

**Lexington Public Schools
School Committee Meeting – June 7, 2005
Lexington High School – Library Media Center**

Members present were Helen Cohen, Tom Griffiths, Scott Burson, Olga Gutttag, Tom Diaz and Interim Superintendent William Hurley.

Helen Cohen called the meeting to order at 7:40 p.m. She extended thanks to the school administration and Lexington Police Department for handling the demonstrations by the Westboro Baptist Church this weekend. The WBC church members demonstrated at Lexington churches all weekend and at the Estabrook Elementary School on Monday.

Public Comment

The Assistant Moderator of the Lexington High School Senate feels there is discrimination against students on the basis of sexual orientation.

Ashley Carlo, 10th grader at LHS, read a letter representing students who take level 2 classes. It is their feeling that the weighted GPA does not give them sufficient credit.

Trisha Kennealy, Co-chair of Stand for Children, expressed her concern regarding indoor air quality issues in the schools. She hopes the school department will adopt the Tools For Schools EPA program.

Members' Reports/Members' Concerns

Olga Gutttag attended the LHS pops performance on May 26th. She also attended the PTA meeting. The main topic of discussion was how could the PTA/schools get information out to the community quickly. The sidewalk committee has been busy at work, hoping to use the Bridge School to pilot a Safe Routes to School program in the fall. Ms. Gutttag said she would contact Paul Ash to get his input on this. She also attended the graduation and will attend the math fair at Diamond.

Tom Diaz said he also attended the graduation this past Sunday. He also served as a judge, along with Scott Burson, at the World History honors presentation.

Tom Griffiths announced there would be a Safe Schools meeting on June 24th at U Mass Boston from 8:00 a.m. to noon that will be sponsored by Tom Riley. He said schools should not be a target for people promoting issues outside the schools and made reference to what took place this weekend at graduation. Mr. Griffiths expressed thanks to the Lexington and Lowell Police Department for their help in this matter.

Helen Cohen attended the graduation on Sunday and thanked Principal Jones for including former LHS Principal Van Seasholes in this celebration. Ms. Cohen also

attended an Appropriation Committee meeting last week and stated the committee wants to hear thoughts regarding health benefits. She has collected information regarding the Financial Review Committee that the 2020 Vision has been inquiring about. Ms. Cohen also attended a regional meeting on equity and excellence the goal of which is to look at education across the entire region we live in and think about ways to be able to work on a balance on issues of equity throughout all Massachusetts communities. Statistics presented at the meeting showed that 50% of high school students in Lowell drop out of school. Also, by age six, children in Lowell are academically 1.5 to 2 years behind children who attend schools in our area.

Ms. Gutttag suggested the School Committee send a letter to the Lowell Sun expressing our appreciation and thanks for all their help with the LHS graduation. Lowell's "No Place for Hate" group showed their support for LHS graduates, faculty and families on Sunday by staging a counter-demonstration with welcoming signs. Their efforts were very much appreciated.

Discussion Items

Lexington Reads Presentation

Don Cohen, representative of Lexington Reads, addressed the School Committee stating the goal of Lexington Reads is to encourage people in Lexington to read and discuss the same book. This year, the group has decided to do two books. The first book is *The Name Sake*. Lexington Reads plans to have events surrounding the reading of that book. Mr. Cohen has talked to Susan Lum about making this book available to students. The second book is *Paul Revere's Ride*. It is their hope to have discussions and activities about this book leading up to Patriots Day. Mr. Cohen stated he would like a general endorsement from the School Committee in support of their group.

A motion was made to support the efforts of Lexington Reads for the academic year 2005-06. (Diaz – Griffiths; 5-0)

Superintendent's Report

Superintendent Hurley extended his thanks to everyone in the community who has been supportive during the recent demonstrations. He also expressed thanks to the Lexington Police Department for their efforts. Mr. Hurley introduced two new Central Office administrators; Ann Giombetti, Director of Business, Finance and Operations, and Carol Ann Gregory, Director of Human Resources.

Life Threatening Allergies Policy – First Reading

Scott Burson, the Policy Subcommittee representative, brought the first draft of the Life Threatening Allergies Policy to the School Committee. He explained that the policy is basically a small enhancement of a substantially similar policy currently in place. The policy has a food free classroom approach with two new paragraphs that specify no food

sharing and no utensil sharing. Mr. Burson said the School Committee is responsible for policy issues and this policy includes procedures we intend to implement.

Tom Griffiths said the principals have a big role to play in implementing policies.

Jane Franks said each school has a crisis management plan that is in place to respond to a generic crisis. We teach all staff how to respond in a medical emergency.

