

**Lexington Public Schools  
School Committee Meeting – January 18, 2005  
Estabrook Elementary School**

Members present were Tom Griffiths, Olga Guttag, Tom Diaz, Helen Cohen, Student Representative Janette Ekanem and Interim Superintendent William Hurley. Scott Burson is not in attendance as he is in Israel.

Tom Griffiths called the meeting to order at 7:40 p.m.

**Public Comment**

Tom Griffiths acknowledged the personnel issues with the LEA and said the School Committee welcomes written commentary on this dispute and has listened to all disputes. The dispute involves a personnel disagreement expressed by the School Committee in executive session. Previous speakers have disparaged parents advocating for children and have made personal comments about certain staff and the administration. This is out of order at School Committee meetings. He noted the final step to resolve this issue is arbitration. Arbitration is a contractual option and a reasonable course of action. The School Committee does not resolve personnel disputes in public hearings.

Vito LaMura, President Lexington Education Association, said the LEA does not like the School Committee's decision to go to arbitration but respects their decision to do so. The LEA feels disrespected because the School Committee is not responding. The LEA executive board has not been acknowledged nor has their letter been answered. They presented a petition signed by almost 400 teachers saying they were dismayed and asked for a resolution without arbitration. Two weeks ago they asked the School Committee to respond to their letter and petition and to date there has been no reply from the School Committee. The LEA is requesting a response when they communicate with the School Committee board.

Sue Offner, a biology teacher at Lexington High School, said the high school is a school that runs on teacher morale, some teachers putting in 15 hours a day and doing over and above what they have to do. She is upset and bewildered about this issue.

Mr. Griffiths provided Mr. LaMura a written letter in response to the letter in question, during the course of this discussion.

**Superintendent's Report**

**Estabrook Elementary School – Welcome from Principal Joni Jay**

Mr. Hurley announced that Pam Houlares' mother passed away. He also introduced the new Director of Informational and Technical Instruction, Stephen Arnoff. Mr. Hurley introduced Joni Jay, Principal of Estabrook Elementary School.

Joni Jay welcomed all to Estabrook and acknowledged parents and faculty of Estabrook who were in attendance at this meeting. Estabrook has 478 students, 73 students with another language at home, and 35 students that speak English as a second language. There are 105 students of Asian decent, 27 METCO students are bussed in from Boston, and 9% of students who receive Special Education services. Ms. Jay noted that the staff at Estabrook is the school's greatest strength. They have a good mix of experienced teachers and new comers who possess a high degree of professional competence and positive attitude. The school has a warm community spirit with a lot of parent involvement. Estabrook has a limited number of goals this year. They are focusing on the differentiated reading program and exploring the achievement gap and looking at what they can do to make improvement. They are extremely focused on anti-bias and anti-racism education. Estabrook is working on a special project that involves a survey to parents, staff and children regarding homework. Ms. Jay invited the School Committee to attend some upcoming events at Estabrook. January 25<sup>th</sup> at 7:00 a.m. there will be a discussion regarding the homework survey with the staff, 2/16<sup>th</sup> and 2/17<sup>th</sup> they are having their winter concerts. Ms. Jay thanked the School Committee and said she is grateful for all the work they do.

Tom Griffiths commented on the facilities at Estabrook. Ms. Jay said the building was built in the early 1960s. One of the challenges is that there is no cafeteria in the school. Structurally, roof leaks are a major issue. She is working with Dana Ham on it, as considerable repairs are needed each year.

Helen Cohen feels it is not acceptable for children to eat their lunch in the hallway. She asked if any actions have been taken on the homework survey. Joni Jay is looking for Estabrook to have their own school handbook and will be making recommendations to the School Committee to update and match curricular demands.

#### Harrington and Fiske Move Schedule

Mr. Hurley thanked Dana Ham and Carol Pilarski for working with the staff and working out all the details.

