

**Lexington Public Schools
School Committee Meeting – May 24, 2005
Lexington High School**

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

Helen Cohen called the meeting to order at 7:40 p.m. Ms. Cohen said the School Committee researched some concerns that were expressed at the last School Committee meeting during Public Comment regarding a sexually explicit book in the second grade. The committee determined that this event happened in another town and does not involve Lexington. In regard to the incident at Estabrook where a parent was arrested, she referred to the LPS website notes for information. Ms. Cohen noted the School Committee supports the actions of the administration concerning the Estabrook incident completely and feels they have been acting according to the values of the LPS system.

Public Comment

Jeff Drake read a letter on behalf of a Lexington parent regarding a personal tragedy that her daughter experienced.

Bonnie Brodner, a parent of two elementary school students, spoke regarding the controversy around the different groups that are trying to restrict children from being open as to who they are. She is concerned about the hatred and bigotry that has been brought into the community. These displays of hatred will affect all our children. She is proud of the Lexington Public Schools and how they have accepted all children from all types of families.

Sue Delahant, a Lexington parent, said she and her partner came to Lexington for the school system. She wanted to thank the principal at Estabrook and the Superintendent for all they have done.

Pamela Tames, a parent of a son who goes to Estabrook, said she appreciates the decision of the principal and Superintendent regarding the recent incident at Estabrook. She is in support of the Diversity Book Bag and is proud to live in such a diverse community.

Lorraine Fournier, Precinct 8, spoke about the controversy in Massachusetts regarding same sex marriages. She said not everyone in society accepts same sex marriage but the Lexington school system has been teaching children about “two mommies” and “two daddies” for years. She said that she and others are not against homosexuality; they are against same sex marriages.

Superintendent's Report

Calendar Committee Report

The Calendar Committee made a preliminary report. Andre Ravenelle and Susan Elberger will present a calendar at the June 7th meeting. Ms. Elberger thanked all the members on the Calendar Committee. In putting together the calendar, the Committee started with the number of days and hours required by law and contract for a school year. Testing also had an impact on scheduling matters. She presented the School Committee with a draft of the 2006-07 school year calendar. It includes 182 days for students with a start date of Friday, September 1st for staff. The last day will be Wednesday, June 20th. If the five snow days are necessary, the last day will be June 27th. Mr. Ravenelle still needs to have conversations about where to put the professional development days and conference days. The goal this evening was to bring a start date, a finish date and have the holidays/vacations scheduled.

Members' Reports/Members' Concerns

Tom Diaz said the School Committee drafted a statement on recent and future events around diversity which is available on the LPS website. It will also appear in the Minuteman. The statement addresses the commentary in the Lexington Minuteman regarding intolerance in the community.

Scott Burson said it is hard to live in a society as diverse as the one we live in. Teaching how to do so is critical in America's future. We have to teach our children the core values of respect and civility.

Tom Griffiths urged Ms. Gutttag to unrecuse herself from the GPA discussion, as he feels she has a lot of input to contribute. He would like to have her participate. Mr. Griffiths also wanted to make it clear that there is no agenda in schools to promote any political stance. The agenda is to welcome all, affirm all, and focus on a solid learning community.

Ms. Gutttag explained (and Mr. Hurley confirmed) that she is not legally obligated to recuse herself from this discussion. However, she is sensitive to the appearance that she might have a personal interest in the matter because she has children at LHS who may be affected by the decision. She will leave it up to her colleagues to make the decision of whether she should participate or not. All School Committee members felt she should participate and she should feel comfortable to state her opinion on this subject. Ms. Gutttag agreed to participate but wanted to assure everyone that she approached this issue seeking what is best for all Lexington children and not just her own children.

Ms. Gutttag announced that the No Place for Hate committee has done a great job keeping the community informed. She extended thanks to the Police Department and School

Department for keeping everyone informed and safe. Their next meeting will be held Tuesday, May 31st at 8:00 p.m. in the Estabrook Hall at Carey Hall.

Mr. Hurley thanked those in the community who have taken time to write and email in support of the actions that have been taken on behalf of the children. The very thing we are trying to do is prevention. The school department has no judgment on lifestyle or any way of life; we are talking about families. It is our job to try to provide as safe and nurturing environment as possible. Our focus is not on adults but on the children.

Discussion Item

High School Grade Point Average

Helen Cohen said she was not sure if the School Committee has a role in the grade point average decision. The School Committee has gotten feedback from legal counsel, which has advised that the decision is likely the responsibility of the faculty and administration. A decision will not be made tonight but will come back on June 7th for further discussion.

With the prior permission of the School Committee, Adam Seitchik, a parent of two children at Lexington High School made a presentation to the School Committee in favor of retaining the weighted GPA. His presentation included comparisons of Lexington's GPA reporting to our cohort communities – vast majority of which report weighted GPA, reference to research that indicated that in spite of what college admission officers said they favored admitting students with weighted GPAs, and an example where a student's transcript without a weighted GPA can favor a less good student who does not challenge himself as much as another student who takes educational risks and takes more challenging classes. Mr. Seitchik felt that before the weighted GPA is eliminated, more needs to be understood about the unintended consequences of such a change.

The School Committee then opened the meeting for public comment on the weighted versus unweighted GPA topic.

Ricki Pappo, a parent of two children, feels the weighted GPA should be eliminated and strongly supports this recommendation. Elimination of the weighted GPA will assist children in choosing courses that are the best match for them. Level classes will remain on transcripts. This is a simple goal that will send an important message to students that we respect their choice of education. It will allow all students to make choices without feeling some courses are worth more than others. The goal is to support children and their individual goals; the change would not have a negative impact on students in regard to college admissions. A weighted GPA only affects students if there is a student rank, which Lexington does not do.

