

LEXINGTON SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEETING

Tuesday, December 14, 2010

Cary Hall Auditorium

1605 Massachusetts Avenue

Present: Superintendent Paul Ash, School Committee Chair Rod Cole, School Committee Members Sandro Alessandrini, Margaret Coppe, Jessie Steigerwald, Mary Ann Stewart and student representative Noah Coolidge. Minutes were taken by Leora Tec.

The meeting was convened at 7:33 p.m.

I. Call to Order and Welcome (Rod Cole)

II. Public Comment

Janet Tiampo, Alana Osher, Ilana Markowitz and Debbie Silberman (FOLMADS members): FOLMADS strongly supports the restoration of funds to the elementary music program in order to eliminate fees. The number of students participating in the program dropped after fees were introduced. They presented information from studies showing that students participating in formal music programs have higher academic achievement.

III. Superintendent's Announcements

1. Massachusetts Department of Transportation Notification of Completion and Solicitation of Bid Documents for Sidewalk Construction for Bowman Safe Routes to School Project. This is a competitive federal grant. There is a bids process and after the low bidder is selected the sidewalks will be built within a year.

IV. Members' Reports / Members' Concerns

Mary Ann Stewart: I attended the Suburban Coalition Meeting to hear Michael Widmer, the president of the Massachusetts Taxpayers Association, discuss the budget gap as it exists currently. It's not looking great but there is movement in the direction of reducing the State's structural deficit, if revenues continue to be above benchmark.

Jessie Steigerwald: There is a gap in the curriculum in the middle school level between the Open Circle Program at the elementary level and strong anti-bullying programs in the high school. Will this year's budget have anything to fill-in that gap?

Paul Ash: Next year we will have a K-12 Director of Guidance, which we have not had for years. At that time we can discuss incorporating such a program into the budget. It's clear that we do need to do some program development in this area.

Jessie Steigerwald: When will we be hearing enrollment projections?

Paul Ash: At the January 4 meeting I foresee the following on the agenda: 1). I will present my recommendations for the FY 12 budget; 2) I will present an enrollment report and 3). We will begin the discussion on fees. I anticipate a gap between the level service budget and the amount of revenue available. I will look for direction from the Committee on how to proceed.

Jessie Steigerwald: Hank Manz indicated that the Master Capital Plan Task Force would probably not meet until the spring. I want to make sure the community knows that we have a Master Plan that meets the needs of all nine schools and that the School Committee is willing to meet.

Jessie Steigerwald: Dr. Ash is going to hold a round table discussion for site council members regarding the budget.

V. Discussion Items

1. District Management Council Report on Student Services Staffing and Financial Assessment – Presentation and Q & A Session. Introduced by Paul Ash. An outside firm was hired to come in and do an in-depth review of the Student Services Department. We looked at resource room therapists, speech and language therapists, occupational therapists and counseling services. We looked at other high performing districts and recommended benchmarks. The good news is that we are doing quite well. This report will be an important tool to enable us to have a discussion.

The report was presented by Nate Levenson of District Management Council. Within each of the areas the following aspects were examined: staffing levels; financial resource allocation and the pedagogical approach and philosophy. According to the report there is relatively limited oversight and there are a wide variety of approaches to providing services. There is a lot of emphasis on individual judgment. Massachusetts has the highest academic achievement and the largest special education achievement gap in the country. Mr Levenson presented recommendations for improving the Student Services department.

There were questions and comments from the Committee which were addressed by Mr. Levenson and Dr. Ash. In January Dr. Ash will discuss with the Committee how LPS will incorporate this report going forward.

There were questions and comments from the audience.

Phyllis Neufeld (LEA President, on behalf of LEA membership): We received this report on December 1. Many of the recommendations in the report are very positive. It would have been helpful to share the draft with the educators before it was released. We have not had time to adequately respond to this report. Many statements are not qualified and the data is not included in the report. Nowhere is there consideration of the severity of different students' needs and the effect that has on the caseloads of professionals. We feel this report is more focused on staffing numbers than on our successes. The role that administrators play

should have been looked at. There must be consensus by the departments involved that the data is indeed accurate. The LEA proposes that: 1). Dr. Ash and Linda Chase meet with each department studied in this report with an LEA representative present; 2). Teachers put their comments and questions in writing and send them to Dr. Ash and Linda Chase and 3). Dr. Ash work closely with the LEA and other stakeholders to review the report and pull from it what is best for children.

Tom Diaz (Town Meeting member and school teacher): Regarding continuous improvement, I would like to highlight two recent improvements: 1). We now track our expenses much more closely than we used to; and 2). We invested in SPED services in late 2006 and that has been enormously successful. It is a good thing when teachers use different practices because it means they are tailoring their teaching to the needs of the students.

Christine Zende (counselor at Estabrook for 11 years and LPS employee for 13 years): The counseling section of the report referenced small caseloads. Based on the way we have been asked to record this information I question whether this accurately reflects the reality on the ground. I disagree that staff do not respect the counselors. We listen to, help and support each other.