Carol Pilarski said she is delighted to be part of this project. She extended thanks to everyone on the subcommittee for helping work out the details. The first move will be into the new Harrington, which will take place during February vacation. On February 17<sup>th</sup>, teachers will start packing at the old Harrington. There will be no school for Harrington students on Friday, February 18<sup>th</sup> to allow teachers to complete packing. Our custodial and maintenance staff will help with the move from 2/19<sup>th</sup> to 2/28<sup>th</sup>. There will be no school on Monday 2/28<sup>th</sup> to allow for teachers to unpack and set up their classrooms.

On March 2<sup>nd</sup> at 9:00 a.m., students and staff will have a ribbon cutting ceremony at the new Harrington. During the first few weeks in the new building, Harrington will remain on their old schedule. Harrington will then have a staggered schedule beginning on 3/14<sup>th</sup> until the new Fiske Elementary is completed.

Carol Pilarski discussed the tentative time line for the Fiske move. There will be no school for students on March 18<sup>th</sup> to allow time for teachers to pack. There will also be no school on Monday, March 21<sup>st</sup> so teacher will be able to unpack. We will probably hire a moving company for the Fiske move because of the short period of time to move in one weekend. The superintendent applied for a waiver from the state to allow us to have no school on March 22<sup>nd</sup> but we are still waiting to hear from the Commissioner. If so, there will be one additional day off for students to allow teachers to get settled in their classrooms at the old Harrington. Mr. Hurley said this is the anticipated time line regarding the Fiske move. As of now, this is our best intention but it may change due to factors beyond our control.

In regard to the bid process, Olga Gutttag said the current plan of the Permanent Building Committee (PBC) is to make the bid documents available on February 9<sup>th</sup> and expect to open bids by early April. Once the bids are open and we accept, we have 30 days to sign. Construction at Fiske is anticipated to start some time in May, 2005 as we would like to get this project under way as soon as possible.

#### FY06 Budget Update (combined as Superintendent's discussion and Discussion Item)

Back in December, Mr. Hurley presented a budget to the School Committee. That budget consisted of a proposed level service budget plus any additional needs based on student enrollment and any other factors beyond our control. The budget presented in December showed an increase of \$3.5 million or 5.3% for a current proposed budget of \$66,357,000. Driving factors were cost of personnel and benefit costs, maintenance and operations, SPED, instructional services, and transportation. Since that time, the School Committee has looked at the recommendations and asked if there was any way to lower the \$3.5 million increase. Mr. Hurley had conversations with the administration to see what we could cut. Topics under discussion were presented by Susan Bottan.

Susan Bottan gave a summary of the proposed increase for obligations and the proposed budget increase in growth, which gave an overall increase of \$3.5 million. She met with joint council members and administrators to brainstorm this list and try to come up with a number of elements that could be looked at for reductions or cost savings. She discussed some of the ideas that would reduce the obligation request giving a cost savings of \$170,000.

Mike Jones, Principal of Lexington High School, was looking at FY06 in terms of FTEs and not programs. He said the high school is understaffed in physical education and has been for several years. The projections were for a 1.0 FTE physical education teacher in

the budget. In this scenario, we would not hire this physical education teacher. Therefore, in order to preserve physical education (a graduation requirement), we may need help from health teachers to satisfy the PE requirement.

Olga Gutttag asked if administrators are looking at the possibility of changing how we look at physical education and the credits needed towards graduation. Mr. Jones said the state would allow us to count varsity or junior varsity sports towards state physical education requirements, but we still may have to reduce credit requirements for graduation as varsity sports is not considered a curriculum whereas physical education is.

#### Enrollment Update

Susan Bottan went over the enrollments from October 1, 2004 versus January 5, 2005. Since October 1<sup>st</sup>, enrollment has increased to 6,156 students. This represents an increase of 23 students. Eighty percent of this increase was at the elementary level.

Tom Griffiths said there is a collaborative summit meeting with the Selectmen's office tomorrow night. He would like to add the \$400,000 for likely settlement costs. Helen Cohen asked if this was in addition to the superintendent's proposed budget. Mr. Griffiths said it was.

