

**Lexington Public Schools  
School Committee Meeting – February 1, 2005  
LHS Library Media Center**

Members present were Scott Burson, Helen Cohen, Olga Gutttag, Tom Diaz, Interim Superintendent William Hurley, and Student Representative Janette Ekanem.

In Tom Griffiths' absence, Helen Cohen called the meeting to order at 7:37 p.m.

**Public Comment**

There was no public comment.

**Superintendent's Report**

Mr. Hurley discussed the summit meeting that was held last week with the Appropriations Committee, Capital, School Committee and the Selectmen to discuss anticipated revenues, the budgets presented by the Superintendent and those presented by the Town Manager. A decision was made at that time to reduce the gap by \$400,000. He will need to report next week on the effect of eliminating the town-wide reductions totaling \$1.4 million. He and Ms. Vine have begun discussing what percentages each should absorb. Mr. Hurley will give the administration \$979,000 in reductions as a worst-case scenario. The original FY05 appropriated budget was \$66,357,468 but the new FY06 proposed budget that was voted is \$70,127,468, a 5.7% increase. There is also another summit meeting scheduled next week to discuss the budget further.

Susan Bottan shared information from the last couple administrative staff meetings. She distributed a handout with a line item breakdown of possible budget cuts that are under consideration if revenue should fall short. There would be growth reductions in the amount of \$135,000, which would come from staffing reductions at the elementary, middle and high school levels. Discussions were also had regarding possible reductions in programs and services at the elementary, middle, high school and district wide levels for a total amount of \$844,200.

There was a question regarding elementary health and whether it could be incorporated into another curriculum area. Mr. Hurley said if necessary there would be a complete elimination of elementary health as it would not be realistic to have in other curriculum area. A question arose regarding the high school staffing and if all 6.5 positions were driven by increased enrollment. Mr. Jones, principal at LHS, said these positions are driven by increased enrollment. In doing projections, he noted it is very difficult if not impossible for students to take their required courses unless they have these staffing increases. He noted that currently there are around 370 students who do not have enough courses to comply with LHS graduation requirements.

There were concerns regarding instituting a fee of \$200 for instrumental music at the elementary school level.

Helen Cohen asked what we were losing with decreasing expenses in supplies and services. Ms. Bottan said we would have \$2.00 less per student at the elementary level and \$4.00 less per student at the middle school and high school level. The Human Resources department will be reducing Boston Globe advertisements and is working with the new IT director to put an on-line resume process in place for additional cost savings.

In regard to elementary drama, Scott Burson wondered whether we should sustain a program that is not providing benefit because of the reduction in services. Mr. Hurley said that position was not filled this year and part of reason was due to the fact that late in summer, he had a conversation with administrators and elementary principals did not think they had sufficient tutorial time. The decision was made that this was a position, although desired, could be sacrificed. Joni Jay felt Estabrook valued from this position as every year they did an annual play based on their curriculum of study. She felt it was a valuable service but had to go because there were other demands.

Olga Gutttag asked if supply amounts next year per school, per student are going to be lower than this year. Susan Bottan said if these reductions take place, the per-pupil expense would be higher at five of the six elementary schools. On the average, it is a 6% increase per student at the elementary and middle school levels and a 3% increase at the high school level.

#### Harrington and Fiske Construction

Mr. Hurley informed the School Committee that we are up to date on the Harrington move schedule and the actual move will take place during the week of February vacation. Students will return to school the following Tuesday. He is holding off announcing a firm date for the Fiske School move. He has a meeting next week with the Permanent Building Committee and would like to get firm dates from them first. Once he has more firm information from the PBC, he will go public with that information. Hopefully he will have that information within the next two weeks.

#### Members' Reports/Members' Concerns

There were no members' reports or concerns.

### **Discussion Items**

#### **Budget Reductions – Further Discussion**

Tom Diaz wanted to emphasize to the public that the School Committee is not done with the budget process, and that the original pro forma town-wide budget gap was \$4.67 million. There is a budget deficit town wide of about \$1.4 million. A discussion is still going on with the Selectmen and finance committees about the revenue numbers. This current discussion exercise is based on a 70/30 split of the deficit between the school side and the town side; other percentages are possible. The municipal department and their colleagues are facing the same difficult situation as we are. It seems like there is a general assumption that if we don't have an override this year, we will have one in 2007. Mr. Diaz said he would rather cut back on growth areas and not cut back on programs. He suggested holding back on growth and fund as many programs as possible.

