

LEXINGTON SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEETING

**Tuesday, September 26, 2006
Lexington Town Office Building
1625 Massachusetts Avenue**

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

The meeting was convened at 7:37 p.m.

I. Call to Order and Welcome (Tom Diaz):

II. Public Comment : none

III. Superintendent's Report:

1. John and Abigail Adams Scholarships (5 minutes): 25% of the senior class received these scholarships; that is the maximum any high school can receive. It is a significant scholarship based on MCAS in English/Language Arts and Math. The recipients can attend any participating state college or university tuition free.
2. Congratulations to Sandy Curt the LHS PE teacher. On September 20 she logged her 700th career victory.
3. I want to correct a misunderstanding: a student was concerned there was no funding for The Musket, the LHS student newspaper. There is funding for the Musket in the principal's budget.
4. We have hired Sean Newell as the new director to manage energy more effectively in the school system. He comes from the facilities department in the Town of Bedford.

IV. Members' Reports / Members' Concerns: (20 minutes)

Tom Griffiths: Harrington sidewalks will be under construction by the end of the week.

Olga Guttag: Standard and Poors' "School Matters" sent a letter saying Lexington outperformed demographically similar school districts in math and reading/ELA for two consecutive years. Thanks to students and teachers for this outstanding accomplishment.

SBA funding action alert should be followed. The SBA's proposal will reimburse towns based on '04 costs; we are not affected but there may be future decisions that will affect us. We should lobby in support of other communities on this issue.

I attended the Financial Summit of four Boards. The Town Manager presented the Town's financial situation. The Town's and Schools' contractual negotiations will be exceptionally important this year.

Where do we stand on minutes?

Leora Tec(secretary): I will get back to you.

Tom Diaz: Tom Griffiths, Paul Ash, Bill Hartigan and I have continued discussions with Carl Valente on consolidation of the Town and School Maintenance departments. We're not agreed on every detail.

Several citizens have asked about enrollment projections; they seem to contradict overall trends. The forecast shows a drop off in elementary enrollment but there is increase in 6-12 enrollment. These forecasts are difficult to do with absolute precision; even last year's estimate of change for this year was off by about 33%.

V. Discussion Items:

1. CORI Policy – Second Reading (15 minutes)

Fred Rosenberg and **David Horton** answered questions on the CORI policy.

Olga Guttag: We have removed the parentheses around the word "regularly."
If an employee is not current they can't be in noncompliance.

Helen Cohen : On page 3 in noncompliance shouldn't it say that if they don't sign they WILL be dismissed?

Paul Ash: Yes.

2. FY07 Financial Projection (40 minutes)

Paul Ash: This update on finances would be routine if it were not for an overrun in SPED for out of district tuition. If you look at everything except out of district and related costs we have a surplus of \$100K. We can't control this part. SPED is governed by federal and state laws. It is far better for a child to be educated in district, but that is not always possible. Sometimes out of district placements require transportation costs.

Last year we established a contingency fund for out of district tuition (\$260K). By the end of May the surplus had grown to \$295K. On June 16th the projected surplus was \$361K. By the beginning of July deficit was \$61K. Now it is \$567K. Many children's needs change as they get older or, sometimes, kids move in from other places.

Mary Sullivan Kelly (Director of Special Services): It's a joy to work with children and their families. We did budget projections based on the kids that were with us. Some kids are well served at first but then not. Twenty-three out of twenty-six of the out-of-district placements were grade 6 and above. We can't provide appropriate in-district services for every child.

Many out-of-district programs are 11-12 month programs.

Discussion ensued of the circuit breaker money from DOE. Paul Ash stated that for FY06 75% of any single placement above \$31K is reimbursed.

On budget tracking: There was discussion and a request to display what has been spent separately from what has been encumbered.

3. FY08 Budget Calendar (10 minutes)

Some discussion of the budget being presented earlier this year but Paul Ash said he can't commit to doing it earlier right now.

4. FY08 Budget Guidelines (20 minutes) in packet. These are last year's guidelines.

Tom Griffiths: Unprecedented costs of SPED does affect budgetary support for other programs. We should budget \$500K for SPED then.

Can we identify certain things to save money on like substitutes?

I would like to do self-supporting programs, like an after school program in the middle school. It is crucial.

Olga Gutttag: I want the guidelines to send a message to the community that we are watching everyone's money in every area where we spend it, and we are looking for every efficiency we can implement.

I would like to see a level service budget and look for savings, but also look at the educational implications of losing an override. I would like to learn where we should be looking at the restoration of the most devastating cuts suffered because of losing the override, and make them if we can find the right tradeoffs.

When we negotiate with every union the results of those negotiations will have a huge impact on the budget. We should acknowledge that.

Redistricting could increase savings. Streamline purchasing. Energy.

I am not happy with the 4 step process of relying on Town Meeting to handle SPED cost swings because it was designed for April figures. Giving up all the contingency funds (especially energy) this

early in the year makes me nervous. To improve financial risk management, I would like to add more contingency into our budget. The \$500K Tom mentioned for SPED sounds good.

Ravi Sakhuja: We can't just look at a level service budget. Then we put things at risk. Why not drop something on our own and add on our own? People will have more respect for us if we are more proactive.

Tom Griffiths: Olga and I are supporting a similar number for SPED but we are talking about putting \$250K more of programs at risk. I don't take that stance lightly.

Tom Diaz: \$500K seems reasonable.

Olga Guttag: I want to correct Tom's impression. I disagree that building our reserve immediately entails putting that amount of programs at risk. I don't want cuts in programs. Can we deliver services in a different way that costs less?

We can't immediately assume that we need an override.

Tom Diaz: Do we want the budget proposal to say we want a level service budget?

Olga Guttag: You always have to start with level service.

Paul Ash: I don't have the luxury of being so general. I would like to produce a level service budget and then supplements to that budget (most severe impact) and then another document that takes level service down to available funds and is called the at-risk list. On Oct 5th I am meeting with all program leaders. I need to know what is an upper limit.

Tom Griffiths: The useful additions document will be hard to evaluate without knowing what level service will be costing us.

Ravi Sakhuja: Why not have a 2.5% budget as a base budget?

Tom Diaz: I disagree. It sets the wrong tone.

Ravi Sakhuja: But that's what you end up with anyway.

Olga Guttag: If you start with level service and assume an override then a cut list looks like blackmail. If you start with 2.5% and say if you want this, this is what it will cost, it is sort of like "tiering."

Paul Ash: The budget is the Superintendent's recommended budget. I could not recommend a budget within 2.5%. I support what the Selectmen do: a level services budget with things that are at risk. You lead with your vision, but not with a false vision. I don't think a budget that maintains level service will be viewed as too much or as disrespectful of the voters. Shall I begin to build a budget book when I meet with the program leaders on Oct 5? I will also produce two more documents as I already mentioned. I think you should direct me to produce a level services budget book like Carl Valente did.

Helen Cohen: I support that. It's good to produce a budget based on an educational vision.

Ravi Sakhuja: It's the same.

Paul Ash: We don't know what base is.

Olga Guttag: It doesn't really matter because the process is the same.

Paul Ash: The book would look very different in each case, and would have very different narratives.

Tom Griffiths: I agree with Paul Ash.

Tom Diaz: There is a consensus to produce a level services view.

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

The next meeting of the School Committee is scheduled for Tuesday, October 3, 2006, at 7:30 p.m. at the Lexington Town Office Building, Selectmen's Meeting Room, 1625 Massachusetts Avenue.