

LEXINGTON SCHOOL COMMITTEE
Saturday, February 2, 2013
Cary Memorial Building, Battin Hall
1605 Massachusetts Avenue

Present: Dr. Paul Ash, Superintendent, Margaret Coppe, School Committee Chair; Alessandro Alessandrini, Vice Chair; Members Jessie Steigerwald and Mary Ann Stewart; and Sam Alpert, Student Representative

Absent: Bonnie Brodner

The Meeting Minutes were taken by Jean Curran, Recording Secretary

The Meeting convened at 10:00 a.m.

I. Call to Order and Welcome

The Chair called the meeting to order.

II. Public Hearing on the Superintendent's Recommended FY14 Budget

The Chair opened the Public Hearing and invited public comment.

Phyllis Neufeld, President, Lexington Education Association (LEA), stated that the LEA is pleased that there were no cuts to staff or programs. Mrs. Neufeld then inquired about the overcrowding at the elementary schools and wanted to know what the process is for assigning unallocated teachers.

Margaret Coppe asked Dr. Ash to respond to Mrs. Neufeld's question.

Dr. Ash responded to Mrs. Neufeld's question regarding unallocated positions. Dr. Ash explained that he built into this year's budget funds for one unallocated teacher and 20 over-max aides. He explained that due to the collective bargaining contract, if a class size goes over 27 students, there would be a need for an over-max aid. If a class becomes significantly larger than that, the class would be split. Dr. Ash explained that beginning in March the process of registering children for kindergarten begins and by mid April the number of students expected in September would be known. This would be the time he would make a decision to use unallocated teachers. Dr. Ash then would wait another month for enrollment into the other grades. He stated that our schools are at maximum capacity. Dr. Ash and his staff have identified 16 classrooms at the upper level threshold and four classrooms that they know will be over the upper level threshold and they will need an over-max aid. Given these numbers, and the fact that Dr. Ash doesn't yet know the number of kindergarteners yet, he felt the need to budget for this many unallocated positions this year. Dr. Ash stated that the physical capacity won't change until the Bridge and Bowman Elementary School renovations and the Estabrook Elementary School is completed. At this point in time we do not have a money problem; we have a space problem.

Harvy Simkovitzs, 4 Angier Road, thanked Dr. Ash and the Committee for the partial funding of the High School Debate Team.

Gill Benghait, father of a junior on the Debate Team shared that debate has provided many benefits to his child such as research, writing, public speaking and a sense of teamwork. He shared that the children support each other in research before and during tournaments. It is really a special program and his child is motivated to work hard because he really enjoys it not because he has to do it. The funding will have an enormous financial impact on parents, students and all involved in fundraising for this program. He thanked the Committee for placing this item into the budget.

Monica Galizzi Cagliier thanked the Committee and Dr. Ash for the partial funding of the Debate Program. She also shared her feelings on how the Debate Program provides a unique experience for girls and how it provides them the confidence to research and argue their points with boys and helps kids to achieve in higher education. Ms. Cagliier then shared her personal story with her own two girls.

Gretchen Reisig inquired whether there is enough flexibility in the budget to accommodate unexpected larger enrollment needs?

Dr. Ash responded that he feels comfortable there will be enough unallocated positions to cover any unexpected increases in enrollment and there will be options to reallocate money between now and next September if needed. Dr. Ash then stated that there will be a need to begin discussions about redistricting.

Jessie Steigerwald asked Dr. Ash how many unallocated teacher positions there are in Lexington and does the budget still have unallocated funds to have two unallocated teacher positions.

Dr. Ash responded that there is one formal position for a teacher and there are 20 over-max aids budgeted, but we do have the money to hire three to four teachers if we had to.

Pam Hoffman, Chair of Fundraising for Debate Team thanked Dr. Ash and the Committee for placing the money for Debate into the budget. It will make a huge difference to the program and parents.