Bill Hurley has a meeting with Linda Vine, acting town manager, tomorrow morning. He will share with her what it looks like from the school side. He went with the worst-case scenario with 70% of the split coming from the school side. After he meets with Ms. Vine, they will be in a better position to make recommendations at a joint meeting. In regard to programs versus growth, the general consensus of the administrative staff was given that the high school is stretched right now to accommodate students to have enough credits to graduate and given that growth next year is mostly at the high school, it is important to be able to try to accommodate that. To stretch them further is exacerbating a bad situation. He also feels the elimination of programs is a risk because it is harder to restore something once it is gone.

Tom Diaz asked if the split was 65% on the school side instead of 70%, if that would make a difference in keeping programs. It is painful to consider eliminating programs let alone ones we made a point to preserve and try to protect. He hopes to find alternatives so as not to regress.

Mr. Hurley discussed the Superintendent's conference he attended last week where the governor was the guest speaker.

Mike Jones said if we only get 5.5 positions, we are going to have to make changes in the way we schedule classes for students, which will limit choices and the freedom like they used to have in the past. It will make it impossible to accommodate students who want to take a fine arts program.

Scott Burson is not happy with these reductions. He acknowledged the hard work that the administrative staff has gone through to get to this point in the budget process. He feels this is a recommendation that we could live with if we had to. It would hurt us but it doesn't represent catastrophic programmatic effects that we have faced in the past. The news isn't all that bad as there is new money from the state for Special Education

reimbursement. We are moving in the right direction. If we fail our children, we fail as people and it is most important to increase the resources for the children of Lexington.

Olga Gutttag feels these cuts are catastrophic since there already are approximately 370 students enrolled in Lexington High School who are not on track to meet graduation requirements. The solution to this problem is to put more money into high school staffing because it is needed. The alternative is to relax our graduation requirements. This way, students will qualify and meet requirements but, on the other hand, they will not get the same education students got in years past. Shifting money from the school side to the town side is not the answer. We are one town and all citizens will still feel the pain one way or the other. In next year's override, we have to plan for not only how many students we are going to have but where they are going to be in regard to grade level since educating students in secondary schools is more expensive than educating students in elementary schools. Ms. Gutttag is in agreement with the top five priorities to keep if money became available. We need to educate the community from hereon in that if we do not receive extra money from the state, money for services will need to come from somewhere. If the community does not pay for education, we will lose programs.

Janette Ekanem was confused about the statement made regarding scheduling AP courses. Tom Diaz said he had misspoken. Principal Jones had made a point previously about the difficulty of meeting physical education graduation requirements, not AP course requirements.

Tom Diaz said the logic of Ms. Gutttag's points is good but it may be too early in the process to get to some of those. Every department in town is in tough shape. He feels the School Committee is not ready to entertain ideas how to reduce another \$400,000 from our budget whether it comes from salaries or anywhere else.

Helen Cohen believes the money for salary negotiation needs to stay there to support our employees who work hard to make this system work. Scott Burson said we have to get out of the habit of balancing the budget on the backs of our employees. Employees are working very hard and it is incumbent upon us to recognize them appropriately. On the school side, employees were very understanding given the difficult financial situation we were in last year and we now have to be realistic. We cannot continue to expect that and have to give our employees the support they deserve. In turn, we will continue to get extraordinary service from them.

Helen Cohen opened up the meeting for public comment.

Vito LaMura, LEA president, wanted to clarify the budget statement about the contributions by the LEA to the budget. Ms. Bottan agreed that she had misstated relevant amounts in the budget and that she would correct them.

