

LEXINGTON SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEETING

Tuesday, February 28, 2006

Jonas Clarke Middle School

Waltham Street

Present: Superintendent Paul Ash, School Committee Chairman Helen Cohen, Scott Burson, Tom Diaz, Tom Griffiths, Olga Gutttag and student representative Toni Maeck. Minutes taken by Leora Tec.

The meeting was convened at 7:40 p.m.

I. Call to Order and Welcome (Helen Cohen)

II. Superintendent's Report

- A. Steven Arnoff, Director of Technology, is resigning. He will be joining the private sector. We wish him well. We will fill the position for the next academic year, and we will finish school year based on his exit plan.
- B. Pam Houlares, Clarke Middle School Principal, is retiring at the end of the academic year. She has had a distinguished career. Dr. Ash's letter praising her career shall be included in the permanent record of the minutes.
- C. LHS Academic and Athletic Highlights: Dr. Ash highlighted a number of outstanding sports teams, and two students who received honors in semifinalist 2005-2006 Seimens/Westinghouse Science Competition in Math, Science and Technology: Irving Chung, Jeon Kim

III. Members' Reports/Members' Concerns

Tom Griffiths: Attended the PBC meeting. They met with the architects regarding the White House. There were several parking proposals discussed. They selected one with room for 69 cars.

IV. Discussion Items

FY 07 School Budget "at-risk" list- Public Hearing

- A. After a brief introduction by School Committee Chairperson, Helen Cohen, Superintendent Paul Ash updated the Committee on the budget.
 - 1. **At the last meeting the at-risk list was \$72,000 short:** To fill this gap \$50,000 of personal services will be charged to a federal special education grant instead of using it for consulting. \$16K has been freed up after negotiations. Elementary assistant principal salaries have been restructured. The reduction of the teaching schedule for high school health teachers is no longer feasible. So, we still need to make up \$40K, Dr. Ash recommended cutting specialists in the 2 Middle Schools, .4 more cut in each school.

2. **Policy debate:** Dr. Ash met with parents from policy debate; clearly this program is highly revered and life-changing for many students. They discussed how to save the program. The best option is funding the program through a successful override. They need to decide by the next School Committee meeting so students can sign up. They can't raise funds without knowing if the program will exist, and there may not be a teacher. So how else could it be funded? Should a user fee be charged for the course? We have to be able to offer the course free to students who choose not to pay the user fee. So a student who doesn't pay the fee can still take the course. How large should the fee be? It would be for policy debate and for Lincoln Douglas. The parents can raise additional funds for additional travel. The School Committee needs to decide if they think it's a viable option.
3. **Instrumental Music:** If there is a fee for strings, woodwinds and brass, kids can take recorder at no extra charge, if the override fails. It's better to have a fee-based program than no program, but preferable to have it be for free.

Tom Griffiths: The town is building reserves by \$800,000. If we ask in an override if the town wants to be a AAA-rated town. There are alternatives because elementary Spanish, instrumental music and policy debate come within \$10,000 of our share of that \$800K.

Tomorrow the School Committee will not vote on at-risk list at detail. The Summit will decide the total amount of the budget. In a couple of weeks, on March 14th we will decide the at-risk list.

B. Public Hearing:

Pria Raja (9th grade debater): In favor of the policy debate program.

Mark Anderson: Disheartened about cuts, but Lexington taxpayers are paying for the METCO program. Do we need a METCO director here? Can't the kids be shifted around to adjust class size? Why don't we get Special Ed. Money from the Boston School Committee?

Paul Ash: At the last meeting, the School Committee voted to support the move to increase state funding for METCO. Regarding the METCO Director: Lexington has the second largest program in the state. The METCO Director is the principal of this program, there are 260 kids and they need a leader. Without a director the State might not fund the program. Shifting students: you don't shift METCO students like furniture from school to school.

Sara Harari (sophomore LHS): German should not be cut.

Bonnie Brodner: These cuts are a painful procedure. There could be scholarships for instrumental music. If there is a fee then only the kids who could afford private lessons would get the lessons.

Masha Traber: You have a creative solution for policy debate; she hopes we can do the same for German. There has been a German program at the school for over 40 years, the teacher just won outstanding teacher of New England. We should keep German.

Beth Gaudette (precinct 1): We need to support the Superintendent's full budget. We need to maintain our buildings to prevent illness and injury and to prevent great expenses down the road.

Dawn McKenna (precinct 6): Policy debate should be protected as core curriculum. Instrumental music: we used to have a recorder program, why not just pay for instrumental music if we are paying for a recorder teacher?

Ashley McKenna (junior in college, by proxy): Concerned about elementary foreign language and instrumental music being on the at-risk lists. These are core curriculum areas. Also we should not reduce the number of science classes per week.

Vito La Mura (LEA President): This cut list will have many negative results but this is not a new story. Lexington will never escape this cycle until there is an adequate flow of state funds for the public schools. At a future meeting he will ask people to join Stand for Children. Why have overrides in early June with the cut-list in February? We will lose valued employees because they don't want to gamble with their families' futures. Still, this is a "responsible dismantling of the LPS." Two recommendations: Not even one tenth of an administrator is being cut. Do the two smallest elementary schools need the same portion of assistant principal as the bigger schools? We should not contemplate cutting the ITS (instructional technology specialists), we have spent so much on technology.

Susan Rubinstein: We need to take care of our facilities.

