

LEXINGTON SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEETING

Tuesday, June 6, 2006

**Lexington High School, Library Media Center
251 Waltham Street**

Present: Superintendent Paul Ash, School Committee Chair Helen Cohen, School Committee Members Tom Diaz, Tom Griffiths, Olga Gutttag, Ravi Sakhuja and student representative Toni Maeck. Minutes taken by Leora Tec.

The meeting was convened at 7:36 p.m.

I. Call to Order and Welcome (Helen Cohen)

Helen Cohen: I am feeling sadness that we were not supported by the town in the override, about the faculty that are being let go, the students who won't have programs, increased class sizes, etc... There is also anger and anxiety about what happens next and how can we fix this. It's important to take a deep breath, listen and figure out what information we need and then move forward. This is a wonderful school system, with a wonderful administration, faculty and parents, and students; at some point we will get through this and move forward. I want to appeal to everyone that we as School Committee members, administration, faculty and parents all work together. We will face an override situation next year to maintain and to restore. We have the creativity to figure it out.

Paul Ash: I will start with thank yous. I like being here, there are wonderful people here. Most people really care. The town was divided 49% to 51 %. That does not mean that people turned their backs on the schools. Thank you to the principals, the Central Office staff, the LEA, and the teachers for putting together the budget, and to the members of the School Committee who supported it and worked incredibly hard to convey it to the community, and to the Board of Selectmen and Town Meeting who supported the budget. Thanks to Lexington for supporting Question 3. Life goes on, we will still have an outstanding system, and I look forward to the next cycle of the budget process. There are ups and downs in the process, we are still a strong school system. I look forward to working with the community and having a great year next year.

Helen Cohen: I left out the thank yous. Thanks to Paul Ash and his staff for the incredible work on the budget. Thanks to the YES campaign, chaired by Tom Diaz and Debora Hoard, that did an outstanding job. And of course thanks to the staff and the faculty.

II. Public Comment

Principal Steve Adler, and parents Jesse Steigerwald, Diane Bigelow and Kelly Tzannes: Came to propose a fundraiser to improve the Hastings playground. They hope to raise money for two tiers, and stated that they would be catching up to the quality of other system playgrounds.

Motion to accept proposal to raise money to improve the Hastings playground and make it accessible to all children.(Gutttag, Diaz). **The motion passed 5-0.**

Susan Elberger: I am chair of the all night graduation party, which is Sunday night. It is a great party. I am requesting that people come to help us decorate.

Ana Flaster (precinct 5): Private funds can't be used to hire teachers.

III. Superintendent's Report:

Paul Ash attended a Rotary cookout for senior athletes. We won 70% of our games. We may win the Dalton award this year.

IV. Members' Reports / Members' Concerns:

Helen Cohen: Custodial negotiations were concluded so the custodians can get their back pay. We are moving forward on a contract for the next 3 years. Thank you to Olga Gutttag, Carol Gregory, and Bill Hartigan. On June 20th we will elect a new chair and vice-chair of the School Committee.

Toni Maeck: Students are sad and angry that more people didn't vote.

Olga Gutttag: Today is a sad day for Lexington. I am grateful that Question 3 passed but sad that Questions 1 and 2 didn't. Thanks to those who voted. We are facing two questions: 1). What happened? Many people are hurting financially; it is not about lack of faith in our youth. The Questions were not structured the right way. There were too many critical things in Q1. School Committee leadership is not seen as good. 2). What do we do now? We have new information: we received money from SPED expenses from the state. Let's try to restore some things.

Tom Griffiths: I have three requests: 1). An employee roll-up that is up to date and accurate; 2). An answer to the question about FTE discrepancies; and 3). An assessment on whether we owe the town any money under Scott's motion of 10-24-05 limiting the application of the FY06 supplementary appropriation to those areas in deficit at the time of the request.

I concur with all the thank yous, especially to those involved in the YES campaign. We are fortunate that Questions 3 and 4 passed. Three will allow us to get started on preventive maintenance, and from the town's perspective I am glad we have a supervisor of roads. The loss of the school Questions will be felt for years to come. We will have weakened credibility as a town. People may not live here or may go to private school. The leader of the No campaign misrepresented the number of new FTEs and the school budget increase. He said he had misremembered, but he had constructed a justification on the TMMA listserve for his school budget claim. As we proceed to more overrides we have the right to expect a higher level of debate than the falsification of self-evident data, which makes a mockery of the process.

Tom Diaz: Thanks to the voters for passing Questions 3 and 4. I have a request for some final budget data related to a question from Mr. Barry Griffiths. On May 31st we had the Executive Director of Mass. Budget and Policy Center, Noah Berger, do a great presentation on the fiscal crisis in Massachusetts. I hope that those who voted no know what students are in for; many staff will be now laid off. Question 1 lost by a very small margin. Next year will be a struggle. The electorate was annoyed at problems the new administration inherited. I am proud of how the administration has stood by gay parents and children. I hope voters were not swayed by the idea that there was a plan B.

