

**LEXINGTON SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEETING**

**Monday, February 12, 2007**

**Jonas Clarke Middle School**

**17 Stedman Road**

**Present: Superintendent Paul Ash, School Committee Chair Tom Diaz, School Committee members: Helen Cohen, Tom Griffiths, Olga Guttag, Ravi Sakhuja and student representative Toni Maeck. Minutes taken by Leora Tec.**

**The meeting was convened at 7:46 p.m.**

**I. Call to Order:** Clarke, Room 127

**II. Executive Session:** Clarke, Room 127

**III. Return to Public Session and Welcome (Tom Diaz):** Clarke, Auditorium

**IV. Public Comment**

**Susan Kleinman** (precinct 8): Why isn't curriculum review collaborative with school districts to which Lexington compares itself?

**Paul Ash:** The first phase is an internal examination of how well we are doing. Your point is a good point for later phases of the curriculum review process.

**V. Superintendent's Report:**

A. If you have made a request it is in the cue. This is a busy time of year.

B. There is now a spending freeze except for things that can be shown to be essential. But we are going to severely limit expenditures. I will report on this at the next meeting on March 6<sup>th</sup>.

**VI. Members' Reports / Members' Concerns:**

**Olga Guttag:** Discussing FY07 and 08 in the same evening is confusing. Can we meet separately?

**Tom Griffiths:** There are 3 options for financing capital projects, like energy-related improvements that may pay for themselves in a reasonable period of time: cash-capital, debt-exclusion, or within-levy borrowing in instances where financing and repayment costs run less than project savings. Items have been reprioritized through working with Bill

Hartigan. Capital Expenditures considers the proposed Clarke renovation [which we have at priority 2] to be priority 1 on their list.

**Ravi Sakhuja:** I have been working with an energy service company that can do energy-savings-based renovations and amortize capital costs out of savings. The added benefit such a company brings to the table is a certain level of oversight in the continuing operation of the renovated systems with sustained level of savings.

**Motion to accept the capital items proposal before us as it stands until additional information becomes available about items 13 and 15 (Gutttag, Cohen). The motion passed 5-0.**

**Toni Maeck:** I want to emphasize the importance of the photographic darkroom to LHS students. Students currently aren't allowed to use the photographic darkroom.

**Michael Jones:** Any day now that will be back online. It has taken far too long

**Helen Cohen:** I attended the PTA presidents' meeting. There was a presentation by Nancy Wisman, the new food services director, which was very effective.

I attended the most recent Youth Services Council meeting as the School Committee liaison. The police chief and fire chief were there along with regular members. Everyone agreed that there is a long standing concern about substance abuse in Lexington. There will be an intensified effort in this area. The YSC will try to meet with Dr. Michael Jones, high school principal, and develop initial projects.

**Tom Diaz:** We were invited to meet with Hastings parents about potential closing of Hastings. That will be posted as a public School Committee meeting.

Evaluation of Dr. Ash: Every member provided input and signed off on it. Tom Diaz summarized the report.

## **VII. Public Hearing on the FY08 Recommended Budget:**

**Doug Kleinman (precinct 8):** Curriculum review is a six-year program with eight program elements. The question of cost came up and you said you had money for year one, maybe for year two. I suggest we only need curriculum review if we don't know where our problems are. Why not do year one for all the areas, locate all problem areas, and work only on the identified problems? Apply same service to the next areas: English and science.

**Tom Diaz:** Are you proposing we do year one for English and Science instead of year two of math and phys ed?

**Doug Kleinman:** Yes.

**Paul Ash:** I don't agree. The priority list was established with the principals. The health curriculum was a priority. Math is a graduation requirement. I didn't need a survey to know that we needed that. Science is a graduation requirement and has never been reviewed. Literacy is the most essential academic skill. To survey all the areas ...some would go out of date.

**Patrick Mehr** (precinct 3): First, good news about energy conservation but it took us 20 years. Now, health benefits are \$20 million in shared expenses, the vast majority go to pay for teachers' and retired teachers' benefits. If we don't manage them better we are strangling the schools. Do we have a full time individual to handle that? It is you, the School Committee that needs to deal with that? We have to deal with it. There is a direct link between LEA negotiations and coalition bargaining that drives the \$20 million.

**Tom Diaz:** We are in communication with the town manager and we are concerned about this issue; beyond this we can't say anything further in public session.

**Jessie Steigerwald** (precinct 8): Curriculum review has to be done. For example, in math, the teachers are frustrated and can't tackle it alone.

The cut list will come out in March. What is left to cut in elementary school? At Hastings recently in a whole school learning about Africa the art teacher couldn't print out in color. Teachers are reluctant to use the in focus machine for fear the \$500 bulb will burn out. There are not enough mice or keyboards in the computer room.

**Tom Griffiths:** Kids could change the world if they could vote.

**Dawn McKenna:** 1. When elementary foreign language changed to all Spanish it was to get the faculty to all work together. Allow a separate question for elementary Spanish and elementary instrumental music. 2. For the override we need voters to have confidence and trust in what we are doing. In budget presentations there have been justifications for what we are doing, voters won't think same service. Let's not lose based on labels. 3. The question on Mandarin Chinese needs to come before school committee.

**Tom Diaz:** I don't feel compelled to take this up. Several of us indicated support for this program.

**Helen Cohen:** I agree. It is not our job to decide the curriculum.

**Olga Guttag:** The SC gets to determine where priorities get to be. Community support for a program equals community support for the schools. We don't have a lot of time, I would hesitate waiting to introduce this but I think having the public comment is a good idea.

**Dawn McKenna:** Every time there has been a change in the language program it has been a public process. 4. The METCO budget had not been publicly reviewed. When will it be?

**Tom Diaz:** We will give ample notice to METCO parents. Regarding same service: we gave the superintendent the authority to substitute items of equal value for same service. Some people may be confused by that.

**Tom Griffiths:** What is the fear of allowing the superintendent to try a piloted Mandarin program?

## **VIII. Discussion Items:**

FY08 Budget Discussion

High School Budget Subcommittee Report (Presented by Dr. Ravi Sakhuja and Dr. Olga Gutttag)

Overall: 2.4 FTEs are requested to accommodate the forecasted 30 additional students.

Foreign Language is requesting a .6 FTE for Spanish 3 Level 1. For the supplemental budget they are requesting Spanish 3 textbooks and language lab tech support.

Guidance is requesting a ten-month part-time assistant registrar funded with application fees, though they could get by with only peak help.

Science is requesting .5 FTE for earth science and \$18K for microscopes. The supplemental budget includes restoring honors physics back to 6 blocks (thereby increasing it by .5 FTE) and \$4500 in supplies for senior engineering and robotics.

**Mary Ellen Dunn:** Regarding the photo lab issue, a chemical disposal protocol has been developed and is being reviewed by town officials. If that is approved the photo lab can be put back into service, but that doesn't repair the lab which will take 5 weeks or longer. Hopefully it will be done by the end of the school year.

**Paul Ash:** We don't know the scope of the work and the cost. I can't assure the Committee that it will be done by June 30.

The discussion included the possibility of losing the science fair, high school students losing the ability to take multiple foreign languages, cuts to the debate budget, teachers' increased teaching loads in terms of numbers of students they teach, the assistant registrar being moved to the supplemental budget, fees for transcripts, peer programs and travel for the debate team.

## **IX. Action Items:**

**Motion to return to executive session for the purpose of collective bargaining not to return to public session (Gutttag, Griffiths). Cohen-aye, Diaz-aye, Griffiths-aye, Gutttag-aye, Sakhuja-aye.**