

**Lexington School Committee Meeting
Harrington Elementary School – November 16, 2004**

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

Helen Cohen called the meeting to order at 7:33 p.m. Tom Griffiths was at a Conservation Commission meeting concerning Fiske School construction. Mr. Griffiths arrived at 8:25 and resumed the Chair at that point.

Public Comment

There was no public comment.

Superintendent's Report

Harrington School – Welcome from Principal David Crump

Mr. Hurley introduced David Crump.

Mr. Crump welcomed the School Committee to Harrington and thanked them for rearranging their schedule to accommodate the Harrington community. Harrington is the smallest of the six elementary schools in Lexington. It has 306 families, 381 students as of yesterday, 18 classrooms, one town-wide SPED program and houses part of the Lexington Children's Place. It also has 63 full-time and part-time staff. They have worked long and hard to help teachers to improve their craft to help students with learning. Harrington's goals this year are diversity and respect as it has children and families from all over the world. Their goal is to continue to work towards eliminating racism and promote academic success for all students. The second goal they are focusing on is improving their math MCAS scores and helping kids improve their math skills. He is hoping to see gains in this area over the next three years. Transition is a third goal as they are awaiting the move to the new school. It is necessary to pay attention to students, parents, and teachers, as this is not only a physical move but an emotional one as well. It is a challenge moving to new environment and he does not want to lose the family atmosphere from the old school to the new. In turn, they are all very excited and happy about moving into the new school.

Scott Burson noted the Harrington community is the first elementary school to move into a new school. He asked based on this experience with Harrington, do you think it is possible to operate a school on same site as the new school being built. Mr. Crump said for the sake of safety it is always good if construction and students don't mix but sometimes there is no choice. For students this has been interesting because they have

been involved on a daily basis in the construction process. The only drawback on having construction on same site is safety.

Olga Gutttag thanked Mr. Crump for taking care of safety issues. She asked what measure he would be taking to improve on math. Mr. Crump noted there are built-in assessments in the every day math program. They will be making use of those tests and use them on a regular basis to check which skills students have mastered. This way they will be able to follow students' results year to year.

FY05 Budget Status/Financial Report

Susan Bottan addressed the School Committee with the FY05 first financial report. She stated the school department is expected to meet all financial obligations including those unanticipated and unbudgeted with the funds appropriated. The total appropriation for this year is \$66,357,268, a 5.7% increase over 2004. This reflects a \$3.2 million override and a \$1.2 million reduction in existing FY04 services and materials.

The cost of unbudgeted FY05 negotiated settlements were covered by reallocating funds from unemployment benefits, METCO (since the State decided to continue funding METCO at the existing level, the \$100,000 put in the budget as a contingency was now available for other necessary expenses), postponed hires of Secondary Director of Education, 2.5 FTE custodians and a salary differential. Heating fuel costs, workers compensation and nurse and classroom aide substitutes are other expenses that will need to be covered. The main expenses we are closely monitoring as we enter into the winter months are utilities and facilities, mainly facilities equipment and heating systems.

Ms. Bottan noted we are expected to generate unanticipated savings that will help offset unbudgeted expenditures. These savings will come from salary differentials on retirements and savings generated from voluntary resignations and non-rehire of staff. We will also see savings from Fiske transportation, legal services and telephone services.

Mr. Crocker, a parent, inquired about the savings on the Fiske transportation. Ms. Bottan said she budgeted for four additional buses to transport Fiske children to Harrington beginning some time around Christmas of this year. Now they will not need to be transported until possibly February of next year. Therefore, there is a savings of about \$1,200 per day for a month. This expense will be incurred in a future fiscal year.

New Harrington School Update

Mr. Hurley noted Harrington was scheduled to make the transition to new building right after the Thanksgiving vacation. That will not happen and he will share a new date with the community as soon as he knows. After meeting with contractors and subcontractors, at the present time it is hopeful that the transition will take place some time in January 2005 but it is not guaranteed. It will depend on the ability of the subcontractors to

complete their work. The exterior of the new building has been completed for some time; it is the interior that takes dramatically longer. The general contractor is working on this with the subcontractors to get materials quicker in order to get the work done. We will give you as much notice as we can so families can plan as well.

Barry Glass is concerned about the budget for Harrington school. He noted it would be helpful to know where we stand on the budget. Mr. Hurley said we might come in under budget; at worst case we are at budget and not over.