Larry Belvin (parent) Special education should be scheduled first as it is in Clarke and LHS.

Karen Laufer (Middle Street, parent and SPED attorney): Was Mr. Levenson given the right questions to answer and did he have the right skills, tools and resources to answer them? I am concerned that our approach on this issue is driven by data rather than being thoughtful and comprehensive. One positive aspect of this report is that it encourages collaboration among teachers.

Overall the report fails to consider the needs of the SPED population and encourages non-compliance with federal and state law. The written report is harsher than the oral presentation.

Suheil Zende (Baker Avenue): My son went through LPS. I request that the School Committee reject this report as it amounts to bullying. It is demeaning to the staff and is counterproductive.

Elizabeth Sackton I have heard that SPED services have been hit or miss. And matching the appropriate teachers to their students has not always been ideal. It might have been useful to ask the clinicians what they do with their time other than face-to-face time with the children.

Lynn Perry (SPED teacher at Fiske): The information in this report affects *all* children. Elementary teachers are not certified in reading and they need the additional support of reading and SPED teachers to help children with a wide array of reading and writing problems. SPED teachers have been trained by this district in many different approaches. A disabled child will not make more than one year's growth in one year of instruction. I think this report portrays us in a bad light. We should take a hard look at the data.

Laura Hussong (IA in an elementary school in Lexington): It seems we commission these reports so that we won't feel bad when we make financial decisions that will affect the quality of the education of our kids. There are always trade-offs and we should be aware of them.

2. High School Starting Time – Initial Discussion. Jessie Steigerwald introduced the topic. She passed out a summary of information she has compiled on communities who have instigated later high school start times.

The Committee discussed the changes. Dr. Ash believes that this would require a massive amount of work to implement and he is not aware that such a change would affect learning. This could have a positive effect but not as great as other goals that we have committed to investing our energy on.

There were comments from the audience.

VI. Action Items

1. Vote to Approve the Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan Policy and to dispense with the third reading. The following amendments were proposed and agreed upon: 1). On page three, line 24, the words “receipt of a bullying report” should be changed to “determining that bullying or retaliation has occurred.”

2). Also on page three, in lines 28-33 the wording should be changed to: “The investigation shall be completed within a reasonable amount of time. The parents or guardians of both the aggressor and the target shall be notified if there has been a finding that bullying has occurred. They will be updated periodically.”

Motion to approve Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan Policy as amended tonight (Steigerwald, Alessandrini). **The motion passed 5-0.**

Motion to dispense with the 3rd reading of the Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan Policy (Coppe, Steigerwald). **The motion passed 5-0.**

2. Vote to Approve July 1, 2011, through June 30, 2014 Employment Contract for Mr. Robert Harris, Assistant Superintendent for Human Resources.

Motion to approve July 1, 2011, through June 30, 2014 employment contract for Mr. Robert Harris, Assistant Superintendent for Human Resources (Coppe, Stewart). **The motion passed 5-0.**

3. Vote to Accept \$2,050 in Donations to the William G. Tapply Memorial Fund

Motion to accept with gratitude \$2,050 in donations to the William G. Tapply Memorial Fund (Steigerwald, Alessandrini). **The motion passed 5-0.**

4. Vote to Accept Donation of Dictionaries from the Lexington Chapter of the Elks Organization.

Motion to accept with gratitude the donation of dictionaries from the Lexington chapter of the Elks Organization (Steigerwald, Stewart). The motion passed 5-0.

5. Vote to Approve School Committee Minutes of October 19, 2010.

Motion to approve School Committee minutes of October 19, 2010 (Steigerwald, Stewart). The motion passed 5-0.

- VII. Motion to go into executive session for the purpose of collective bargaining, to return to open session only for the purpose of adjourning (Cole, Steigerwald) Coppe-aye; Cole-aye; Stewart-aye; Alessandrini-aye and Steigerwald-aye.**

The Committee went into executive session at 10:37 p.m.

The Committee returned to open session in order to adjourn at 11:15 p.m. (Coppe, Stewart) The motion to adjourn passed 5-0.

Documents: Meeting agenda; letter to Town Manager Carl Valente from Patricia A. Leavenworth, P.E., District Highway Director, re: Lexington Sidewalk Construction Along Philip & Dawes Roads, Buckman Drive, Lantern Lane and Locust Avenue (Safe Routes to School- Bowman School) Federal Aid No. SRS-002S(189)X. Project File #605870; report entitled "Lexington Public Schools Student Services Staffing & Financial Assessment, November 13, 2010," with appendices and power point presentation, prepared by The District Management Council, Boston, MA; memo from Carol A. Pilarski to Dr. Paul Ash and members of the Lexington School Committee, re: Request for Donation Approval; Lexington School Committee Minutes of October 19, 2010; document presented to the School Committee by FOLMADS board members re: participation levels in instrumental music program as related to fees; Final Draft LPS Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan Policy.