

**LEXINGTON SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEETING**  
**Monday, March 19, 2007**  
**Clarke Middle School Auditorium**  
**17 Stedman Road**

**Present: Superintendent Paul Ash, School Committee Chair Tom Diaz, School Committee Members Margaret Coppe, Tom Griffiths and Ravi Sakhuja. The minutes were taken by Leora Tec.**

**The meeting was convened at 7:41 p.m.**

**I. Call to Order and Welcome**

**II. Superintendent's Report**

Dr. Ash announced the people he appointed to be principals at Bridge (Jade Reitman), Bowman(Mary Anton-Oldenberg) and Harrington (Elaine Mead). He thanked the outgoing principals for their service

**III. Members' Reports / Members' Concerns**

**Ravi Sakhuja:** Dr. Sakhuja gave his response to the budget proposal and his suggestions for changes. These included: moving METCO children and thereby reducing elementary teachers, several questions for Dr. Ash.

**IV. Discussion Items:**

**A. Public Comment on the FY08 Budget**

**Nate Jaffe, Peter Tao, Olivia Shapiro, Paige Campbell** (Harrington 5<sup>th</sup> graders. They accompanied their friends to the mike)

**Rome Gandelsman:** The schools need the custodians. They are really nice and are our friends. The librarians are very special to me. I love reading they help me find books and help with Book Fair and Book Swap. If we just had aides they would not know where to find certain books.

**Talia Jaffe:** We need our custodians and librarians. The custodians are our friends. We need evening events. The librarians are our second teachers. Part-time aides won't know us well-enough. Last year I was devastated when the override did not pass.

**Liam Gandelsman:** You should not cut the night custodians and take away their health care. It will affect their families if they don't have health care. It will affect the teachers who know them and it will affect more and more people than just the custodians. The evening activities are part of the community and a great way to express yourself.

**Rabbi Jaffe:** Thanks to the School Committee and Dr. Ash for all the work you are doing in balancing the budget. No matter what is at risk it will be near and dear to

someone. I have the privilege of also serving this community as the vice chair of the Cary Memorial library Board of trustees . The library is very well-used in this community. We need to provide our students the opportunity to learn how a library works at as young an age as possible. Librarians are much more than someone who can point out a book. Please find a way to remove that item from the at-risk list. I too would like to speak to the matter of the custodians. We have the responsibility as a municipal institution especially to protect those who are the most vulnerable in our larger community. Working as a custodial staff member is a dignified job that pays a small amount of money and provides the precious benefits that make it possible for those individuals who do that work that few of us who live in this community would be willing to do, to do that work for us. And the measure of any community, of any civilization, is how we treat those who are most vulnerable in our community. If we are going to decide to put them and their families at economic risk then we need to take a very hard look in the mirror at who we are and for what we stand. Our community is not filled with wealthy individuals but we have to find a way to know that we are taking care of those who are taking care of us and the institutions in which our children spend their time every day. To do anything less is simply unconscionable.

**Emily Fenn:** Phys Ed and Wellness programs are important.

**Tony Porter:** Student athletes should not be excused from physical education. Physical education includes wellness and total fitness. Athletes are role models and should not be an elitist group. Forty percent of kids would not be taking gym. Athletics is not a substitute for physical education. The user fee increase may result in a decrease in participation. There was a slight drop in before school sports participation when the fee was increased to \$100 from \$60. We recommend dropping it back down.

**Tom Diaz:** We are recommending reducing that.

**Lucia Gates** (Guidance), **Joanne Cunningham** (3<sup>rd</sup> Grade teacher), **Lea Rothbert** (classroom teacher), **Wendy Ernst** (? Parent) {all from the Bridge community}: Spoke in favor of the Behavior Management Specialist (PALS). Cutting the position will cost more because this program keeps kids out of SPED.

**Christina Cohen:** Can other areas of town spending be cut instead of schools? What about sales tax with revenue stream dedicated to education?

