

LEXINGTON SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEETING
Saturday, March 15, 2007
Clarke Middle School Auditorium
17 Stedman Road

Present: Superintendent Paul Ash, School Committee Chair Tom Diaz, School Committee Members Helen Cohen, Margaret Coppe, Tom Griffiths and Ravi Sakhujia. Minutes taken by Leora Tec.

I. Call to Order and Welcome (Tom Diaz)

Mr. Diaz summarized the budget process to date.

II. Discussion Items:

A. Public Hearing

Carolyn Kelly (Clarke librarian): I've been forced to think about the fact that students might not come to middle school prepared to do research if the elementary school librarians are cut. We would need to start the process in 6th grade that has historically begun in kindergarten. I have worked most of my career in the high school. This proposed cut will affect projects assigned across the grade levels. Please preserve a more than 40 year old program that impacts the education of every Lexington student.

Mary Ann Stewart: Thank you for offering these public hearings. Shame on the state for not providing more education funding. I advocate for our children in many different forums in the state. We need to come together to work for the schools. We must pass the override. We need vision and action on that vision. Dr. Ash has provided a vision, now we must take action.

Leslie Bove : You brought up the cost of the out of district placements, but we are losing a SPED teacher at the elementary level so the out of district costs will continue to climb.

Paul Ash: In my conversations with Dr. Mary Sullivan Kelly and Mr. Russo they believe they are responsible cuts. No kids are at danger for going out of district due to these cuts.

Jesse Steigerwald: If the at-risk list were implemented and the principal is out of the building, the assistant principal is in a meeting, the METCO aide is not there anymore and our teacher is ill, who watches the children if there are no aides?

Paul Ash: If there is an adjoining classroom, the teacher in the next room. Longer term the principal or assistant principal has to be called back to the building.

Jesse Steigerwald: If there literally is nobody extra...

Paul Ash: Would we have reduced capacity to deal with unforeseen circumstances, no question about it.

Jesse Steigerwald: If class sizes were to increase, do we still ask all our teachers to differentiate instruction if we don't have literacy specialists?

Paul Ash: There are literacy coaches and half a literacy teacher per school on the at-risk list. This will be less support to classroom teachers. They do teach teachers to differentiate instruction. We will have more struggling readers and that will affect their ability to learn in all content areas and more kids will be referred to special ed.

Jesse Steigerwald: What if science frameworks change suddenly and there is no central science person, how will the teachers get the proper training?

Helen Cohen: The literacy specialists and the math specialists are important but also the larger class sizes will make differentiated instruction more difficult.

Paul Ash: You need curriculum specialists because you rely on a textbook but not all teachers are strong in every subject. With curriculum coordination you have higher standards. They improve the pedagogy of the teachers.

Jesse Steigerwald: Be careful if you are asked to prioritize these items. There should be support for second year teachers. If we don't have night custodians can the PTA still have night events?

Paul Ash: It will limit the ability of the school system to make that space available to organizations and to PTAs. The model that I put forward moves us from custodians who clean and do a whole lot of other very important things in addition to cleaning. And so, there is no doubt in my mind that PTAs would have limited access at the elementary level, they might have to go back to holding the meetings at the secondary schools because we have custodians on duty. And it will have just the adverse impact that you stated.

Dawn McKenna: I don't understand the philosophy underlying the cuts. We are willing to sacrifice employees who have been loyal to the system for many, many years in order to take away their benefits. I don't like that as a community statement. We're willing to terminate the long-term 40 year plus German program and yet at the same time introduce a brand new language into the middle schools. We're taking service away from kids during the school day and leaving all the after school programs. Let's make the after school things fully fee based to save librarians. We are willing to put literacy specialists and librarians at risk. The utilities for the White House are being budgeted for the '08 budget and yet you are vacating the White House. The Old Harrington is now empty and the use won't be as intense as it was as a school. The budget must assume that the override won't pass. The things at risk should be the things that are not services to children.

Tom Diaz: By after school programs do you mean athletics and extended day? We have increased those fees dramatically in recent years. We are increasing athletic fees in this budget. I would not want to further increase fees on room rentals because we already did so much damage to the after school programs.

Tom Griffiths: Mrs. McKenna has spoken on a number of occasions against the introduction of the Mandarin program in the middle school. We look at how important each language is and will be to our children. We should also look at our population here in Lexington. In the future Mandarin will be more important than German. To continue to labor this point strikes me as missing the point.

Dr. James Flynn: I moved here for the schools. I am disappointed in Lexington. We need to be more creative than relying on overrides. Maybe we could dig into our own pockets. Cutting the custodial force is an easy target but it says a lot of shameful things about us if that is what we do. Is the override going to be tiered? What did Winchester do?

Tom Diaz: Let me commend you for suggesting corporate sponsorships even though it doesn't sound like it's something...

James Flynn: Maybe not McDonald's, maybe Biogen...

Tom Diaz: We do have LEF. We don't use that money for operating expenses. We will discuss the structure of the override after we vote the bottom line. Another major source of financing is aid from the state and the federal government. I encourage you to join Stand for Children in lobbying for more state aid.

James Flynn: Maybe parents can volunteer more. I understand there was some heated commentary at the last meeting from the custodial forces that was quite touching. It reflects on the community if those are the things you are targeting. Those are things you could do better. What would it take per child in dollars?

Ravi Sakhuja: About 750 per child. It's clear that the system forces us to do this but we are not recommending these cuts. If any of you have ideas we want to hear them.

Margaret Coppe: The Selectmen decide how to structure the override.

