

LEXINGTON SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEETING
Tuesday, November 28, 2006
Jonas Clarke Middle School Auditorium
17 Stedman Road

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

7:30 p.m. I. Call to Order and Welcome (Tom Diaz):

7:40 p.m. II. Superintendent's Report:

A. I saw *Evita* last Saturday night at LHS. It was an extraordinary event. Congratulations to the faculty members, the students and their families.

7:45 p.m. Members' Reports / Members' Concerns: Tom Diaz first congratulated student representative Toni Maeck for getting her college applications done.

Ravi Sakhuja: *Evita* was outstanding.

Olga Guttag: I agree about *Evita*. Here is an invitation from the SPEDPAC. On December 7th at 7:30 the Council will hold a presentation by Dr. Ellen Braaten about assessment tools used by schools and psychologists for children who may have a disability.

We are entering the budget season. This is the time to start paying attention. This is the time we can actually react to public feedback.

Helen Cohen: Our secretary who takes minutes for us has been through surgery today and has gotten through it and is home, so Leora, we look forward to seeing you soon. It is a cumbersome process to get the minutes in on time. Leora takes the minutes and she sends them out and then all of us have to read them and approve them and approve each other's versions and get them back to her. We need to do that more quickly.

Tom Griffiths: I attended a Council on Aging meeting where we discussed the preliminary findings of our space study. I told them we might release the White House, we might use part of the old Harrington, but no decisions have been made. Last night I was in a meeting regarding the DPW building. The debt exclusion will probably be postponed until June. They will only ask for design money at the special Town Meeting. They will come to the April Town Meeting with estimates based on plans that are halfway along. And finally, Tom Diaz and I went to the Finance Committee last night and we talked about FY06 unpaid bills.

Tom Diaz: I attended the end of the same Selectmen's meeting as Mr. Griffiths and the discussion continues about combining facilities and maintenance departments. There is a Special Town

Meeting tomorrow night, which will address the need of the schools for a supplemental appropriation to cover SPED expenses.

8:00 p.m. Discussion Items:

1. Superintendent's Recommendation on K-5 District Lines (60 minutes)

Paul Ash: About a year ago I made it clear to the School Committee that we needed to redraw the K-5 district lines. I know this process involves the lives of children and families. It is ultimately designed to create equity and excellence. There were two major factors that would not change under any circumstances and that were unacceptable: 1). The Bridge school was significantly over capacity and 2). When the new Fiske school came online it would be a school that would have a large amount of excess capacity. Other schools were also overcrowded. I convened a committee made up of two parents from each elementary school and two School Committee members. We went over all the relevant information and came up with criteria for doing so. We used data assembled by David Finney of Design Partnership to produce a master plan for the four elementary schools that have not yet been renovated. He came up with an optimal educational capacity for each school and what facilities were needed at each school based on what facilities the new Harrington has.

Dr. Ash presented the spare student capacity in each school in two scenarios: both if district lines were not to be moved and if they were to be moved. He presented a map of Lexington, redistricted. He explained the reasoning behind having students from the new Avalon Bay project attend Fiske. He explained that the committee went through many iterations of the problem. He presented enrollment projections both before and after the proposed redistricting. Dr. Ash went through FAQs. Dr. Ash thanked the members of the redistricting committee.

2. Special Education Report (60 minutes)

(The SPED presentation may be viewed on the LPS website)

Olga Guttag: We need clear data.

Paul Ash: We have our own '07 data.

Olga Guttag: If we could find at least some data for at least some of the other programs it would be great to convince Town Meeting members that this is a crisis that is created by an under-funding of mandates and not by mismanagement on our part.

Tom Griffiths: It would be nice if we could count on money in the year in which we incur our expenses. It would also be nice if we could reduce the deductible from four times foundation to three times foundation. And of course, it would be nice if we could increase the percentage

reimbursement. How does the district-wide program compare with the two ILPs at Clarke and at Diamond?

Maura Johnson, MS Sped Coordinator: There are nine students at Diamond, eleven at Clarke. Next year we will have a space limitation. We would like to build a program at Clarke. There would be individualization depending on the kids.

Tom Griffiths: The high school multi-disciplinary support team is a huge savings, so if I were less certain that these programs would all work, would this be a good cherry to pick?

Paul Ash: Yes. It will cost just 78K and avoids spending 500K. The five recommendations are in categories. Priority 1 items save the most money but the others, though they may not save a lot in year one, will save more in year two.

Tom Griffiths: What if we can't deliver on what we are promising?

Paul Ash: I had the same fear. I have enormous confidence in these recommendations.

Tom Griffiths: I want to go on record in complementing you. This is the most comprehensive report on this subject that I have ever seen.

Helen Cohen: Thank you. The written materials are extremely important. I have a response to Ms. Guttag. Van Seasholes tried to get a connection with Minuteman Tech because some kids could benefit from the courses it offers. . Eliminating those kinds of classes at LHS was a mistake. Looking at what we pay for in residential placements, we pay for therapy and counseling; the department of mental health used to pay part of that and parents paid for part of that, with or without insurance. We have a lot of work to do on the state level. The schools have ended up carrying expenses for things that are not school responsibilities. We need good lobbying and good legislators to make the situation more manageable.

Tom Diaz: Our representatives deserve our thanks because Lexington will receive an increase of 800K this year. That 800K will pay for the overrun in out of district tuitions.

Olga Guttag: Thank you. I agree with Helen. The social safety net becomes more and more corroded and schools are making up for it.