Harrington Technology Plan – Superintendent's Recommendation

Mr. Hurley explained the topic of the technology plan for the new Harrington came to his attention about four or five weeks ago. At that time, he was taken aback with the cost of the items in the plan and was not in a position at the last School Committee meeting to make a decision. He needed time to formulate a reasonable response and thus met with the entire administrative staff, shared with them the technology plan for the new Harrington school and considered the question of equity. Will we be able to provide any new elementary school being built with the same technology or anything comparable to that of the new Harrington? He asked all administrators for their opinion on this. Even if we cannot replicate this plan in every school, we need to come up with what we think should be the model technology plan for each school. After debating all issues, there was overwhelming consensus by the administrative staff that we should go for the original proposed technology plan. Mr. Hurley said he also had a meeting with the entire Harrington staff and listened to their concerns. He followed up with a meeting with Shelley Chamberlain, Dana Ham, Olga Guttag and Andre Ravanelle and asked for clarification of where the equipment was going to be located, going class-by-class and item-by-item.

The amount estimated by the technology consultant for the new Harrington is \$175,000 but with installation the total cost could be as high as \$312,000. Mr. Hurley recommended going forward with the proposed technology plan as it was originally presented to him by the consulting firm and our staff with the caveat that it would not exceed the budgeted amount of \$275,000. The second caveat is David Crump's request of removing printers from a couple locations and putting them elsewhere. Mr. Hurley supports his recommendation as he modified it. The third caveat is if, in fact, bids come in at an amount in excess of \$275,000, Mr. Hurley will meet with Mr. Crump and whoever else needs to be present and determine where to make modifications to get down to the \$275,000 figure, which is the amount that has been allocated for this technology program. Mr. Hurley also noted if we dedicate \$275,000 for the technology at Harrington, he recommends putting at least that much aside for the technology program at Fiske.

Olga Guttag wanted to clarify some misconceptions to the Harrington community. In her presentation at the October 12, 2004 meeting, she asked for a review of the proposed

technology deployment. She produced a plan for Mr. Hurley to demonstrate that there was time for review. In looking at the costs of consumables for all the proposed technology we will have in the building, she wanted to wait until there was a budget in place for next year to make sure we had funds available for upkeep. She was concerned about equity because steel and concrete prices are skyrocketing and it is expected that the new Fiske will cost more than Harrington. Because of Bill's reorganization of the IT department, we are in the process of hiring a technology director. This person will have a vision for the future and should be given the opportunity to implement it at Harrington. Finally, one of the things that we hope to get out of the technology review committee by end of April is a standard technology kit for each classroom. She wanted to wait until the School Committee had a recommendation from the technology review committee before equipping Harrington. She did not want to end up in situation where we had one school had everything and every other school had nothing. That is why she wanted to slow down the technology portion. Ms. Guttag wanted the Harrington community to know she will advocate for them just as hard as she would for every other school in the town.

A parent, Judy Crocker, suggested if there is any money left over in the Harrington construction that it gets used for landscaping.

Another parent of a Harrington student wanted a breakdown of what the \$275,000 in technology money would entail. Mr. Hurley gave him the breakdown.

Bruce Embree, a parent, addressed the School Committee. If you leave money on the table for too long it tends to go other places. Suggested if you have it, spend it. State of the art technology is a moving target and every day it gets cheaper and every day it gets better. He is an advocate for spending the money and getting the technology you want now.

Susan Elberger, who has a daughter at Lexington High School, is concerned with the issue of equity. This is the smallest school and she is disturbed that the smallest school will have better resources than the high school. Operating costs of equipment are an ongoing concern. You have to figure into the budget the replacement costs of supplies.

Mike Spencer, assistant principal at Harrington, thanked Mr. Hurley for discussing this issue with the Harrington staff. The Harrington community wanted a chance to be heard. The main vision as a staff was excitement and anticipation to be a model. He thanked Mr. Hurley and the School Committee for this opportunity and backs the suggested recommendation.

Barry Gelston, Harrington parent involved in the technology committee, said a lot of significant thought was put into what vision they wanted to create. They received documentation from the town on what the vision was to integrate technology with education and they are trying to make the decision on what we really need to make that possible. Thanked the School Committee for making this possible.

Phyllis Neufeld, 30 years teaching elementary school in Lexington, believes in integration in teaching and curriculum as the quality of work improves when you can integrate. She strongly urges the School Committee to accept the recommendations made for technology.