Helen Cohen: We are part of a phenomenon that is happening everywhere. In Winchester they passed an override but their education foundation pays \$400K of teachers salaries.

James Flynn: I'm not in favor of cutting anything.

Diane Biglow: Does the School Committee write to the state and federal officials to get state funding?

Several members of the Committee and Paul Ash explained what the committee does to lobby the state. Tom Diaz mentioned the Stand for Children rally on April 25th.

Diane Biglow: Should we call newspapers/TV and write editorials?

Tom Diaz: Yes, make sure Melissa Beecher (Globe Northwest reporter) is aware.

Diane Biglow: The Massachusetts Association of School Committee plan will take 5 years?

Tom Diaz: Yes, because it is a ton of money. It is a plausible plan. Also, our enrollment will level off and maybe even decline a bit.

Diane Biglow: We are going to build three more schools. Do we take loans for 20 years?

Tom Diaz: Yes.

Diane Biglow: This has nothing to do with this school budget? Are we still paying for the high school?

Dawn McKenna: We are still paying on a 20-year schedule.

Tom Diaz explained debt exclusions versus overrides. Both he and Helen Cohen pointed out that the School Committee can't ignore other needs in town such as the senior center and the DPW.

Kate Cremens-Basbas: The proposed phys ed and wellness reductions will reduce collaboration, communication, and coordination between students and faculty. Elementary students and parents have already noticed the loss of the health educators. The health curriculum frameworks have standards and objectives that can't be met in these limited hours. Last night there was a substance abuse panel to which 70 parents came, earlier this year there was a parent athlete forum. The proposed changes diminish the program, reducing the leadership will delay implementation of initiatives. Eating disorders, type 2 diabetes, and advertising, are everywhere; the kids need critical thinking, we shouldn't leave it to media or corporations to educate our kids. The wellness model brings all of us together around youth and health.

Tom Diaz: What's the difference between phys ed and athletics in 25 words or less?

Kate Cremens-Basbas: Athletes often don't have a balance. Athletics is elite and competitive. Phys ed is more holistic.

Ravi Sakhuja: I have worked with Kate over the last 6 months as a member of CPY in line with the school program on Internet and media. We brought in speakers on children's engagement with Internet and their risky behavior and exposing themselves to additional risks from pedophiles and predators. CPY also had speakers on the effect of media on children's behavior and parents' guidelines regarding disciplining children. I have been educated by you and others. These are very serious issues. It is a community issue. I appreciate the leadership you are providing.

Kalie Kosso: For 4.9 million what is the cost per 1000 of assessed tax value?

Tom Diaz: \$400 for the average household.

Pam Hoffman (Stand member and Estabrook PTA president): Thanks for mentioning Stand rally on April 25th on Boston Common. Last year close to 1000 people did lobbying that increased funding by 126 million dollars.

Jill Brandwain-Fryar (Teacher at Clarke and parent of LHS student): I appreciate the teachers and the librarians. I support them. I value the custodial staff incredibly. I hope there is a way for us to come together.

Gina Cobin: The healthiest schools are schools with happy teachers. People need to be more open. Countdown to kindergarten in Boston where businesses are involved or parents are involved is a great program.

B. Fiscal 08 Budget

Paul Ash: Thank you to Mary Ellen Dunn. The budget is now up 8.89% not 10.42% It has been reduced by 1.6% since Jan 16. There was still \$291K to find for the at-risk list on March 6th. I trimmed the amount for bargaining in good faith with all our unions by \$291K. At the last School Committee meeting you voted capital projects to reduce energy costs so those energy savings are factored in. We will also have a reserve for unemployment insurance, \$120K, if the override should fail. So, the total amount needed beyond proposition 2.5 funding is \$3.9 million. The projected number of SPED out of district students is 111. (The number is currently 131).

The discussion included the fact that more SPED students will be grouped together in classrooms because of fewer SPED IAs, and the cost of the NEASC review. Tom Diaz proposed putting the athletic fees back in the budget to make the override smaller (with an eventual goal of eliminating athletic fees), and having a separate override question just on fees. There was discussion on this, including the question of whether fees could be charged for things other than athletics.

The members, mainly Mr. Diaz, Mr. Sakhuja, and Mr. Griffiths, discussed the expected energy savings starting in FY08. The savings are estimated at \$300,000 per year starting in 2008 based on a specific set of capital projects. Net of \$180,000 of estimated annual finance costs in the next couple of years, there would be savings of \$120,000 to the bottom line.

In the 2007-2008 school year, there is a one-time additional amount available because finance charges will not hit the budget for the entire year; the consensus is that the one-time amount, whatever it may be, should be used only for some contingent, nonrecurring expense, such as unemployment compensation for employees laid off if the override should fail.

Mr. Diaz pointed out that if the consolidated facilities department is revived, energy expenses—and thus energy savings—would be in shared expenses.

Tom Griffiths: There is almost no part of the at-risk list that doesn't appall me on several levels. Paul and his advisors have done their job. I can't fault him for any of his suggestions. We have started the destruction of the school system. The real damage will be done if we don't fund the schools adequately. We are talking about irreversible damage potentially.

III. Motion to adjourn (Cohen, Coppe). The motion passed 5-0.

The next scheduled meetings of the School Committee are as follows:

- Monday, March 19 — 7:30 p.m. at Clarke Middle School Auditorium, 17 Stedman Road
- Tuesday, March 20 — 7:30 p.m. at Cary Hall Auditorium, 1605 Massachusetts Avenue