

LEXINGTON SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEETING
Tuesday, January 31, 2006
Jonas Clarke Middle School Auditorium
17 Stedman Road

The meeting was convened at 7:35 p.m.

Present: Superintendent Paul Ash; School Committee Helen Cohen - Chair, Scott Burson, Tom Diaz, Tom Griffiths, Olga Gutttag; Student representative Toni Maeck; Minutes taken by Leora Tec

I. Call to Order and Welcome (Helen Cohen)

II. Public Comment

William Clayton (precinct 6): LABB Collaborative voted 3 years ago to form a union. They are now in mediation. Dr. Ash is a member of the LABB Board of directors, but has not attended the mediation sessions. We have been bargaining for 18 months. Please join us to help us to settle our first contract.

Paul Ash: I deeply appreciate the work you do for kids. Today I was at a LABB Board of Directors meeting. It is very complicated because there are LABB employees paid at 5 salary ranges with different benefits because it involves 5 towns and 5 rates. How can we achieve a fair settlement? We spent 2.5 hours working the problem and empowered the negotiators with some good ideas. With a mediator you will get a contract. People are working in good faith. They appreciate your work. I promise I will be actively engaged, though I don't decide who sits at the table.

Cosette Dunham(?)(10 plus years in LABB): Lexington has been a good host. Lexington has 70% of the LABB staff members.

There were 33 people present representing the LABB staff.

III. Superintendent's Report:

A January 24, 2006, letter from Town of Lexington Fire Department stated that we must put either storage lockers or sprinklers into the four old elementary school buildings. There is no specific code mandating lockers but the spirit of the law demands it. There are fire issues and all the kids' things narrow the hallways. The program must be completed by Sept. 2008.

IV. Members' Reports / Members' Concerns:

Scott Burson: Due to health issues I may depart at 10:00 or before.

Tom Diaz: The budget process collaboration group (Gang of 8) met the morning of January 27. The Town Manager reported that the municipal level services budget, plus the school "level and required" services budget totaled an override of about \$3.5 million, which takes into account an allocation of about \$2 million of free cash, a stabilization fund of about \$650,000, and cash capital at 4%. Also, the Superintendent and Town Manager reported they had met and agreed on a split of incremental revenue with about 72% going to schools and 28% going to the municipal departments. Those percentages could be tweaked a bit but

reflect the percentages of spending in the final (post November) FY06 budget. The group also scheduled summit meetings for February 17 and for March 1, in addition to the already scheduled meeting on February 9 at 6:30 p.m.

Tom Griffiths: Senior Center Siting Committee is preparing a report for Selectmen. The two sites under consideration are: 1) Harrington; and 2) a combination of the Muzzey and Munroe schools. The next step is to report to the Selectmen Monday night. There will probably be a warrant article for additional research. The schools appeared before CEC and proposed 2.146 million dollars, which included \$400,000 for the technology capital budget (and lockers at \$120,000).

Olga Gutttag: The administration should work with the PBC to establish a process for construction-related tasks such as completion of punch lists in occupied buildings and how to make claims under warranties. In the past building capital was separate from technology capital and this year they are together. What are the pros and cons?

Scott Burson: They were separate because the initial technology initiative consisted of additional funds from Town Meeting, now it is less critical that they be separate. As long as it is transparent it is ok.

Olga Gutttag: To follow up on our previous discussion concerning posting the full budget on the web, we have always posted the Superintendent's budget presentation within a week, this year we did it the next day. Yesterday the supporting spreadsheets went up too.

Tom Diaz: There is a summary of the budget and there are reports of four individual members.

Discussion regarding email questions going to Olga.

Discussion about the easiest way to get the minutes checked by committee members.

V. Discussion Items:

FY07 Budget

Paul Ash presented two budget breakouts. The first lists the amount required to maintain level services plus legally or otherwise required services, the other lists enhancements recommended by the Superintendent.

Changes since Dec. 20th.

The collective bargaining figure has declined significantly. The SALDIF has been changed to \$650,000. ELL: Thanks to Lynne Sarasin's consultations with the Associate Commissioner we can have one fewer ELL position, so this item is reduced by \$50,000.

The SPED out of district amount increased by \$25,000.

So, total increase in level service is 6.5% (3.9 million). The total increase is 11.05%. The FY07 budget is \$66,680,158

Members' Questions:

Questions from members about various topics including: ETLs at LHS, FTEs working on curriculum, circuit breaker money, Clarke/Diamond equity, technology positions, further limiting ELL positions, funding of supplies and services provided by PTAs and LEF, and categorization of personnel for the budget.

