

LEXINGTON SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEETING
Tuesday, December 20, 2005
Lexington High School, Library Media Center
251 Waltham Street

The meeting was convened at 7:39 p.m.

Present: Superintendent Paul Ash; School Committee Helen Cohen - Chair, Scott Burson, Tom Diaz, Tom Griffiths, Olga Gutttag; Student representative Toni Maeck; Minutes taken by Leora Tec

I. Call to Order and Welcome (Helen Cohen)

Helen Cohen explained that School Committee meetings are working meetings for the Committee. The public is invited to attend, and to participate upon the specific invitation of the Committee if there is time.

II. Public Comment:

Barbara Masi, Lexington resident, Bridge School parent: High enrollment at the Bridge School has continued for the past several years. Bridge will stay overcrowded until redistricting is implemented. There should be a fair and equitable distribution of resources among the elementary schools. She proposes taking teachers from Fiske and moving them to Bridge. She handed out a report to the Committee members.

III. Superintendent's Report: none

IV. Action Item:

After a presentation by Principal Michael Jones and the two chaperones, and a short Q&A period, mostly related to student safety, the SC voted to approve the LHS Spanish Club trip to Honduras.

Motion to approve trip to Honduras approved 5-0 (Burson, Diaz)

V. Discussion Items:

1. Presentation of the FY07 Recommended Budget

(A handout of Dr. Ash's PowerPoint presentation was available, and the presentation will be posted on the website.)

Dr. Ash reminded those assembled of the core purposes of LPS, and of the guidelines of the budget, voted by the School Committee in Sept. 2005, and stated that he took those guidelines very seriously.

Dr. Ash indicated that this budget was built from the bottom up (starting with a blank slate as opposed to building on last year's actuals) and was developed together with Central Office administrators, principals and department heads. The intent was to combine programmatic goals with School Committee goals.

Dr. Ash emphasized that this is not a wishlist budget, and that sometimes very small amounts of money can repair areas that have been allowed to erode over the years. He pointed out that the work that went into this budget required a whole team and that Lexington has phenomenal people working on behalf of its children. He is proud to present this budget to the School Committee.

Dr Ash discussed the challenges facing the Lexington Public schools:

1. All legal and required (e.g. energy costs) services
2. A contingency account for out of district tuitions
3. Needed teacher and support positions

4. Adequate instructional expense budgets
5. K-12 systematic curriculum review
6. High quality professional development
7. A preventative school building maintenance program

Some highlights:

- There is a projected 23.5% increase in health and dental insurance.
- We are not in compliance with our ELL program and thus title funds are in jeopardy. We need to hire three ELL teachers to replace three ELL tutors.
- Adding four new custodial positions would only cost the equivalent of a .8 position because of all the overtime that is being used now.
- We will bring substitute teachers in-house instead of using a temporary agency.
- A building maintenance program costing \$608,000 for the New Harrington, Diamond, Clarke and LHS.

Some points brought up in the subsequent discussion:

- Concern about the large increase in health care costs.
- How do we prioritize this budget?
- Is it possible to reduce energy costs?
- Why not have preventative maintenance for all buildings?
- Concern about lack of curriculum review (Carol Pilarski, Assistant to the Superintendent, assured the School Committee that there have been pockets of assessment and development but just not a systematic K-12 vertically articulated curriculum review process.)

Comments from the floor:

Vito LaMura (President of the Lexington Education Association) was perplexed about the 23% figure for health benefits. He said the bargaining coalition is looking at a way to provide prescription drugs at no cost to employees or the town. It may save us money, and the town manager is checking that.

Dawn McKenna (precinct 6): There was a change in state law that requires fully funding liability of retirees.

Dr. Ash will present his recommendations for the capital portion of his budget on January 17th.

2. Field Trip Policy — Second Reading

(A copy of the policy was available at the meeting)

Olga Guttag suggested adding the words “or stay” after “overnight travel,” in section (C) (1) (b). She also suggested that section (C) (2) (b) read, “...overnight stay or travel between the hours of midnight and 6 a.m. is involved.”

There was a discussion regarding the chaperone/student ratio. Helen Cohen stated that there should be at least two chaperones, but proposed the addition, to section (III) (B) (9), of the words “the ratio of chaperones to students, and the gender of the chaperones should be appropriate to the age of the students.”

The administration should provide guidelines as to how far in advance the identity of chaperones should be communicated to parents.

Discussion of cases of financial hardship. Scott Burson pointed out the difference between curriculum-related field trips, where no one should be denied access, and co-curricular field trips, where access is not necessarily guaranteed.

Dawn McKenna (precinct 6) questioned whether it was appropriate for family members of chaperones to go on school-sponsored trips.

Scott Burson clarified that all overseas trips will be considered co-curricular.

There will be a third reading of the policy and the final draft must be vetted by counsel.

VI. Members' Reports / Members' Concerns:

1. Discussion of Tom Diaz's proposed guidelines for communication among School Committee members.

2. Discussion of Olga Guttag's suggestion that "member reports/member concerns" be moved to where they had previously been, closer to the beginning of the meeting. Some discussion on this being acceptable if each member were limited to five minutes. Concern expressed about staff time, and about the public's attendance for particular agenda items.

Vote on items 1 and 2 tabled until the next meeting.

Tom Griffiths: Attended the appropriations meeting with Olga Guttag. Proposal by Carl Valente regarding free cash.

Olga Guttag:

- a. Thank you to the DPW for help during snow storm. The crosswalk at Muzzey and Forest was repainted.
- b. The Sidewalk subcommittee has made its recommendation of a sidewalk budget to BOS.
- c. The PTA Presidents Group wants clarity on the School Committee fundraising policy. They discussed the Westwood model of a joint fundraiser among schools.
- d. Attended a great SPED PAC meeting presentation about overcoming learning difficulties through cognitive interventions.
- e. No Place for Hate: January workshop for town committee members, and a February lecture at the library by Charles Martin.
- g. PBC meeting: Fiske project on budget and on schedule.

Helen Cohen: Training for committee chairs of Lexington boards; she is going to two of them, and another member might attend the third.

VII. Motion to adjourn to go into executive session for the purpose of discussing collective bargaining, not to return to public session (10:51pm). (Diaz, Guttag). Burson: Aye, Cohen: Aye, Diaz: Aye, Griffiths: Aye, Guttag: Aye .

The next meeting of the School Committee is scheduled for Thursday, January 12, 2006, at 7:30 p.m., at Jonas Clark Middle School, 17 Stedman Road.