

LEXINGTON SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEETING
Tuesday, April 26, 2011
Lexington Town Office Building, Selectmen's Meeting Room
1625 Massachusetts Avenue

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

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

I. Call to Order and Welcome (Chair Mary Ann Stewart)

II. Public Comment

Jacqueline O'Connor, a Lexington High School senior speaking on behalf of **Mark Chonofsky** who graduated from LHS in 2010 and is currently studying at Cambridge University: Mr. **Chonofsky** wrote to express his concern regarding the early retirements of Latin and French teachers, Dr. Michael Fiveash and Mme. Karen Girondel. He expressed concern for calling off the play, *Columbinus*, as well as the early retirement of Brian O'Connell 18 months before. Mr. Chonofsky feels there is a pattern and urged the School Committee and LPS administration to take necessary steps to ensure that Lexington continues to provide the very best education.

Dr. Ash stated the teachers mentioned in Ms. O'Connor's statement are outstanding teachers. The decisions of the teachers to leave was 100% their choice; these teachers were not forced to leave. The implication that the climate in the schools caused two teachers to leave, who were here for over thirty-eight years and that they were forced to leave by the administration, is false. They had personal reasons for retiring.

III. Superintendent's Announcements

1. The Second Annual LHS Senior Art Exhibit will be held in the LPS Central Office Gymnasium, April 27 through May 13. The public is invited to attend.
2. The final day of school for students in all schools except Estabrook will be June 22. The final day of school for Estabrook will be June 24. The last day of school for all students will be a half-day.
3. The presentation of the Massachusetts School Wellness Awards to the Hastings School and Lexington High School was held at the 2011 Legislative Breakfast on Wednesday, April 6, 2011.

IV. Members' Reports / Members' Concerns

Sandro Alessandrini: There will be two showings of the film *Race to Nowhere* this week at Cary Hall. This movie deals with student stress.

Regarding the comments of the student during Public Comment, I would like to know why we had three teachers at that level resign at the same time. Dr. Fiveash is an excellent teacher.

Margaret Coppe: The Policy Sub-Committee has several policies to bring to the School Committee, including the third reading of the Medication Policy.

Bonnie Brodner: I am wondering, after the situation with *Columbinus*, if it would be worth discussing whether or not we want to have a policy about plays—perhaps we can put that on a future agenda?

Jessie Steigerwald: Thank you to Suzie Barry and the Celebrations Committee for all their hard work on Patriot's Day.

Thanks to Cynthia Wimer and Songyi Kim the co-chairs of the ACT Committee at Fiske for sending us a copy of "Our Corner of the World: A Year in the Life of Fiske Students," which is the result of an artist-in-residence project done through ACT - with additional support from LEF and the Fiske PTO. This creative enrichment project was a wonderful way to enhance student learning.

The high school is putting on *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* (due to retirement, it is potentially Mr. Bogart's last production at LHS).

In the future I would like to continue our discussion of funding of the music program.

I also agree with Bonnie that I would like us to discuss a play policy, and with Sandro, that I would like to discuss the retirements.

Mary Ann Stewart: The Cary Memorial Library Art Sale and Soiree will take place this Sunday, May 1.

Before our next regular meeting convenes on May 10th, there will be a Public Hearing on School Choice, beginning at 7:30 PM.

Jessie Steigerwald: Robinson Road is probably more a municipal issue than a School Committee issue because it involves a town street. However if there were to be a very long driveway at Estabrook would that make this a School Committee issue?

V. Discussion Items

1. Plan to Establish Three Special Education Study Committees. Introduced by Superintendent Dr. Paul Ash. The following three topics will be discussed: 1). The need to establish three Special Education Study Committees described in the packet; 2). Our current work to strengthen general education and it's relationship to special education; and 3). Our Theory of Action to help struggling students in both special education and general education. Our goal is to supply an excellent, effective and efficient education for all students. We need to ensure that the programs are cost effective but first we need to make sure we are providing an excellent education for all children. We are going to do an internal review of how we provide special education. We want to agree on program eligibility criteria, program standards and processes. We will define and operationalize what excellent special education services look like as part of a pre-K -12 system of services.

Dr. Ash presented his Theory of Action to improve general education for struggling students in general education, which includes setting clear learning expectations and determining the best instructional practices. Prevention is much better than intervention. Frequent assessments are necessary. Teachers will be trained in assessment. Not all students who are in special education should be there. Special education was never designed to be the remediation program for all students. Last year all nine schools had an academic and a pro-social goal as part of their School Improvement Goals. The academic goals all talked about using data to improve instruction. This is a major shift that will enable us to identify problems sooner. The second goal, teaching students pro-social skills, will make students more resilient.

Director of Student Services Linda Chase briefly described the three proposed committees:

- The first will look at eligibility for special education services.
- The second is concerned with service delivery: what types, frequency and duration of services are required?
- The third committee will look at when and how the decision is made to place a child in a district-wide program or an out-of-district placement. Having clear placement criteria will insure that all students will receive the help they need and that standards are consistently applied.

Special education is meant to support, not supplant, general education; we need to be able to support struggling students in general education.

There were questions and comments from the Committee on topics including parent perceptions of the IEP process, parent feedback on special education, educating regular education teachers on special education and the use of assistive technology.