Preetham Chippada, Debate Team member thanked Dr. Ash and the Committee for the funding of the Debate Program. He shared that he knows a lot of kids who fundraise and also do sports and music which takes up a lot of their time and then are expected to work on homework. He shared that this funding will remove the stress of all the fundraising that is involved and be able to focus on educational matters.

Haley Burnham, Debate Team member thanked the Committee for the \$65,000 and stated that the money will be put to good use and promises that the Committee will see really great things from the team.

Sarah Conway, Lexington Resident spoke about her concerns regarding class size in the elementary schools.

Dr. Ash responded that he didn't believe class sizes will reach 30 children in a classroom but there are two options should that occur (i) if some of those classes go much higher, there would be a need for additional aids or a teacher, or (ii) they could take a room being used for another purpose and convert that space into a classroom.

John Adaire, freshman at Lexington High School and a member of the Debate Team spoke about how Debate has changed him from a shy individual to a more confident student who has learned many new topics that he never would have studied had he not been on the Debate Team. He expressed how much fun he has had and that Debate is a close community and everyone helps each other not only in Debate but in school as well and he really enjoys the program.

Duncan McCallum, freshman at Lexington High School and a member of the Debate Team shared that the debate community is really tight. When he joined debate he got to know lots of people and made lots of friends in the debate community and this has helped him to adjust to high school. He also shared that this has been a good experience for him and has learned a lot and feels this is a great activity and debate is really fun.

Miranda Clark, Lexington resident with two daughters at the Hastings Elementary School. She spoke to parental stress and concern regarding class size and would like to support having more classrooms rather than ex-large classes because even with teachers and aids the sheer number of people in a classroom impacts student learning.

Ilene Benghiat, Debate Team President shared the following requested information from the last public hearing on Wednesday, January 30th with the Committee regarding what the current fundraising is now and what would be dropped with funding? Ms. Benghiat responded that fundraising at the tournaments will continue. Out of 54 hours per student for fundraising, 32 of those hours are spent at tournaments. The phonathon will be discontinued because it has become unproductive, along with selling raffles because you cannot make a lot of money off of this activity. Car washes will continue because she believes that this is a community building activity. The light bulb sales and Barnes and Noble fundraisers, along with alumni contribution with corporate matches will continue for the time being. Ms. Benghiat shared that she expects alumni voluntary donations will continue, parent voluntary donations will be reduced significantly and that it will be a 45% reduction for parents to be in line with what other school activity parents are asked to contribute. Current plans do not include increasing the amount to be fundraised. She provided a chart she prepared to the Committee. She publically thanked Rob Collins who initially brought this issue forward to the Committee and Laura Lasa, Lexington High School Principal for her support and Dr. Ash for placing the funds in the budget.

Wei Liu shared that his first child at the high school chose debate and he is thrilled with what his son has done and how much passion and hard work his son is putting into the

program. Hard work and team work are great traits and he is thankful to the Committee for supporting this program.

Radhika Chippada, Debate Team parent shared how proud of all the work that her son puts into Debate and provided her perspective on the program. Ms. Chippada stated that there are not many areas where children can apply their learning and debate is one area where they can apply their reading, writing and research into much deeper concentration and read about problems. It was amazing to see how much research and complicated subjects the children work on. Debate is giving them the opportunity to see the pros and cons of different topics and it is a really wonderful thing to offer to high school kids.

Katie Wipke, Lexington resident spoke to smaller class size for kindergartners. She shared her own personal experience with her own two daughters and stated that other parents have no idea that this is going on and they need to work on getting the word out to those parents.

Brianna Nadelberg, shared that parents will support alternatives for smaller class sizes and stated that her son was in one of those larger classes and it was a detriment to his learning. She shared that her son is doing much better in a smaller class size. Ms. Nadelberg stated that having small class size is a priority.

Katie Cutler, a Lexington resident who has a freshman in debate shared her own experience and how debate is holistic and part of learning to be a professional and how to act with others and work very hard. She shared a story about hosting debate students from New York along with a snow day in which debate team members ended up at her house working on research and then turned into pizza party and watching football.