Public Comment:

Annie McQuilken: I have a daughter in elementary and one in middle school. The older one had a hard time in elementary school and I had a hard time getting her the help she needed. My younger one is thriving. It is important to identify kids' needs early. The program has to be the right program

otherwise parents are still going to want out of district placements, particularly with regard to psychiatric disorders. Can we really create a safe environment for these kids? A child with a learning disability without appropriate supports becomes a child with an emotional disability.

Sue Cusack: Finally there is some progress in thinking about SPED as a continuum of services. Now we are seeing a coherent, thoughtful sense of purpose. Leadership is critical. It feels like you are being proactive instead of reactive. I wish you luck with implementing.

Jay Kaufman: Thank you for the exquisite presentation. It saddens me to hear the same things I was saying 12 years ago, that the state government has to step in. The money must come from somewhere. It's clear the system is broken. Maybe the era in Massachusetts of sticking our heads in the sand and refusing to deal with these tough issues has come to an end. I'm glad Deval Patrick did not offer easy fixes. There are no easy fixes. Maybe we can begin the public conversation to really fix these issues; they are not new but they are also not going away.

Parent: Some of the language you use like *problems* when you are discussing children is difficult. How are you going to communicate these programs to parents?

Mary Sullivan Kelly: We have started meeting with parents and will meet with more.

Tom Diaz: I sense a consensus that the administration should make these programs a priority for FY08, is that correct?

Tom Griffiths: Should we do a program or programs that pay the most short term benefit? If we propose these programs and we are wrong about the cost savings, what we will have done is to have moved regular education programs into override territory and that makes me nervous.

Olga Gutttag: How likely are we to be able to staff all the programs?

Paul Ash: The middle school ILP program has to go into place and if it doesn't I am just going to recommend to you what the out of district costs will be for the 8 placements. So, if you agree with me on my recommended budget it will have the same effect on regular ed if you vote for the program or you don't vote for the program. We do not have a program for those 8 children in the middle school.

Tom Diaz: That is the easy case.

Paul Ash: I believe that these figures are conservative. I have been humbled by the worry that if I put money in these services then without an override it means that regular ed services will be cut.

Tom Griffiths: You would put 243K in the budget for the district-wide program and you would put 417K in the budget if we do not. Did I misinterpret what you said?

Paul Ash: No, you did not. That is exactly what I would do.

Olga Gutttag: If we do all 5 programs all at once, what is the likelihood that we will do them all well? Is it wise to strain the system so much to introduce 5 programs all in one year?

Paul Ash: These 5 programs would be implemented by three administrators and in some cases these are expansions of existing programs. If we don't build these programs we will have to describe how much time is spent with parents to determine which out of district placement is appropriate. That is incredibly time-consuming.

Denise Oldham, LHS Sped Director: There were actually 2 more programs that we decided not to propose for September. We are already building on excellent programs.

Kathy Meagher, MDS Team Director We see the MDS program as an alternative to a therapeutic day school. These schools are not the answer to everything. It makes more sense to keep kids in the system instead of trying to get them back in high school.

Ravi Sakhuja: Some are probably a better investment than others.

Motion to support the three programs in priority one and ask Dr. Ash to include them in the budget (Cohen, Griffiths).

Olga Gutttag: Would you accept a friendly amendment?

Helen Cohen: How friendly is it?

Olga Gutttag: Do everything possible to make these programs happen before July 1.

Helen Cohen: I assume that is a given.

Tom Griffiths: I am reserving the right to think about the priority two items until the next School Committee meeting.

Tom Diaz: I also support this motion and I will consider the priority two programs. We are already increasing our operating expenses in this area considerably. We need to be mindful of the budget consequences.

Olga Gutttag: We should renegotiate our agreement with Town Meeting on how to fund unexpected special education costs.

The motion passed 5-0.

2. **Mary Ellen Dunn:** We have a variety of invoices totaling \$42,864 that were without a funding source. We've found funding sources for some of them. The balance is a request for \$37,050 to fund those bills. The largest one is a \$26,000 from The Walker School for services that they assisted the school district with last spring for a program that was at the high school. The rest are small invoices.

Tom Diaz: We won't make a request to the special Town Meeting to pay these bills; we will do so in the spring.

Olga Gutttag: Can we post this list to the TMMA list?

Tom Diaz: We're not going to go over it line by line; we can make it available.

Olga Gutttag: I agree. Also we have to stop this from happening.

Helen Cohen: I hope we can fix this. I appreciate the detailed information.

Dawn McKenna: Tomorrow night can you give an explanation of why the controls put in place failed?

Tom Diaz: I will consider that.

Tom Griffiths: I object to the word failed.

Ravi Sakhuja: It failed. Last year's obligations are being paid this year.

Tom Griffiths: I think it's a longer story than that Ravi, but if *you* want to characterize it as failure, I am perfectly happy to let *you* characterize it as failure.

Ravi Sakhuja: It's best to just explain what we have and what we are going to do going forward.

Tom Diaz: I am going to consider Ms. McKenna's point but my intention is what I said. We are not asking for the money tomorrow. I won't have a lot of time.

3. Date for School Committee Public Hearing on Redistricting (15 minutes)

The date will be December 13th, 2006 at 7:30.

Short discussion about building an extra room in schools to account for short-term overcrowding.

Man from audience: If you don't redistrict you will have to redistrict in a few years.

Paul Ash: These redistrict lines will last four years.

The DVD was cut off.

10:15 p.m. Executive Session:

The next meeting of the School Committee is scheduled for Tuesday, December 12, 2006, at 7:30 p.m. at the Lexington Town Office Building, Selectmen's Meeting Room, 1625 Massachusetts Avenue.