Patrick Mehr (Precinct 3): (Sent an email which he wants to be part of the permanent record): He is a strong supporter of schools. Eight opportunities: (1). eliminate elementary classrooms with under 20 students; (2). 3 million in natural gas and fuel oil, 20% is wasted in many forms, we should take advantage of state law to bring an energy services company in to build energy savings; (3). fees: 1/3 of high school students could pay fees; (4). we can have 35 kids in honors mathematics; (5). health benefits the School Committee should ask the Town Manager to reopen negotiations with unions regarding health benefits; (6). review efficiency of school operations; (7). Have multi year budgets; and (8). Have an endowment at LHS.

Paul Ash: Regarding energy services: Bill Hartigan said it was an excellent idea. Regarding fees: a free public education is something we should cherish in the USA. To expand fees further is the wrong way to go unless there is a compelling reason.

Will Sears (senior at LHS): Do not cut policy/debate program.

Paul Ash: A user fee concept won't change the meritocracy aspect of the program.

Susan Harari (parent of child in the German program): Why was German picked? Why do LHS students who are in school sponsored sports programs not given PE credit?

Paul Ash: Dr. Jones and I discussed a number of cuts. The smallest foreign language programs are German and Chinese. We already have some other European languages. Mandarin Chinese is widely spoken and China is a growing economic power. Regarding phys. ed.: state law requires that phys. ed. be offered in all four years of high school. The athletic program is not a substitute for phys. ed.

Kim Ephron (parent): I support retaining the K-5 science specialist.

Kim Ephron (reading a statement from other parents): In favor of retaining the Science Specialist, Fran Ludwig.

Jesse Segovia (parent): Two of our kids have availed themselves of the instrumental music program. It is great. The elementary language program: you change the way your brain is wired when you learn another language. Debate: part of core curriculum and parents contribute so much. Parents are already paying a lot.

Jessie Steigerwald (district 8): Do not cut Fran Ludwig, the Science Coordinator. Why treat science differently from math and literacy?

Doss Murrows (Junior at LHS): Read letter signed by over 100 Lexington alums in favor of policy debate.

Jenna ????? (Junior debater): In favor of policy debate. Read a letter written by the varsity policy debate team (55 students). There are hundreds of emails from policy debate alumni and debate coaches and parents.

Gabe Schoenfeld (2nd year Lincoln Douglas debate): Policy debaters won't be able to easily transfer to Lincoln Douglas debate.

Tanya Morissette (Bridge parent): Don't cut Fran Ludwig who affects 435 of the school population.

Matt Schnall (Hastings parent): In favor of policy debate program, you shouldn't charge a fee.

Alex Dang (sophomore): Has done both Policy and Lincoln Douglas. Going to tournaments is an integral part of debate. We should give credit for extracurricular sports, hard to make quota for PE requirement. Science can be cut down to 5, that's not too much to ask. Landscaping costs a lot of money. Class size: not a big difference between 25 and 35, would rather have bigger classes and save debate.

Deborah Lapidés (Bridge parent): Don't cut the elementary Spanish program.

Reid Zurlo (precinct 3): Drug prevention program, where is that? Don't increase class sizes.

Helen Cohen thanked the public and indicated what a difficult process this is.

Olga Gutttag: Thanks to all for showing up, help us change Federal and State education funding policy. We have superb debaters who could help us make arguments. Everyone here should start a voter revolution to get adequate funding for education and avoid having to raise property taxes.

V. Action Items:

A. Vote to approve Field Trip Policy

Scott Burson: The Field Trip Policy has been through two readings and consultation with attorneys.

Dr. Jones (LHS Principal): The High school administration would like the Committee to take into account frequent occurrences like parents driving other children to an event, or a teacher might ask students to meet her at Harvard to see a film, so they have to get to and from the event on their own. Should we incorporate it into the policy? Some of the requests don't fit into the policy as written.

Scott Burson: Just found out about the issue of permissible drivers today. Burson expressed his opinion that the policy as written already provides the administration the flexibility to cover the full range of possible drivers.

Tom Griffiths: Is 100/300 liability insurance sufficient nowadays? What constitutes appropriate student behavior? In another country if the student is allowed to drink, how is that resolved?

Paul Ash: What is in the handbook is the first thing we look at. The school rules govern AND they must follow the local laws and those of the country they are visiting.

Scott Burson: Overnight field trips don't include international trips.

Olga Gutttag: I added US to #10.

Dawn McKenna (precinct 6): What about chaperones taking family members with them?

Scott Burson: I move that the School Committee adopt the Field Trip Policy as circulated in the packets with the exception that on p.1 line 26 "through" is stricken; on p. 2, line 4 the dark language is added; and on p. 3 lines 30 and 32 are stricken.

Insertion of "US" on page 3, line 33 is accepted. Line 20 is accepted. (Burson, Griffiths). The motion passed 5-0.

Helen Cohen thanked the members of the committee: Scott Burson, Robin DiGiammarino, and Fred Rosenberg.

B. Vote to accept \$10,000 donation from C.A.S.I.T. Inc.

Paul Ash: This is an organization that supports Italian education in public schools. The understanding is that we are going to have an AP Italian course.. Motion to accept the gift with gratitude (Diaz, Gutttag). The motion passed 5-0.

C. Vote to Accept a gift of \$600 from Houghton Mifflin to Bowman school to be used at the discretion of the principal.

Motion to accept the gift with gratitude (Gutttag, Diaz). The motion passed 5-0.

D. Motion to approve the minutes of December 20th, 2005 (Griffiths Gutttag).
The motion passed 5-0.

E. Motion to approve the minutes of Jan 31st (Griffiths, Burson). The motion passed 5-0.

- V. **Motion to adjourn to executive session for the purposes of collective bargaining not to return to public session.** (Burson, Diaz) Scott Burson recused himself from the Executive Session due to a potential conflict of interest.
Burson - aye, Cohen - aye, Diaz - aye, Griffiths - aye and Gutttag - aye.