Members' Statements:

Scott Burson: The budget presentation was a lot of work for the staff and is a successful effort. There is transparency. The bottom line request is high, and realistic. I support the budget. Class sizes, richness of curriculum, and maintenance and upkeep of facilities are important. These are not luxuries. The SPED contingency is very wise. Funds for a new teacher induction program are important given the changing teacher demographic. Adequate provision for maintenance and upkeep of facilities is long overdue. This is not a pie in the sky budget but represents reasonable compromises between what we can afford and what we need. It may be nice to explore how much it would cost to make class sizes smaller. We could use more money for social and emotional support for kids. I am looking forward to the development of the Health and Wellness curriculum. I am still concerned that there is no full day kindergarten. The needs the budget identifies are real, and there are real needs it does not meet.

Tom Diaz: An operating override will be necessary this year. It will probably be unbundled. So far, no at-risk list has been put together. Suggested reductions in level services: \$240,000 (\$197, actually, now) for out of district placements we predict for next year. We can't forecast with enough accuracy to have this in the level services budget. It would be more reasonable to treat these as an additional reserve against future expenses. This goes up and down all the time, so I recommend reducing the budget by \$197,000. We could encumber the funds perhaps or put some money in stabilization funds. We want to avoid special Town Meetings to request extra money. I agree with the question about ETLs. Maybe we could reduce new technicians in technology and try to make do with one instead of two. We could reduce preventative maintenance by \$60,000. We could reduce new teacher mentoring by \$50,000. Let's get rid of the NEASC reaccreditation. I recommend enhancing the language program in elementary school, reducing the languages at LHS or eliminating French in middle school. We should add 2 FTEs for crowded elementary classes next year.

Paul Ash responded that we have spent a lot of money on technology but we are not getting our money's worth by not having enough technicians. He also feels we need the \$197,000.

Olga Gutttag: Kudos to the staff. This is a budget that will help us continue to deliver quality education. However, I am worried that perpetual tax increases will drive long-time residents out of town, and I cannot support a budget that is almost 11% higher than last year's. I suggest choosing two or three items that are really critical areas to keep, and making some sacrifices elsewhere. I recommend keeping: 1. induction and mentoring, 2. technology infrastructure and maintenance of facilities, and 3. professional development to improve instruction. Things I am willing to sacrifice for one year are: breadth of offerings at LHS and not improving the teacher/student ratio; restructuring of K-12 programs that increase FTE counts; and, in spite of a slew of emails, I would sacrifice reducing class sizes next year in the elementary schools. I would go to one Central Office administrator for curriculum with sufficient secretarial support, and do at most one K-12 review next year. Regarding technology, next year I'd like us to focus on the basics, complete the infrastructure and productivity software upgrades and accept little progress in technology integration. I would like to see if there are any places we can "work smarter;" we should not have the administrators doing clerical work. I trust the voters.

We can offer them multiple options; I like to think of it as a choice between a Chevy, a Lexus and a Maserati.

Tom Griffiths: Thanks to Paul Ash and his staff for pushing us to look at where we stand educationally, the process has been invaluable. What you have shown us frightens me. I have two recommendations: increase the shared expense account with the town by \$100,000 or \$150,000 and decrease the SPED contingency. The “pending” SPED numbers in reserve should be included in the base budget because they are expenses we will have to make, though predicting the amount is tricky. Preventative maintenance is the ideal item for an override, perhaps combined with the custodian FTEs and the other two non-custodial positions under facilities. The proposed building tech could save enough money in operations to justify the position.

In the future, I support not funding the NEASC because money is very dear. I don’t believe Lexington will be faulted for not having this. We should begin to replace French with Chinese in the middle schools. Perhaps we could do with one computer tech instead of two. This is an adequate budget. We need to do the right thing, for education, not decide between a Chevy, a Lexus and a Maserati.

Toni Maeck: K-12 health and wellness restructuring would increase mental wellness. I recommend not eliminating funding for NEASC accreditation as we don’t know whether it would impact college admissions.

Helen Cohen: Thank you to the staff and my colleagues. I am comfortable that the budget represents the real needs of the system: professional development, supplies, preventative maintenance and mentoring new teachers, which is an invaluable investment. I am concerned about physical education and the health department. I hope cutting of the health director from .75 to .5 will be balanced by the Phys Ed. and Wellness director. I support the .5 prevention specialist. I have no suggested cuts to present at this time.

Paul Ash stated that putting together a cut list was his priority. The Committee agreed that they would take a straw poll on February 7th to present to the Summit on February 9th, but not a formal vote.

Discussion of the likely delay in design of the DPW building and the effect that may have on the timing of a debt exclusion. The Committee decided to keep its options open with respect to the *White House*. In particular, the Committee will keep the warrant article on the White House and decide closer to Town Meeting whether to move the article or indefinitely postpone it.

VI. Motion to adjourn to Executive Session for the purposes of collective bargaining (Diaz, Griffiths): Cohen-aye, Diaz-aye, Griffiths-aye, Guttage-aye. (Scott Burson had left early for health reasons)

The next meeting of the School Committee is scheduled for Tuesday, February 7, 2006, at 5:00 p.m. at Lexington High School, Library Media Center, 251 Waltham Street.