Ping Zhang, parent of a Debate Team member, shared that her son has been in the Debate Program for three years and the benefits go beyond the classroom. He has now gone through the college application process and his college essays were reviewed by the graduates who are now in college. Debate has helped him during the interviews and improved his writing and research skills.

Nicole Semon, parent at Hastings Elementary School, expressed her concern about having special need students with sensory needs in the classrooms at Hastings Elementary School which impact the other children's learning. Ms. Seeme wants to be supportive and questioned what parents can do other than attend school meetings in order to be part of the solution.

Dr. Ash suggested she work with the principal of her school. He then thanked everyone for coming out this Saturday morning to share their comments and concerns regarding debate and the Hastings Elementary School. He reminded everyone that Lexington has class size issues at the other schools in town and the problem will be resolved with this budget and we will address staffing issues.

Margaret Coppe shared that Jessie Steigerwald had requested more information at the last School Committee meeting regarding the position in the recommended budget for a performing arts technical director and asked Dr. Ash if he had any information to share on this position.

Dr. Ash responded that he spoke with Mr. Leonard, Performing Arts Coordinator at Lexington High School, regarding this position and Mr. Leonard has not yet had the time to decide whether the funds will be a stipend or a position.

Jessie Steigerwald shared her interest in exploring the idea of offering an academic opportunity or course for kids who are interested in doing technical work in the theater department.

Dr. Ash replied that he would speak with Carol Pilarski, Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum, Instruction and Professional Development, and Mr. Leonard and report back to the Committee.

Margaret Coppe brought up the issue of the bus fee and the deadline of May 15th.

Dr. Ash responded that he was not at the last meeting but he has spoken with Carol Pilarski and Mary Ellen Dunn, Assistant Superintendent for Business and Finance Operations, regarding the issue of the bus sign up period and bus fee and whether parents would be able to pay in installments. Dr. Ash stated that Mary Ellen Dunn indicated that her office does not have enough staff to handle double or triple transactions. If someone did need more time, her office is willing to work with them on a case-by-case basis. Dr. Ash then stated that Mary Ellen Dunn is researching technology for parents to register online and that will save time and help track expenses. Dr. Ash recommended staying with the current plan for parents to pay by May 11th to qualify for the \$300 fee.

Margaret Coppe then inquired if it would be possible to add another section for debate since the program is full.

Dr. Ash replied that at this point in time he is not comfortable adding an additional section debate program. He relies on the department head and principal to make those recommendations.

Pam Hoffman, parent of Debate Team member shared that there is student teacher who is an experienced debater who might be appropriate to be placed into the program.

The Chair closed the Public Hearing at 11:02 a.m.

III. Public Hearing on the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education Proposed Evaluation Standards and Indicators for Educators

The Chair opened the Public Hearing invited public comment.

There were no public comments.

Jessie Steigerwald asked the Chair if she would share what the process will be.

Margaret Coppe replied that on Wednesday, the Massachusetts Association of School Committees will be holding seminars on these new standards. She reiterated that not all 31 indicators have to be used and it will be decided in agreement with those being evaluated.

The Chair closed the Public Hearing at 11:00 a.m.

The Chair announced the next School Committee Meeting will be held on February 12, 2013 at 7:30 p.m. in the Selectmen's Office. The Chair also announced that there will be a School Committee Meeting on February 26, 2013.

Motion to Adjourn (Steigerwald, Alessandrini) The Motion was Approved (4-0) Brodner Absent

The Meeting Adjourned at 11:05 a.m.

Documents: Meeting Agenda; Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education Chart of Rubrics At-A-Glance; Lexington High School Debate Current/Proposed Fundraising dated February 2, 2013; Chart regarding Debate Team fundraising prepared by Ilene Benghiat

Voted by the School Committee April 1, 2013