Marcia Finnegan, computer technician for the school department, said the Harrington building project would benefit the entire town of Lexington. The elementary servers are out of date and they can use the new Harrington server to work for all the other elementary schools in the district.

David Crump, Harrington principal, said he understands that supplies cost money and the mere fact that building a new school inevitably creates inequity. The number of computers to students in the Harrington school is less than any other school and they have been operating this way for two to three years.

Shelley Chamberlain told the School Committee that every year she has to do a state report that involves counting up all the equipment we have and then make a ratio of how many students per computer. The breakdown is as follows: Bowman – 5.36 students per one computer; Bridge - 6.86 students per one computer; Estabrook - 6 students per one computer; Fiske - 7 students per one computer; Harrington - 10 students per one computer; Hastings – 6 student per one computer; Clarke – 5 students per one computer; Diamond - 5 student per one computer; and the High School - 4.5 students per one computer. The High School has the best ratio student/computer ratio. Ms. Chamberlain clarified the numbers stating all the elementary schools have the same number of computers but Harrington has the oldest computers. The State ratio is weighed by the age of the computer, not the number of computers.

Laura Cecere, the co-president of the Fiske PTO, addressed the School Committee. Her concerns were not helped by some of what she heard tonight. She resents having to oppose something for the new Harrington but her fear as a Fiske parent is if there is enough money to finish the new Fiske school as originally planned. Before a final decision is made on the technology plan, she asked for another meeting so the Fiske parents can be heard as well.

Olga Gutttag wanted to clarify that she was misquoted when she said she was willing to wait two years on the technology for Harrington. She wanted to wait for the bid process for Fiske and for the report from the technology committee. The report will be complete in April, 2005 and she wanted to see what will be recommended as the technology model school for Lexington. She is also concerned that in buying all this new technology for one school all at once, the school will be best this year but in five years from now it will be the worst. This has already happened to Harrington. She feels we have to come up with a phasing system to even the balance. Ms. Gutttag is very disturbed that the numbers Shelley Chamberlain has presented show Harrington has been technology-deficient for

the past three years. She asked Bill Hurley to ensure equitable allocation of technology in the future.

Scott Burson supports the superintendent's recommendation and thinks it is quite justifiable. The decision is based on the consensus of a group of educators who spent a lot of time and thought carefully of what we needed to best educate our children. There are nine schools we need to look at and do what is necessary to see that all children in Lexington get the support they need.

Tom Diaz thinks Mr. Hurley's recommendation is a good one and wise. The School Committee's intention is that we try to do this in the future for all the schools.

Tom Griffiths noted Fiske might be more expensive than we had hoped, but Harrington may be less expensive than we thought. Although, we won't know Fiske's cost for sure until we see the actual construction bids on Fiske.

Helen Cohen supports Mr. Hurley's proposal and thanked all who have been in touch with the School Committee and who have come tonight to discuss these issues.

Tom Griffiths noted the problem we have when looking at values is making sure we have enumerated all of them. He wants to make sure we have leadership in the area of technology within our schools. He agrees with Ms. Gutttag that we possibly should have put this off a bit but supports the recommendation of the Superintendent.

Olga Gutttag thanked Mr. Hurley for doing what she asked. She feels she would have done it differently but she is not in the classrooms. She supports him for making a carefully thought out decision. Once the new Harrington can be used as a model, it is her commitment as a School Committee member to provide similar technology for other schools a goal for the School Committee.

A parent asked if LEF grants could be used to fulfill technology recommendations. Mr. Griffiths said he would look into that.

Members' Reports/Members' Concerns

Mr. Hurley announced that tomorrow evening is Learning is Fun night at Bowman Elementary. There will be activities that students and parents can do at home to promote learning.

Janette Ekanem said the senior class council is looking for a graduation speaker. If anyone has any suggestions please contact her.

Olga Gutttag attended a number of meetings. At the LHS PTSA meeting, there were compliments from parents regarding the strong leadership at the High School with Dr.

Jones. She attended a Sped PAC meeting. The next meeting is scheduled for December 2nd. She also represented the School Committee at a capital expenditures meeting. Ms. Gutttag reiterated the need to discuss the use of the Central Office building as it is in need of repair. A decision has to be made whether the school department will stay at their present location. If so, the building is in need of repair. She hopes to be able to discuss this at the next meeting. Ms. Gutttag has been appointed a member of the town manager search committee.