Gary Simon, a resident of Lexington for over 20 years, said he has been an educator for 28 years of which the last 9 he has served as a math teacher and department head for

Lexington Public Schools. There is a critical and compelling perspective regarding the GPA issue, and he feels this has become a political campaign. The question should be whether our children would be disadvantaged in college admissions with an unweighted GPA. He feels having a weighted GPA in a competitive environment is unhealthy for children and believes it drives our students to what is unreasonable. Parents have lost sight of the emotional balance for children. The primary reason to get rid of a weighted GPA is to have children realize we value all levels and all course choices. The weighted GPA devalues some children and this has to change. Mr. Simon asked for the School Committee's support to help students and faculty change the weighted GPA.

Principal Mike Jones addressed the School Committee stating that he is being accused of dumbing down the curriculum and discouraging students from stretching themselves academically. He has come before the School Committee to set an agenda for the future. He assured the committee that he and his faculty have good intentions and are highly qualified teachers and administrators. He said he found it awkward for faculty and staff to be in an argument with parents. Dr. Jones stated that his goal and the faculty's goal is to support LHS students and their families. Dr. Jones stated that ending weighted GPAs is a critical starting point for broad positive systemic changes for our students. He expressed the hope that he could explain to the School Committee tonight why a system with unweighted GPAs is more compatible with the needs of all our students. Mr. Jones said this has to be enacted now for the students of 2009.

Chris Barnett, a parent, feels children will be affected by eliminating the weighted GPA, and is in support of keeping weighted GPA.

Leslie Perelman, Director of Writing across the Curriculum at MIT, said MIT and most other colleges are looking for lifetime learners. He is in favor of an unweighted GPA. He urges the School Committee to accept this fact and show respect to the excellent faculty of Lexington and allow professionals to do their job.

Christopher Janey, a resident and college professor, said he has been following the weighted GPA proposal since the beginning and he is not clear on the facts and feels this topic needs more discussion. He feels the weighted GPA is a system that supports the concept of achievement and allows children to achieve greater goals.

Jim Keefe, teacher and resident, is in support of the unweighted GPA.

A parent commented stating her family moved to Lexington because of the school system. She feels students take certain courses because it looks good on their transcript not because of the weighted GPA.

Susan Bennett, a parent of three Lexington students, is in support of eliminating the weighted GPA. She feels it contributes to a competitive atmosphere at the high school level and distorts children's decision in choosing courses.

Betsey Weiss, a parent of two former LHS students, feels the weighted GPA should remain in place. Her children feel it allows students to take a risk in taking a course as well as prepares students for challenging college courses.

Kate Andrews, a student and member of the LHS faculty senate, said parents are too concerned about getting their children into colleges and feels the weighted GPA is a way for students to compare themselves against one another.

Frank Wren, a student at LHS, feels students deserve recognition for taking honors and AP course and is in favor of the weighted GPA.

Emily Walker, a parent of a child at LHS, read a letter she previously submitted to the School Committee regarding the weighted GPA.

Evan Seitchik, a sophomore at LHS, is in support of the weighted GPA. He feels it challenges students. Whether or not you eliminate the weighted GPA or not, colleges look at what level classes you take.

Ed Moriarty, parent of a child at the high school and a child at Clarke, feels the weighted GPA is unnecessary. He said colleges look more at how passionate you are about learning.

Susan Spencer, a parent of two children who attended Lexington High School, said the high school has done a wonderful job getting students into competitive colleges as well as preparing them for such. She has heard many students say that college was much less stressful than Lexington High School. She is in support of the weighted GPA.

Sue Wong, parent of three children in the school system, trusts Mike Jones' decision to do the best for all students.

Susan Elberger said the ultimate purpose of education is for children to want to keep learning. She feels the outreach from the faculty to the community on this issue is insufficient. How can we as parents respect the faculty; you must do the same in return.

Mark Andersen, a Lexington resident, does not believe the weighted GPA is a factor in student stress. He feels students entering the high school are not as well prepared academically as they should be, and that is why stress level is high. He feels the weighted GPA accurately depicts which students are doing more and working harder.

Olga Gutttag feels we are lacking background on how eliminating the weighted GPA will decrease stress. She requested a presentation of how we got from wanting to reduce student stress to eliminating the weighted GPA as a solution, and what other options we have to reduce stress for students.

Janette Ekanem is in support of abolishing the weighted GPA as she feels it gives students a false sense of hope and accomplishments.

Tom Griffiths wanted to recognize that all teachers, administrators and faculty have a common goal in Lexington.

Action Items

A motion was made to accept the \$2,700 donation to the Lexington Athletics Gift Account. (Griffiths – Burson; 5-0)

Mr. Hurley made the recommendation and asked for the School Committee's support to increase Bill Cole, a dean at the high school, from .92 FTE to full-time. Olga Gutttag feels this decision falls under administrative prerogative. Tom Griffiths supports Mr. Hurley's decision. Scott Burson thinks it is good practice to inform the School Committee of these decisions but no need to vote on it.

A motion was made to accept the minutes of the March 15, 2005 School Committee meeting as amended. (Gutttag – Burson; 4-0; Tom Diaz abstained as he was not present at that meeting)

A motion was made to adjourn at 10:32 p.m. (Gutttag – Burson; 5-0)

A motion was made to go into Executive Session for the purpose of collective bargaining discussions and not returning to public session. (Burson; roll call vote 5-0).

Submitted by,

Lisa McGuire

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