There were comments from the audience.

2. Recommendation for Extended Day Child Care Lease Award. Introduced by Dr. Ash. He explained that the Extended Day Review Committee has selected Lextended Day to run the extended day programs at all six elementary schools. Lextended Day plans to retain the same staff members in the other three programs. There will be one parent from each school

on the board—there is strength in collaboration. There are programmatic, professional development, and financial reasons for having one competent Lexington-based company that will provide terrific services. The Lextended Day board has a thoughtful plan on how to embrace the other programs. Dr. Ash feels the individual characters of the programs will continue.

Dr. Ash requested the School Committee to authorize him to enter into a five-year contract with Lextended Day.

Jessie Steigerwald stated that she respects the advantages of one program but she would like to see the programs come to this willingly. She is not comfortable with dictating the structure of the after-school programs. She is surprised that the RFP did not call for a middle school program.

Dr. Ash stated that if we were not to have this structure then over time outside vendors would take over the individual programs and it would be very hard to stop this under the law.

The other Committee members expressed confidence that existing programs will retain their autonomy.

Margaret Coppe expressed a hope that eventually there would be a middle school program.

Sandro Alessandrini likes the increased financial stability with one town-wide program.

Irene Denty (Director, Lextended Day): The vision that I have is that Lextended Day will be more of an administrative umbrella. Directors have to have autonomy—they will select their own staffs and determine certain aspects of their budgets. I envision a lot of collaboration.

Bonnie Brodner: Agrees with Ms. Coppe and Dr. Alessandrini that it sounds like there will not be any changes from the perspective of the students in the programs.

Chair Stewart: Families need access to quality and affordable programs. We are fortunate to have access to such high quality programs. I was impressed with the sensitivity of the transition plan; the transition plan is very thoughtful.

There were comments from the audience:

Miriam Fein Cole (Cliffe Avenue) stated that HED is not interested in merging. She wanted to know if it were possible to keep it running as an individual program.

Dawn McKenna (9 Hancock Street) questioned the School Committee's authority for enjoining all six schools as one entity. She does not support the plan and asked the Committee not to vote it in.

Paul Ash responded that under statute 30(b) leasing school space is subject to the procurement laws. We could get out of this by not renting school space but we want to support high-quality, affordable child-care. Some districts run their own programs. That would not make sense here since high quality programs already exist.

Flavia Vidal (Maple Street): The wording of the bid—the preference for one provider—was a choice of the administration.

Motion to authorize the superintendent to enter into a five-year contract with the Lextended Day Program in all six schools (Coppe, Alessandrini). **The motion passed 4-1** (Steigerwald).

3. Future School Committee Meeting Dates and Tentative Agenda Items. Dr. Ash would like to add to the agenda for Tuesday May 10th a recommendation from him and Carl Valente on how to approach the issue of the access road to Estabrook School. He would like to tentatively add to the agenda for Tuesday June 7 revisiting what we might do if we had more funding (i.e., fees, critical positions).

VI. Action Items

1. Vote to Appoint Charles Favazzo as the School Committee Representative on the Permanent Building Committee.

Motion to appoint Charles Favazzo as the School Committee Representative on the Permanent Building Committee (Alessandrini, Coppe). **The motion passed 5-0.**

2. Vote to Accept a \$635 Donation from Wilson Farms' School Fundraiser to the Hastings School.

Motion to accept with appreciation a \$635 donation from Wilson Farms' School Fundraiser to the Hastings School (Steigerwald, Brodner). **The motion passed 5-0.**

3. Vote to Accept \$300 in Donations to the William G. Tapply Memorial Fund.

Motion to accept with excitement \$300 in donations to the William G. Tapply Memorial Fund (Steigerwald, Alessandrini). **The motion passed 5-0.**

The launch of the book of student poetry that has been supported by the William G. Tapply Memorial Fund will be done with the poet Robert Pinsky.

4. Vote to Approve School Committee Minutes of March 21, 2011.

The minutes of 3/21/11 are approved pending an amendment to the sentence regarding the bid criteria.

VII. Motion to go into executive session for the purpose of contract negotiations with non-union personnel, to return to public session only for the purpose of adjourning, (Brodner, Steigerwald). Alessandrini-aye; Brodner-aye; Coppe-aye; Steigerwald-aye and Stewart-aye.

The meeting went into executive session at 9:43 p.m.

Documents: Meeting agenda; Superintendent's Bulletin, dated 4.8.11 containing a draft of the proposed Special Education Study Committees; memo from Assistant Superintendent for Business and Finance Mary Ellen Dunn, to Superintendent Paul Ash, re: Recommendation for Award: Extended Day Child Care Lease; Future School Committee Meeting Dates and Tentative Agenda Items, revised April 20, 2011; resume, Charles N. Favazzo, Jr., Project Manager; memo from Hastings Principal, Louise Lipsitz, re: donation from Wilson Farms in the amount of \$635; memo from Superintendent for Business and Finance Mary Ellen Dunn, to Superintendent Paul Ash, re: Acceptance of Donation of \$300 for the Tapply Fund; draft School Committee minutes from 3.21.11 meeting; letter from Mark Chonofsky to the School Committee.