Tom Diaz thanked the LEF for having their annual Trivia Bee. Unfortunately, the School Committee members did not prevail as the winning champions. He reported on a committee that he serves on that focuses on air and noise pollution, mainly in regard to school busses and SUVs. One of the questions the committee is considering is whether to write a local bylaw covering this issue. This committee meets once a month; the next meeting is scheduled for December 15th at 7:00 a.m. in the Selectman's meeting room. The committee has not decided on the bylaw but will have to bring it to town meeting. The committee has decided to strongly urge the town to conduct a program to educate the public on running engines. They are trying to raise public consciousness throughout the town. The Technology Review Committee met on November 10th. They took a field trip to the State of Maine to study their technology program. There will be a formal report from the Technology Committee that will include the findings from this trip. The next Technology Review meeting will be on November 18th at 7:00 a.m. This is a public meeting and all are welcome to attend.

Scott Burson reminded that the fall musical, Pippin, would be at the high school this Thursday, Friday and Saturday night.

Helen Cohen attended the PTA Presidents meeting. All parents would have found this meeting interesting. Cathleen Higgins, head of the food service provider Chartwells, gave a presentation. It was clear during the meeting that it was a surprise to many of PTA Presidents to learn that most of the food served is actually cooked within the school itself. It was evident from the meeting that Chartwells cares about our children and is working hard to provide the best possible nutrition and is trying to keep the food variation interesting.

Tom Griffiths announced that he is going through radiation treatments for a malignant polyp. He will also be running for re-election to the School Committee. The grand opening ceremony of the Lexington High School in-door track will be November 27th from 3 – 5 p.m. All are invited to attend.

Discussion Items

Superintendent Search Subcommittee Update

Helen Cohen gave an update on the Superintendent Search Subcommittee. The committee is still in the process of reviewing applications. There are about 20 members on the committee who are divided into two groups. One group is assigned to reading the resumes. The entire committee will be getting together on November 29th to pick the 8 or 9 semi-finalists. No information will be public until the final four applicants are picked. The committee is diligently trying to get any input that the community has as to what they are looking for in a superintendent. Please call or email the School Committee at any time.

School Committee Expectations for Development of the Preliminary FY 06 School Department Budget

Tom Griffiths informed there would be a collaboration meeting with the Selectmen and finance committees tomorrow evening at 6:30 p.m. at the High School. Discussion was had between all School Committee members regarding the FY06 budget process and how they would like to see it presented to them. The purpose of this collaboration meeting is primarily to discuss policy and not budget numbers. Mr. Hurley noted he would be presenting the budget by the end of December. He has some items in outline form but would like to know what the School Committee is anticipating from him in regard to presentation. A needs-based budget was suggested. The question arose of how do we best serve our children in presenting our requests. Is it better to come in with a number that we know is unattainable? Tom Diaz is in favor of doing a service growth budget. He questioned why a needs budget was done in FY04. Susan Bottan informed that is the format we have used in the past. The School Department always presented a needs-based budget and from there it was shifted. It is very important to present a vision through the budget where we want the schools to go. Helen Cohen is in favor of a level service with growth budget. Mr. Hurley's opinion is to address the growth in the presented budget. Olga Gutttag feels we are going to get into trouble with facilities if we don't start funding that area more. We need to look at the operation and determine where we need to make shifts because we have bigger gaps in respect to operation. Tom Diaz is not convinced that we've had the operating expenses over the years to maintain our buildings properly. He also feels the administration in the system is thin, especially at the Central Office. There was also discussion of possibly going out for an override. Mr. Hurley suggested the expectation should be to show a level service budget with growth and to show items that are needed.

Action Items

A motion was made to approve the minutes of the October 12, 2004 School Committee meeting. (Diaz – Burson; 5-0)

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Helen Cohen questioned the procedure on receiving the minutes to review prior to approving them at meetings. Ms. Cohen had one change to the October 26th minutes. A motion was made to approve the minutes of the October 26, 2004 School Committee meeting as amended. (Gutttag – Burson; 5-0)

It was agreed to defer the approval of the November 2nd School Committee minutes until the next meeting.

A motion was made to go into Executive Session at 10:40 p.m. for the purpose of discussing a personnel matter and not returning to public session. (Burson – Gutttag; roll call vote unanimous 5-0)

Submitted by,

Lisa McGuire

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