Bill Hurley suggested having wording put in the policy that new staff hired each year will be trained on policies, practices and procedures.

Mr. Griffiths asked if having bus drivers trained was an option. Ms. Franks said they used to train bus drivers every year, but the bus company questioned what the bus driver's exact role was as they are not a direct employee of the school system and has not agreed to having drivers included.

Olga Gutttag spoke as a parent of children with life threatening allergies. She noted the policy as written covers the elementary school level extremely well but there is a gap in the policy once children get into middle and high school. Ms. Franks said they have tried to put a peanut free table at the middle schools but the students didn't follow the plan. Ms. Gutttag referred to Section F of the policy where it relates to the elementary school level. She said she would like to see something in the policy to show that these allergies also exist in the middle and high schools, and will need to be addressed by each school.. She also requested acknowledgement in the policy where it pertains to school sponsored events at middle and high school levels.

Mr. Hurley encouraged the School Committee members to email their concerns to Scott and he can bring them before the members of the Policy Committee to review. The review committee will meet next Monday.

A parent read a letter to the School Committee regarding training for nurses as it pertains to life threatening allergies. She talked about an issue with her son at Diamond Middle School who had a reaction to Advil. The administration of an Epi pen by the nurse saved his life. She also requested that the School Committee should offer students training on how to administer an Epi pen.

High School Grade Point Average Proposal

Principal Michael Jones presented the School Committee a modified proposal regarding the weighted GPA issue. See his presentation attached. Mr. Jones said the administration was able to draft a proposal that is a compromise and addresses the concerns of all involved. Mr. Jones said he would like to come to a resolution that everyone is comfortable with.

Tom Diaz thanked Mr. Jones and the faculty for working on the proposal. He is in favor of the idea of redoing the mission statement for the high school and having a mission

committee. Mr. Diaz feels the faculty committee has to figure out what they are going to measure and decide what the criteria are, and whether there is some risk or no risk to college admissions. He is pleased with the resolution of this issue and believes that the ultimate decision should be made by the administration.

Scott Burson also agreed that the final decision should be made by the administration. He feels the proposal that Mr. Jones has brought forward is a constructive way to move forward to do what is right for our children.

Olga Gutttag thanked Mr. Jones for his proposal. She said she was impressed with how it included all constituencies and sees this as step forward and an opportunity to improve the quality of student and faculty life.

Tom Griffiths was extremely pleased with the proposal. He noted that if we maintain faculty/parent disagreement as in previous meetings, he feels the School Committee should step in as policy maker. Mr. Griffiths asked Mr. Jones to change item #4, last sentence in the long form of the proposal, to make that the first priority of the Committee.

Susan Elberger said she is concerned because the faculty at the high school is unanimous on an unweighted GPA. She feels parents should be involved and part of the conversation and decision on this issue. She feels we can all work better and come to a better solution if parents are brought into the process and respected from the beginning.

Mr. Jones said he believes parents are capable of understanding this issue and wants to bring parents in for their input. The faculty committee will take parent input and address parent concern. He asked that parents let the professionals do the work and give them a chance to listen to parents' concerns. We will take a step back, do more studies and take parent concerns into consideration.

Dawn McKenna said she was taken aback at the discussion that was held at the last meeting. She feels parents have not had the benefit of three years worth of work that the administration has done. She agrees that #4 on that list says it will be a faculty committee but thinks that is a set up for failure. Ms. McKenna appreciated the tone of what has happened at tonight's meeting and asked that #4 be changed to "a committee that involves multiple members".

Erin Barrett, a parent, asked if the faculty committee will make the decision or will the School Committee make the final decision. Mr. Hurley feels the purpose of grades is to give feedback on student performance and feels that decision falls on the administration.

Scott Burson said whether the School Committee would be active on this is an open question. He hopes that we will define ourselves in a new and better place, commit ourselves to taking a hard look at difficult issues and at the end of the process will be in a place that hopefully everyone is comfortable with.

Action Items

Mr. Hurley recommended the School Committee accept the \$500 donation to the Clarke Middle School gift account. A motion was made to accept this donation with gratitude. (Guttag – Diaz; 5-0)

A motion was made to accept the minutes of the May 2, 2005 School Committee meeting as amended. (Diaz – Guttag; 5-0)

A motion was made at 10:00 p.m. to go into Executive Session for the purpose of collective bargaining issues not to return to public session. (Burson – Diaz; roll call vote 5-0)

Submitted by,

Lisa McGuire

cc: Helen Cohen
Tom Griffiths
Scott Burson
Olga Guttag
Tom Diaz