Ravi Sakhuja: Thanks to YES campaign volunteers. I am saddened that the school questions did not pass, I was confident that they would pass. I was very active. I am glad Question 3 passed as it can produce some savings for us. This plus some SPED money could bring back some programs.

Motion to work with Dr. Ash to identify any resources that have appeared between the structuring of the override and now, and apply them to minimize the damage and see what we can rescue at this late date. (Guttag, Sakhuja).

Discussion of the Motion:

Paul Ash: We built the best possible budget with the available dollars. The override list is a real list. It is important that we proceed with the cuts we said we would make, it is important to do what you say you are going to do and there is also a practical reason. In Newton an override failed and then they received a great deal of money and gave it to the schools to restore things. The impact of adding those dollars meant 10 years of no overrides in Newton; no one believed that the School Committee was telling the truth. The most important thing I have to offer is my word. When the campaign devolves into lies it undermines the whole democratic process. If we do anything that appears that we found the money we will never be believed again.

Helen Cohen: I support everything that Dr. Ash said. We did not plan for such a decision. Even if we did find the money, any decision about what to restore would be divisive.

Olga Guttag: This is about what we can give to the kids and the staff, for example, teaming in the high school in 9th grade.

Tom Griffiths: I agree with Dr. Ash. He made a commitment to the town that we would eliminate programs if we lost the override. The \$266,000 is non-recurring income because of the huge increase we had in SPED. One proposal is to put the money in a revolving fund, this is better budget policy.

Tom Diaz: Dr. Guttag's request is well-motivated; she is concerned about sending the plan B message as well. We continue to experience extraordinary expenses in SPED. At one time we had an additional school Question for 280K for a fund for SPED. Because we know that our SPED costs are still increasing. FY08 is going to be a challenge. I am voting against this motion.

Ravi Sakhuja: A deduction in expense is the same as revenue.

Helen Cohen: We don't know how much we will save on energy.

The motion failed 2 to 3 (Sakhuja and Guttag in favor).

V. Discussion Items:

A. Potential 2007-2008 Calendars — Public and LEA Feedback:

375 – 400 emails were received on the subject. Parents were in favor of the earlier start time 2 to 1; faculty were in favor of the earlier start time 3 to 1 (presented by Judy Cohen of LEA). The principals were unanimous in favoring the earlier start time, saying that as many as 30% of children don't show up

the last week of school. The Athletic Director, Hayden and LABB all also favor the earlier start time. The vote will take place on June 20th. Dr. Ash recommends starting before Labor Day in 2007.

B. Data Analysis Project and Strategic Planning Project with Boston College

Lynne Sarasin and Joanne Henessey explained through a power point presentation how this was implemented at Diamond. BC chose Lexington public schools; it is a multi-year partnership. The project involves data analysis to improve learning for all kids.

C. Wellness Policy — Second Reading (before B)

Several changes were made.

VI. Action Items

A. Use of Special Education Circuit Breaker Funds

Paul Ash: The State reimbursed us \$266K because of expenditures for FY06. The money comes to the School Department. We can either leave it in revolving account until we have more SPED expenditures than we have budgeted for, or we could charge this year's SPED costs to this account and use it all up so our surplus would increase by \$266K and would revert back to the general fund. Initially I assumed that the money would go back to the town until Carl Valente suggested the money should go into a revolving account. This is a pure policy question.

Olga Gutttag: The third option is to do neither of the above but purchase oil at a discount price.

Motion to leave the 266K in a revolving account (Diaz, Griffiths) The motion passed 5-0.

- B. Vote to Approve School Committee Minutes of February 7, 2006
- C. Vote to Approve School Committee Minutes of February 14, 2006
- D. Vote to Approve School Committee Minutes of February 28, 2006
- E. Vote to Approve School Committee Minutes of March 29, 2006
- F. Vote to Approve School Committee Minutes of April 3, 2006
- G. Vote to Approve School Committee Minutes of April 5, 2006
- H. Vote to Approve School Committee Minutes of April 24, 2006

Motion to approve the minutes in action items B-H (Diaz, Griffiths). **The motion passed 5-0.**

VII. Motion to Adjourn to Executive Session to discuss pending litigation (Diaz, Griffiths): Cohen-aye; Diaz-aye; Griffiths-aye; Gutttag-aye; Sakhuja-aye.

The next meeting of the School Committee is scheduled for Tuesday, June 20, 2006, at 7:30 p.m. at Lexington High School, Library Media Center, 251 Waltham Street.