

**Lexington Public Schools  
School Committee Meeting - January 4, 2005  
Bridge Elementary School**

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

Meeting called to order at 7:35 p.m. by Tom Griffiths.

**Public Comment**

Mollie Garberg, a parent, commended the School Committee on all their efforts made to get information on the website and out to the community regarding the budget process.

Vito LaMura, President LEA, said the LEA said a letter to the School Committee on December 10<sup>th</sup> requesting that they get a response to their previously filed grievance as soon as possible so as to reach a resolution of this grievance. Chuck Swartz, a math teacher at Lexington High School, addressed the School Committee. He feels the administration is becoming less supportive of teachers. The grievance filed in regard to course load sends a message to him that teachers are not being supported by the administration, the School Committee and contract agreements. He asked to be treated with respect and valued.

**Superintendent's Report**

**Bridge Elementary School – Welcome From Principal Barbara Manfredi**

Barbara Manfredi addressed the School Committee noting that Bridge is the largest of the six elementary schools with 522 students. She said at Bridge, they are a community and a partnership exists between the students and teachers. They are working on two new initiatives this year, the first being the open circle program. This is a social competency program to help children become more proficient in problem solving. Right now there are about 80 people trained to use the open circle program. Second, Bridge is working on tasks and making commitments to improve children's awareness of wellness and nutrition, helping them to understand more fully the benefits of a healthy diet. They are working with Chartwells to improve student lunches, snacks and the role food plays in events at schools. The goal is to help children lead healthy lives both emotionally and physically.

Helen Cohen thanked Ms. Manfredi and said the wellness issue is very important. In addition to what kids are eating and drinking, physical education also plays a part in that if children are getting enough. Ms. Manfredi noted they did not plan on extending it to that level but they are trying to raise children's awareness of what they are eating. A future goal down the road may be to incorporate this with physical education and teach the importance of exercise.

Olga Gutttag said the healthy lunch program is an excellent idea and it is also good for children with food allergies. This should be a system-wide initiative. She is also pleased with the drop in the number of students who need special education intervention. She also hopes this happens across the board system-wide.

Scott Burson thanked Ms. Manfredi for bringing the diversity of Bridge's student population to the School Committee's attention. Such diversity poses challenges as well as opportunities to educators.

Tom Griffiths thanked Ms. Manfredi for helping make Lexington one of the best school systems in the nation.

#### FY06 Budget Update

Mr. Hurley briefly outlined the budget that he previously presented at the December 14<sup>th</sup> School Committee meeting. He indicated that the main factors driving the budget are obligations and growth. Back in December, he proposed a budget with a \$3.5 million (5.3%) increase, and the School Committee asked for an at-risk list totaling \$2 million. The budget process planning group met yesterday and Tom Griffiths was in attendance. Mr. Hurley asked Mr. Griffiths give a synopsis of that meeting and will postpone coming in with another scenario of a budget until we have more clarity on the information from Mr. Griffiths.

Tom Griffiths stated that the main thing about the meeting is some of the projections are still moving around as far as town revenues are concerned. It appeared to them that neither Selectmen nor the School Committee were in position where they felt that the meeting tomorrow night would not be useful or productive. They agreed to postpone that meeting until either the 19<sup>th</sup> or 26<sup>th</sup> of January for the second collaborative budget meeting. We are making progress on the budget but numbers still moving around so they are not comfortable with moving too far ahead. Mr. Griffiths reminded everyone that the budget collaborative meeting tomorrow night is cancelled and will be rescheduled to one of the dates mentioned above. John Ryan, who was the former comptroller for the town, served Lexington for many years but has since retired. He has offered to help with our budget process. Mr. Griffiths opened the meeting for public comment.

Suzanne Adams, a parent, asked Mr. Hurley to briefly review the budget previously presented.

Mr. Hurley reiterated that there was a 7 FTE decrease in staff but an increase in student population by 152 children in the past three years. Right now we are trying to play catch up with the student/teacher ratio as well as maintaining class size. One topic that was discussed at the budget process planning group meeting was the fact that we may see further a reduction in health care benefit costs. The town is looking at that closely.

Helen Cohen said we are trying to maintain the same level of service for our children by restoring some things that were taken away. There are still a number of things that we gave up when the override failed and are still not able to put back into this budget.

Tom Diaz added that in addition to restoration of services and growth, we are dealing within a fiscal year with a larger budget gap and are looking at different revenue projections.

Jesse Steigerwald, a parent, suggested rather than giving input in this year's budget process, asked if there is any way for planning two or three years out. She asked as things continue to grow and cost more, how will you think further out.

Mr. Hurley said in the future, Lexington would have to plan for a whole town and not just a school department. Revenues will have to be shared with the entire process of the town. We would have to look at town needs and projected revenues over a period of time. There will also have to be a community effort when looking that far ahead not just from the school side.

Scott Burson noted it is important to remember that Lexington will always have school support and it is likely that we will always face the pressure that we are under now. The curriculum accurately reflects the needs and desires of the town and once you decide to do without a program, it is very hard to bring it back.

Mr. Jeon questioned the documents presented at last year's town meeting and asked for clarification on the numbers. He said there is a difference of 15 FTEs from the budget presented last year at town meeting.

In regard to last year's budget, Ms. Gutttag said if she remembers correctly and looking at the pre-override staffing projections, the School Committee voted on a pre-override budget at town meeting.

