

LEXINGTON SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEETING
Tuesday, March 13, 2007
Cary Memorial Building Auditorium
1605 Massachusetts Avenue

Present: Superintendent Paul Ash, School Committee Chair Tom Diaz, School Committee members Helen Cohen, Margaret Coppe, Tom Griffiths and Ravi Sakhuja. Minutes taken by Leora Tec.

The meeting was convened at 7:41 p.m.

I. Call to Order and Welcome (Tom Diaz)

Mr. Diaz announced the upcoming meetings. He described the budget process. The increase is about 6.6 million dollars including: collective bargaining, new hires, benefits and energy increase, supplies and miscellaneous items. The revenue available from the town is 1.7 million dollars so we have a gap of 4.9 million dollars. We have been trying to reduce that. On March 6th the superintendent published an at-risk list. The at-risk list is very painful.

II. Public Comment

Cathy Cote (Bowman librarian): The library program is a vital educational program, it impacts kids' test scores, and librarians have daily contact with kids and teachers. We are teachers too. Eliminating librarians will cost the school system money over time. It takes years to build a collection, you need a professional librarian to build a collection. The elimination of the elementary librarians will begin the destruction of the collections. It would be short sighted to make these cuts. We have had the librarians since 1964-1965.

Stephanie Grimaldi: These are tough decisions to make. What are we putting at risk? The literacy department supports classroom teachers and supports kids who need extra help. We intervene early and intensely. It is like preventive maintenance. This creates access to and love of the written word

Phyllis Neufeld: This is my 32nd year of teaching. Please read Vito la Mura's recommendations carefully. The elementary grades are the roots of the tree. Fran Ludwig is unbelievably committed; we have no other resource at the elementary level. Cuts at elementary level will affect the middle and high school level as well.

Steve Solly (phys ed at LHS): We have student signatures to maintain phys ed and wellness as it is today. Any reduction will result in a failure...this will be more study halls, sedentary lifestyles. The teachers have relationships with students for four years. This is the true crossroads—students from all grades are together. This program enhances fitness and attitudes towards healthy living. There are epidemic increases in diabetes and we don't want these national trends to affect Lexington.

Peggy Gibson: The custodians are a vital part of our system. It is not right to cut their health care. How will Bill Hartigan and his team manage a crew of part-timers?

Policy Debate Student: I'm shocked about losing funding for policy debate. I didn't think it was possible to cut more from policy debate. We need to match funds of other schools. If the debate team is downsized students will not be able to get scholarships to a university. You can't debate without school funding. This is the best example of what a high school student should be like. This is an influential and memorable program.

?????: We are speaking for German program. Students at LHS place very well in the national German exam. All the programs are precious to someone. We need an override.

Sarah Chamberlain: We are a new family to Lexington. Our 1st grader benefited from literacy services. Dr. Ash has a daunting task in front of him. A private attorney has been hired to negotiate for teacher contracts because we are too friendly, but we want to be teacher friendly, don't we? Can't we freeze the taxes for the elderly?

Renee Stockton (1st grade teacher at Bowman): I tell the kids to bring tools to school. But how can I go to school without a librarian, math specialist or reading specialist? I am concerned about losing a science coordinator. The librarian has been the number one resource for integrating the social studies curriculum after the social studies coordinator was lost last year.

Tanya Morisset: I care for all these items. I am speaking for the elementary support staff. They help our schools to function at its best.

Bill Murray: (president of custodial and maintenance union): Replacing 18 custodians with 32 custodians and cutting health care is more worthy of a corporate entity than a public school system. We have been reduced to a bare minimum in years past. We are loyal and trusting members of the community. Second shift part-time has been tried and these communities have returned to full-time. There was not one word of appreciation in the letter we received from the superintendent.

Bonnie Brodner: I see at least half a dozen teachers here for Bowman. It's hard to advocate for one program over another. We as a community need to take a deep hard look at our priorities.

Vito la Mura (LEA president): (All the LEA members stood up) Stand is working to increase state aid to public schools. In Brockton they have started project Phoenix, there is a critical mass that is going to move the state legislature in positive ways, there will be short-term relief. The way we will fund education will be through reform. This won't happen overnight. In the short-term the feds have failed what they promised to fund in SPED. This state has cut public education more than any state in the union. We have to point our finger and move the feds and the state into doing what they need to do. Right now we must get behind the override. It is critical. The at-risk list is going to reap the dismantling of a lighthouse school system. I encourage people in the community. Don't ask the employees to fund the health insurance.