Olga Gutttag would like to vote on a budget that does not change the quality of services we could offer our children. She is concerned about having to close any budget gap that we might have and is disturbed by savings we might obtain for not accounting for enrollment in the secondary schools. The fiscal reality is we will have to make budget cuts. Based upon any salary settlements, we will be choosing what we can pay for. Ms. Gutttag is comfortable with a budget that provides for safe services and is comfortable with the superintendent's proposed budget minus the \$100,000 for benefit reductions.

Tom Diaz said he is distressed to see a few things on cut the list and does not foreclose asking for another override this year. He is eager to preserve the things that were just recently restored to the system and wants to be sure we budget realistically for a salary increase. He agrees with Tom Griffiths to add in the \$400,000.

Helen Cohen supports Tom's \$400,000 suggestion as well so there will some room when discussing negotiations.

Bill Hurley feels it is wise to add some money that will help with negotiation settlements.

Tom Griffiths said we needed to work with the Board of Selectmen and finance committees to stress our needs and the town's needs. He anticipated the need to use free cash in order to eliminate at least some of the town-wide deficit. Any vote we take on the School Committee budget is preliminary at this point. He questioned the SPED circuit

breaker and asked what the likelihood is of our being able to take advantage of any of this revenue. Mr. Hurley said we have a better than 50% chance.

A motion was made to approve, for the time being, the Superintendent's budget plus \$250,000 (This figure is derived from the \$400,000 minus the \$150,000 provided by reductions identified earlier in the meeting.) This figured comes to \$70,127,351. (Cohen – Diaz; 3-0; 1 abstain) Tom Diaz supports this motion because he agrees with Tom Griffiths with this stage of the budget process but there are also parts of the priority list that he does not agree with. Olga Gutttag is abstaining from voting because has not had enough time to think through the additional \$250,000. She is not convinced that we will not be able to achieve negotiations with the numbers Mr. Hurley originally suggested.

Tom Diaz feels the \$556,000 in growth hiring would be the easiest thing to forego this year. He would rather do that than eliminate foreign language in the elementary schools. He is in favor of delaying any hiring that we can in 2006 to preserve programs.

Olga Gutttag would like to see what impact those positions would have on course elections and class size. She would like to see a breakdown the budget of “super critical”, “critical” and “must haves”. She feels we do not have staff that has no purpose and would like to see how we got to these staffing levels over the past few years.

Helen Cohen asked what would happen if we decided to cut something and what the process is in that regard.

Bill Hurley said we will base whatever cuts are necessary on what the priorities are, what the impact would be and how the cut would impact all involved.

Olga Gutttag suggested looking for increased revenues as one way to look for cuts and possibly doing a comparison of our fees. Mr. Hurley said we can increase fees in certain areas but we still want to make it affordable for families.

Tom Diaz said town officials sat down with Moody's today and Tom Griffiths should know by the end of the week what the outcome was.

Vito LaMura asked if there were any administrative positions being cut on the list. Mr. Hurley noted there is a \$75,000 cut from the central office staff if it becomes necessary.

Ms. Gutttag shared what she has seen as a volunteer over the past several years in this school system. She feels we have a very thin administrative structure to deliver the expected services and is opposed to any administrative cuts. Mainly, she feels there is not enough administrative support in the facilities department. Tom Griffiths agreed with Olga in that administrative cuts are unwise for the size of Lexington.

Tom Diaz clarified that the vote taken earlier was to support the superintendent's proposed budget with the outcome of what the cuts will be to be determined at later date.

### **Discussion Items**

#### **Ratify or Amend the Proposed Capital Budget**

Tom Griffiths presented Dana Ham's proposed budget at the capital expenditures committee. We need to have the School Committee's support on this budget or amend whatever the School Committee disagrees on.

Bill Hurley said nothing has changed since his last presentation.

The Committee followed the list of items one by one and took votes.