Jane Pagett, parent and town meeting member, feels both the town and the school need to look at their budget differently and suggested for the future a more integrated budget process.

Helen Cohen said she has not experienced any problems between the Board of Selectmen and the School Committee in the budget process. We are not piling new things on top in this budget but are trying to maintain things that we believe are necessary to give the kind of education the youth of Lexington that they are used to and what the parents expect. We are responding to the level of growth and the cost driving issues in this budget as well as trying to be as conservative as we can but there is a vision of what the education in Lexington is about.

Olga Gutttag asked how we could sustain excellent education in Lexington as well as sustain services we are used to on a town-wide basis. We need to identify how our expenses outweigh our revenue. We tend to forget as citizens that because of this deficit we are providing considerably less. The community has to decide to trust their public officials to do job they were hired to do.

Mr. Jeon again asked that the School Committee look into the 15 FTE discrepancies in this budget process. He also questioned the updated student enrollment figures. Susan Bottan noted that as of 10/1/04 student enrollment was 6,133 and she had projected a figure of 6,173. She informed Mr. Jeon that updated enrollment reports as current as 1/3/05 are available at the Central Office.

Tom Griffiths asked Bill Hurley and Susan Bottan to post the answers to Mr. Jeon's questions on the website.

Reid Zurlo, parent, appreciated what Ms. Gutttag said and wishes it could be printed over and over again in the Minuteman. The health care increase is a huge percentage of the budget. She expressed to the public that you should trust the people you elect.

Tom Diaz asked about the status of discussions with Moody's. Dawn McKenna, Board of Selectman, said advisors have been talking with Moody's. January 18<sup>th</sup> is the formal meeting and by the end of January they will have all issues and questions answered. Tom Diaz indicated Moody's is very important, but that the negative outlook did not send a clear signal; he feels we have overreacted to this negative outlook.

Olga Gutttag is very concerned about the Moody's rating. Her concern is not over the rating itself but the underlying management of our finances. We do a great number of things where we are self-insured as a town and unexpected emergencies come up when you are self-insured. Moody's have examined our reserves with respect to our expenses and determined that our ratio is less than perfect. That could be the reason for their concern.

Tom Griffiths said the Triple A ratings is a serious concern, but for him it is not the ultimate concern. Educating our children on a day-to-day basis is the primary concern for us as a School Committee. We cannot back off on our commitment to education. This is a difficult year, and we need to solve this year's problems as well as in years to come.

Olga Gutttag stated that there is a School Committee meeting on January 18<sup>th</sup> and a collaboration meeting on January 19<sup>th</sup>. She would like to schedule a second meeting between January 19<sup>th</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup>.

Dawn McKenna reminded that there is a possible joint meeting with the Board of Selectmen and the School Committee executive session scheduled for either January 10<sup>th</sup> or 12<sup>th</sup>.

Helen Cohen said this is going to be an incredible month because the School Committee will also be interviewing Superintendent finalists. They are meeting tomorrow with Richard Warren to set these interview dates. After that, we can see where we can fit in other meetings. Next week the School Committee will be interviewing at least two of the finalists. The week of the 24<sup>th</sup> we will possibly be interviewing the other two finalists. They decided on a date of January 10<sup>th</sup> at 6:30 p.m. for a meeting between the Board of Selectmen and the School Committee.

Bill will make another budget presentation at the January 18<sup>th</sup> School Committee meeting.

#### Superintendent Search Committee Update

The School Committee will be meeting with Richard Warren tomorrow to discuss dates and would welcome questions from the community to ask the finalists. They expect to have two interviews next week and will put off the other two until the week of 1/24. The School Committee hopes to have an announcement by February 1<sup>st</sup> and will put information on the website as soon as possible to get it out to the community. Tom Diaz said he has received feedback on the candidates from the community and will pass this information on to the search consultants.

#### Members' Reports/Members' Concerns

Olga Gutttag reminded that emails sent to School Committee members are part of public record. If you put something in an email, it can become public so please keep that in mind. She raised a question to Bill Hurley and the administration in regard to the tsunami disaster. Given how much aid is needed, she inquired about having an organized effort to try to provide some type of aid. She extended thanks to all who have worked so hard on the budget and thanked Marianne McKenna for going over and above the call of duty and posting updated information on the website in a timely manner. Ms. Gutttag asked for an update on the IIT director position. Bill Hurley said the new IIT director would begin on January 18<sup>th</sup>.

Janette Ekanem reminded all that January 16<sup>th</sup> is the Martin Luther King Day celebration. She encourages all to come out and support the town and show that you embrace diversity. The celebration will be held at Carey Hall at 10:00 a.m.

Mr. Hurley noted a relief disaster plan for the tsunami victims was the topic of a conversation at the administration meeting today. They would like to plan something for the entire school district. He does not want to deny each school the chance to participate in its own way but would like to represent Lexington Public Schools and direct the effort toward the children who were affected.

**Action Items**

It was agreed to defer the minutes of the December 21, 2004 meeting until the next School Committee meeting.

A motion was made to accept with gratitude the three donations made to the Lexington Public Schools. (Cohen – Gutttag; 5-0)

A motion was made at 9:10 p.m. to move into executive session for the discussion of bargaining strategies and not return to public session. (Burson – Cohen; roll call unanimous 5-0)

Submitted by,

Lisa McGuire

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