimate the importance of other aspects (i.e., energy efficient buildings and clean environments, budgets that reflect goals and priorities, effective building leaders, or anything else) contributing to a positive school climate for teaching and learning.

I believe it is easy for people to underestimate the level of thought and collaboration necessary for a high functioning educational enterprise. Dr. Ash and his administrative team are attuned to all of these aspects and more, keeping the School Committee, Selectmen, Appropriation and Capital Expenditures Committees, Town Manager and others apprised of emerging issues or developments across the district, especially as they relate to people, programs, and facilities.

Our students continue to be well served due to the high quality of instruction to students from our educators, the engagement of our students and families, and also to our nationally recognized high level of commitment to professional development and collaboration with the LEA. Because the community and district place such a high value on these attributes, our schools continue to improve.

Two years ago, the LEA surveyed all teachers on a full complement of issues; the administration has worked collaboratively with Phyllis Neufield and the LEA on the data obtained from that survey. Another such survey will be administered again in the near future. I believe this process fosters greater educator satisfaction and stability, as well as a more comprehensive and unified instructional program, thereby engendering further trust and collaboration from all involved.

Our schools are thoughtfully, collaboratively, and financially well run. Since you and Dr. Ash have had a substantive exchange on this issue already, you know the vast majority of teachers in Lexington are not departing from our schools and are committed to the goals of continuous improvement across the district. Dr. Ash stated that our teacher turnover rate is about 50 to 80 teachers per year out of a headcount of 660 teachers; the percentage turnover rate therefore has been 7.6% – 12% over six years.

The School Committee has to focus on topics where we need to deliberate and take action. We need to work hard to prioritize what we put on the agenda, whether it is with regard to special education, school technology, eliminating or reducing elementary music fees, improving professional learning communities, professional development, or many other goals already identified.

You are concerned and anxious that the departure of two well-beloved, long-time teachers constitutes an institutional problem. These teachers could have retired some years ago as they had reached their full retirement benefit. That they chose to do so at this point in time was their personal decision. Dr. Fiveash and Mme. Girondel each served our students for 38 generous, dedicated years of teaching. They will be missed and I hope you will join me in thanking them for their contributions.

Mary Ann.

PS: In the future, kindly direct all School Committee related correspondence to [school-com@comet.ci.lexington.ma.us](mailto:school-com@comet.ci.lexington.ma.us).

Mary Ann Stewart,

Chair | Lexington School Committee

-----

**From:** Patrick Mehr [mailto:patrick.mehr@gmail.com]  
**Sent:** Friday, May 13, 2011 11:33 AM  
**To:** Mary Ann Stewart  
**Cc:** 'Paul Ash'; 'email list Lex TMMA'  
**Subject:** Re: [lex-tmma] Fwd: Teacher departures a sign of problems in our schools?

Thanks, Mary Ann, I look forward to your answer.

A letter in the *Minuteman* (attached) describes in its last paragraph my concern: notwithstanding what we, and our Superintendent, say, do we actually do day-to-day what we preach to keep our schools excellent?