1. A motion was made to approve \$125,000 for the replacement of outdated intercom and phone systems at the Bridge and Bowman schools. (Guttag – Diaz; 4-0 unanimous)
2. Heating and cooling controls at Clarke and Diamond middle schools estimated at \$350,000. Dana Ham explained that until the study is completed by DMJM Harris, we would not have a firm number of what the heating exchange will be. The study will be completed by town meeting. Tom Diaz did not want to take a vote without a firm cost and asked what the expected pay back time would be. Mr. Ham said we would know once the study is completed as Nstar will not approve this without having a certain amount of payback. Mr. Diaz is very supportive of this project but prefers to wait as long as the payback is reasonable. A motion was made to support in principal the heating and cooling proposal dependant on the survey results. (Cohen – Guttag; 4-0 unanimous)
3. A motion was made to approve \$75,000 for the replacement of multiple entranceways to the Bridge, Bowman and High School. (Guttag – Diaz; 4-0 unanimous)
4. A motion was made to approve \$100,000 or any other amount for exterior lighting in all school buildings. (Guttag – Cohen; 4-0 unanimous)
5. \$250,000 for a school security monitoring system. Mr. Ham said this is for exterior coverage of all school buildings in the system and possibly interior hallway monitoring of the high school and middle schools. This item is lower on Tom Griffiths priority list than any other item on the capital budget. Olga Guttag thought it might be good idea to get what the annual cost of vandalism repairs are to see what the costs savings would be with this security system. A motion was made to support this article. (Guttag – Diaz; 3-1; opposed Tom Griffiths)
6. A motion was made to approve \$140,000 for the update of the Diamond Middle School generator. (Guttag – Cohen; 4-0 unanimous)

7. A motion was made to approve \$404,100 for replacement of custodial and maintenance equipment. (Guttag – Diaz) Tom Diaz is in support of this if it promotes labor savings devices for custodians and if it buys newer and better equipment. Dana Ham said starting in February, an outside company will be conducting a study of how the school department does business with facilities for cost savings, man power savings, and how buildings are maintained. Part of this study will include assessing our equipment and future needs. Capital expenditures will not support an item that is under \$25,000 for its cash capital program. They are not enthusiastic about this project. Olga Guttag argued that since we invested tens of millions of dollars in new buildings, it would be unwise not to invest the \$400,000 for equipment to maintain the buildings. She feels the items in this article are critical. (4-0; unanimous)

The School Committee requested a separate article regarding the \$400,000 voted on for the design phase of the Central Office. Guttag – Diaz. The \$400,000 would be for beginning the engineering and design work to refurbish the white house. (4-0; unanimous) The PBC is agreeable to launching the \$25,000 study of what it would take to begin handling the problems associated with the central office administration building.

A motion was made to approve \$350,000 to be appropriated for the upkeep and upgrade of the schools' technology. (Guttag – Diaz; 4-0 unanimous)

#### Superintendent Search Subcommittee Update

Helen Cohen advised that Wednesday, Thursday and Friday of this week each finalist would spend a day in the school system. There will be parent meetings in the morning and the finalists will spend the afternoons at the Central Office for meetings with central office staff, principals and Mr. Hurley. Ms. Cohen urged everyone to attend the public interviews the School Committee will hold next Tuesday and Thursday. The School Committee will announce their decision at the February 8<sup>th</sup> School Committee meeting.

#### Members' Reports/Members' Concerns

Helen Cohen attended the Martin Luther King celebration Sunday afternoon. Sherry Gordan led the ceremony. United Voices from the high school spoke as well. Janette Ekanem was one of the five people who spoke.

Olga Guttag attended a PTA and PTO presidents meeting. The budget and the donations policy were two topics of interest. She also attended the induction ceremony of students joining the National Honor Society. There were over 200 juniors and seniors inducted. She had a meeting with the Fiske PTA committee and gave a history of how the Fiske project came about. Prior to the Permanent Building Committee meeting, the group will take a tour of the new Harrington which is almost complete.

**Action Items**

A motion was made to approve the minutes of the December 21, 2004 School Committee meeting. (Cohen – Diaz; 4-0 unanimous)

A motion was made to accept the \$500 with gratitude to be used in a general way with no restrictions to any particular school. (Cohen – Gutttag; 4-0)

A motion was made to adjourn 10:30 p.m. (Gutttag – Cohen; 4-0)

Submitted by,

Lisa McGuire

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