**Tom Diaz:** Write to Senator Havern. Also, there is potential local legislation for a tax on restaurant meals.

**Laura Kole** (Lexington parent): Spoke in support of the PAL program at Bridge school and in favor of citizens voting.

**Menumshwik Baine** (?): Spoke in support of the German program.

**J.J. Krawczyk** (parent at Bridge school): Class size is not a luxury item. Bus fees are too high.

**Phyllis St. Clair** (5<sup>th</sup> Grade teacher at Fiske): Woburn has foreign language in the elementary school. Spend more time on this. Student teacher contact hours should be the last to be cut, the librarians must be among the highest.

**William Levitt** (Estabrook parent): We should reduce energy costs. My kids wear t-shirts all winter long.

**Kim Coburn and Denise Bruno Matthews:** Spoke in favor of the librarians.

**Joe Walsh** (30 year resident, Harrington grandparent): In support of librarians.

**Deborah Strod** (Fiske parent, town meeting member): What are we cutting *towards*? Tools for Schools training was given to current facilities workers. We may have to make difficult decisions, even moral ones. Volunteerism is not unlimited.

**Rachel Grady and Stephanie Norris** (sophomores at LHS): Spoke about the importance of phys ed vs. athletics.

**Jesse Steigerwald** (parent and Town Meeting member): Eighty people are at risk. The current class size maximum is unacceptable. Would you be willing to change the maximum class size to a number that we would really be happy with? Don't give librarians half-time jobs. Parents are worn out.

**Lynn Perry** (SPED teacher at Hastings and Lexington parent): There is not enough money. We are preaching to the choir here. There is too much work. Loss of literacy and math specialists will lead to more SPED kids. Not enough proper work spaces.

**Ally Needham and Parsha Basseti** (?) (Senior at LHS): Advocating for phys ed and wellness.

**Suzanne Cherenson** (Harrington parent): It is hard to convince people that our schools are a good investment. This is the cost of doing business. It is a good investment.

**Patrick Mehr:** We should have a five year plan for our budgets. We can save money on energy.

**Leora Tec:** Thanks for the public hearings. Who will do the driver's job if that position is cut from the facilities department?

**Bill Hartigan:** That is a very good question. We would struggle to fill that role with the balance of our custodial and maintenance staff.

**Leora Tec:** The other night you mentioned there would be no more PTA events if the full time night custodians were replaced with part timers with no benefits. Would we still have non-PTA events such as Back-to-School Night, Curriculum night and concerts?

**Paul Ash:** Yes. We would pull people from other buildings or use the part-time person to open and close the building.

**Leora Tec:** There is a lot more to those events than opening and closing the building, particularly the concerts.

**Paul Ash:** We'd have to work with the principals and the community and the parents to figure that out.

**Leora Tec:** It's late so I won't say how wonderful the custodians were on Saturday and how early they had to get up and how they enabled us to have the public hearing...

**Tom Diaz:** I thanked them for doing that.

**Leora Tec:** We've heard from a lot of people, we heard from a teacher, a scientist, a rabbi, PTA presidents, the president of the custodians union about how this cut of

health care benefits is not in keeping with our town's values. Because it stands out and because Dr. Ash has now told us he can cut money from the at-risk list I would urge you to cut this item from the list and put this amount back in the budget.

**Mary Erdman:** I will be a LPS parent starting in the fall with an incoming kindergartener. I ask that you make sure that when my son is a 5<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup> or 10<sup>th</sup> grader that he be given the same opportunities that those who spoke this evening have had, so that he may be as eloquent as they have been.

#### B. FY08 Budget

The Committee discussed: questions and comments brought up by Dr. Sakhuja, sal diff, circuit breaker funds, number of ALA members, particular SPED positions, energy savings, unemployment compensation v. healthcare benefits, removal of 120K of energy savings from reserve for unemployment to be put it in recurring operating expenses, technology specialists, elementary Spanish, high school science and math, and specifics of what they support or don't support in the budget.

#### **V. Motion to go into executive session for the purposes of collective bargaining not to return to public session (Griffiths, Coppe). Coppe-aye; Griffiths-aye; Sakhuja-aye and Diaz-aye.**

The next meeting of the School Committee is scheduled for Tuesday, March 20, 2007 at 7:30 p.m. at Cary Hall Auditorium, 1605 Massachusetts Avenue.