

LEXINGTON SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEETING
Tuesday, February 7, 2006
Lexington High School, Library Media Center
251 Waltham Street

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

The meeting was convened at 5:09 pm

I. Call to Order and Welcome: Helen Cohen

II. Public Comment:

Brenda Deutsch: Lexington taxpayers pay 2 million dollars for METCO, according to what she heard. METCO seems to be a protected program. Two questions: 1). why isn't this program subjected to cuts (perhaps 10%), and 2). Can we afford this program?

III. Superintendent's Report:

1. Update on METCO: the legislature is doing the budget for FY07 and the Ways and Means Committee is putting together a recommendation to go to the House floor. There has been talk of raising state aid money by 5 million dollars, but reimbursement would still be less than for charter schools. He wants the School Committee to support the effort by key legislators to give communities more money for the METCO program.

Olga Guttag made the following motion (Guttag, Griffiths):

Whereas in the past three years 87% of METCO graduating seniors continued on to higher education which is 10% higher than the state average,

Whereas Lexington's 264 METCO students increase the diversity of our student body,

Whereas even though tuition for school choice communities is \$5,000 per student with full reimbursement for students receiving special education, METCO communities are only reimbursed \$3,354 per student – a minimum difference of \$1,645,

Whereas even though the FY06 foundation level is \$7,904 per student – current communities are reimbursed \$4,550 less for each METCO student,

Whereas if METCO students attended charter schools, a charter school would be receiving over \$9,900 per student – a difference of \$6,546 per student over current reimbursement level to METCO communities

BE IT RESOLVED, that the Lexington School Committee urges the legislature to increase funding to METCO-receiving districts by \$5 million, bringing Budget line item #7010-0012 to \$22.6 million.

The motion passed unanimously (5-0).

2. The School Committee will vote on the LHS mission statement at the second meeting in March.

IV. Members' Reports / Members' Concerns:

Olga Gutttag made the following motion (Gutttag, Burson):

I move that the Lexington School Committee support the Chapter 70 Minimum Funding Proposal that would provide a minimum of \$2000 per student to each city and town in Massachusetts.

The motion passed unanimously (5-0).

Olga Gutttag made the following motion to increase circuit breaker reimbursement (Gutttag, Díaz):

I move that the Lexington School Committee advocate for increased reimbursement of costs associated with special education by fully-funding the Circuit Breaker, and adjusting the CB formula from paying for 75% of special education expenses that are above 4 times the average per pupil foundation budget, to paying for 75% of special education expenses that are above 3 times the average per pupil foundation budget.

The motion passed unanimously (5-0).

Tom Griffiths: At the Selectmen's meeting Jay Kaufman and Tom Stanley opened with Q&A, they are working with the 1 billion dollar increase in state revenues. The governor's proposal would be a 17% increase in aid to cities and towns. Jay commented on the Acton proposal, which is unlikely to pass, though we will see a small increase. The Capital Expenditures Committee report from Charles Lamb, had operating budget implications: he is concerned that only \$540,000 is allocated for cash capital. The cash capital policy would have us spend another \$939,939 in cash, not borrowing. To honor the cash capital policy would increase the override by \$939,939. The Summit meeting will be held Thursday, February 9th at 6:30 in Estabrook Hall in Cary Hall.

Tom Diaz: (1) Thanks to Jill Smilow who moderated public discussion regarding a neighborhood dispute. (2) METCO: 260 families in Boston are counting on us to continue to provide a fine education. It will never be completely reimbursed. It's a symbol of our idealism.

Helen Cohen: Thanks to Olga for all the work on the resolutions.

V. Discussion Items:

Discussion and Straw Vote on FY07 Budget

The Committee will not take a formal vote on the budget until they get an at-risk list. The formal vote will be on February 28th. Tonight they will take a straw vote.

Discussion points:

Olga Gutttag: perhaps some items in the level services budget would be more appropriately placed in the non-level service portion of the budget.

Tom Griffiths: I support most of Dr. Ash's budget with some reservations about SPED positions. I do still have questions to be answered; \$200,000-to-\$400,000 may still be too conservatively estimated in the budget. The LEA unit A (teachers) portion of the budget is increasing around 5% (4.74%) while other areas of the personnel budget, cumulatively, show an 8.43% increase. I would like to see an explanation. If the non-LEA-Unit-A portion of the personnel were to increase at the Unit-A rate, there would be around a \$330K reduction in the non-Unit-A part of the personnel budget.

Paul Ash: Would have to show all the employees and all their salaries; I am happy to do it. There are two increases in LEA. 4.74% is actually low because there are many young teachers. We could produce the actual payroll register or sit down with Ann.

Tom Griffiths: Why larger increments in non-unit A salaries than in the unit A salaries? Maybe we need SALDIF for units other than Unit A, or maybe negotiations yielded amounts that I am not aware of, but overall the numbers are too high.

Olga Gutttag reiterated her feeling that the budget overall is too high for Lexington. She supports the level services plus mandated services portion of the budget.

Discussion ensued regarding addition of one or two elementary teachers above Dr. Ash's request to reduce class sizes. Dr. Ash stated that the need for the first of those teachers is greater than for the second, and that there may be a fourth grade class next year with 26 or 27 kids. Given the size of the budget, he decided not to add those teachers.

Tom Griffiths: I am concerned with the personnel budget issue discussed earlier and with SPED out-of-district reserve and whether that reserve could move to the Appropriation Committee reserve to reduce the overall municipal/school budget. Will be guided by conclusion Paul and Carl arrive at.

Level service budget: The Committee took a **straw vote** and they unanimously support the \$66,000,000 level services budget.
The recommended budget:

Scott Burson, Tom Diaz and **Tom Griffiths** support it with an additional elementary teacher (thereby increasing expenses by **\$58,600**).

Olga Gutttag is reserving judgment.

Helen Cohen supports the recommended budget, taking into account Tom Griffiths's idea of putting contingency money into a shared fund, and goes along with the Superintendent's judgment not to add the additional teachers to the budget.

Scott Burson would also support putting contingency money into a shared fund if the Superintendent did not conclude that it left us vulnerable.

VI. Motion to adjourn (Burson, **Diaz**) (6:53pm)

The next meeting of the School Committee is scheduled for Tuesday, February 14, 2006, at 7:30 p.m. at Lexington High School, Library Media Center, 251 Waltham Street.