Dawn McKenna, Selectman, heard discussions about what the collaboration was with the school/town split. The instructions for the superintendent and town manager were to go back to their budget knowing there is a \$1.4 million gap. Each side was to figure out what they could live with. They would then come back and discuss where each was in regard to cuts. Speaking as a parent, there are two items on this list she hopes does not appear on the list for the town manager. One is charging a fee for instrumental music. This program takes place during the school day and when you charge a fee for something that happens during the school day, it hurts the long-term instrumental plan. If you take this program away at the elementary school level, you upset the progression through high school. Parents fought hard for this program to be put back into the system without a fee. The other program she would hate to see go is the foreign language program. Ms. McKenna feels it is a core curriculum that we should not be toying with. If the town takes all the increased income of \$435,000, that would bring the gap to \$1 million, which is a great start. The Town Manager has similar trade offs. It's Ms. McKenna's belief that Lexington can reach their goal if we take a reasonable approach.

Masha Traber, a parent, concurred with Ms. McKenna. She feels foreign language should be part of the core curriculum. She asked if scholarships would be built into the budget if a fee for instructional music goes through. Helen Cohen believes so as that was the practice before.

Tom Diaz agreed strongly with Dawn McKenna in that he really does not want to cut the foreign language program at the elementary level.

Olga Gutttag noted that nurses' schedules were to be reduced. She asked if we could use part of the nursing schedule at the elementary level and use them to teach health. This would utilize staff we already have and thereby not lose the program. Mr. Hurley does not think that is likely.

Per Helen Cohen, future School Committee meetings are scheduled for February 7<sup>th</sup> at 7:30 p.m. at the high school and February 8<sup>th</sup> at 5:30 p.m. at the Clarke Middle School to discuss the superintendent search.

#### Superintendent Search Update

Helen Cohen updated the School Committee that they conducted the interviews from the four finalists. They have been researching the feedback forms and the School Committee met last Friday evening and decided to reduce the finalist list to three people. Dr. Ash, Dr. Silverman, and Dr. Hoffman. Dr. Fleischman was eliminated. The research committee has a great deal of support and recognition for what Dr. Fleischman has to offer Lexington but the issue of experience was dominant. The last step in the process is to visit the finalists' current school systems. These visits will take place next week. A committee of six will visit Brookline on Wednesday, Ashland on Thursday, and Westwood on Friday.

Ms. Cohen advised that the research consultants did an extremely thorough background check on all three finalists. The School Committee has been receiving a number of calls and information from members of the community. All comments are welcome and if you have something to pass on between now and next Tuesday, she asked the community to please do so. This is not an invitation to start calling friends in those districts or but if you already know something of interest, the School Committee would like to hear it as the research consultants are following up on all reference check on the candidates.

Olga Gutttag commented on all the feedback the School Committee has received. She assured that all School Committee members are looking at feedback and being incredibly diligent in figuring out who the best candidate should be.

#### Bowman PTA Waiver

Bill Hurley presented the School Committee with a request from the Bowman Parent/Teacher organization to provide Bowman with funding in the amount of \$10,000 to buy gym equipment for the Bowman School. The School Committee policy limits these expenditures to \$2,500 but there is a waiver noted in the policy if the request is presented in writing to the School Committee. Andre Ravenelle spoke with Tony Porter, Athletic Director, and he is thrilled and in favor of this donation.

Helen Cohen said she has not yet had a chance to read the material so does not feel she can make a decision tonight. This is a policy issue that the School Committee has been asked to work on and needs to work on. Tom Diaz asked if this donation would bring Bowman's equipment up to a level of equity with the other elementary schools. Mr. Ravenelle said it would bring Bowman above some schools but below or equal to other schools. It does not put Bowman in an overwhelming place in terms of equipment. The School Committee asked for a list of what the other elementary schools have as it would be helpful to see a comparative list in terms of equipment.

Malcolm Astley, principal at Bowman, commented that eventually needs that go unmet year after year become enrichment needs. He would like to see the School Committee let each school have enough individually and be creative and then other people can follow suit. There are at least two other schools that have climbing walls and Bowman does not. He feels policies of equity are important but if sound ventures are beneficial for children, it work out for everyone.

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A motion was made at 10:05 p.m. to move into Executive Session for the purpose of discussing potential litigation and not returning to public session. (Burson – Diaz; roll call vote 4-0 unanimous)

Submitted by,

Lisa McGuire

cc: William Hurley  
Tom Griffiths  
Olga Gutttag  
Scott Burson  
Helen Cohen  
Tom Diaz