Jennifer Allen: I have personally benefited from a Lexington education and have 3 kids in schools. It is not feasible to live within proposition 2.5. It is hard to make these decisions. I am concerned about polarization. We need to pay for the Lexington we want. We have extraordinary will.

Leora Tec: I am speaking for the custodians. It is not right to cut their health care. They are among those that traditionally have had no voice in our society. We should think carefully about whether these are the values we want to impart to our children.

Diane Biglow (Hastings parent): We don't work as a team to help all these people. We need to email, phone and call our federal government. We need to fight for our children.

Kate Cremens-Basbas: I have only been here a short time. I met new teachers, the guidance teachers, the custodians, and the librarians. CDC recommends 225 minutes of phys ed at the secondary level not including athletics. Many diseases are related to sedentary living. The youth risk behavior survey tells us that the number of health risks and temptations that adolescents face now are tremendous. The schools are the place where most learning happens. Phys ed and wellness is only one among 7 disciplines in the HS curriculum. It would go from 7.7 to 6.7 %. Education is not something that we use to teach about life, it is life.

Janet Tiampo: I went to school here. If there is a program you want to save you have to find something you will get rid of. Lobby your Selectmen for a bundled override.

Jesse Stiegerwald: I wanted my kids to go to public schools. I am disheartened about little rumors that are going around. Public schools should not be floors. Let's look at the supplemental list. I remember hearing years ago the dismantling was beginning and it has.

Deb Rourke: I went through the Lexington public schools. The same service budget requires an override. Supplemental should be called let's try to regain some ground budget from 2003! The at-risk list doesn't tell the whole story; we need to focus on the supplemental budget as well.

Leslie Bow: There must be another way to approach this. We are only going to get so much funding from the government. Let's look outside the box. We should look at corporate sponsorship.

Andrew ????: I am here for debate. I am a product of the system. I went through speech, I've been through SPED, and there are a lot of files about me. Look what you've raised. I am worried about the effects of the cuts you may or may not make. We are still here because of what you have done for the school system. Keep doing stuff for us.

Tricia Perez Kennealy: I am a product of the Lexington school system and co-chair of Stand for Children. My parents moved here in 1982 and I don't know if I would move here today. This makes me sad and angry. I pulled random annual reports decade by decade. We have always provided an excellent educational system. There was a continued affirmation of excellence. There are many tough issues. We can't be pitted against each other. Supplemental

is nothing of the sort; we still would not restore what was lost in 2003. We demoralize morale with these at-risk lists. We need to talk to our neighbors. It is not enough to vote. Find out as much as you can. Ask hard questions. Don't be fooled by communities that have not had overrides.

Leslie Wilcott Henry: In public school education private funds are not there to replace public funds.

III. Discussion Items:

1. FY08 Capital Budget (15 minutes)

Tom Griffiths presented savings related to self-funding of capital improvements. Patrick Mehr asked about bonding it for 20 years. Mr. Griffiths explained that that would not be fiscally responsible since self-funding was already a risk and since the equipment might need to be replaced in the last 5 years of the 20 year period.

This was followed with some discussion of the high-energy costs of the new Harrington and Fiske schools.

Motion to approve the prioritized list as presented by Mr. Sakhuja and Mr. Griffiths (Cohen, Griffiths). The motion passed 5-0.

Motion to approve the self-financing items that total \$910K (Cohen, Coppe). The motion passed 5-0.

IV. Action Items:

1. Vote to Appoint Karen Watson-Holton as the Community Representative on the Harrington School Council

Motion to approve Karen Watson-Holton as the Community Representative on the Harrington School Council (Cohen, Coppe) The motion passed 5-0.

2. Vote to Approve School Committee Minutes of May 30, 2006

Motion to approve School Committee minutes of May 30, 2006 (Griffiths, Cohen). The motion passed 4-0. (Coppe abstained)

Motion to adjourn (Sakhuja, Griffiths). The motion passed 5-0.

The next meeting of the School Committee is scheduled for Tuesday, March 20, 2007, at 7:30 p.m. in Cary Auditorium, 1605 Massachusetts Avenue.