

LEXINGTON SCHOOL COMMITTEE

Friday, December 4, 2015

McSwiney Center for Professional Learning / EDCO Collaborative North Crossing
Academy, Thoreau Room, 36 Middlesex Turnpike, Bedford, MA

PRESENT: Jessie Steigerwald, Chair; Bill Hurley, Vice Chair; Margaret Coppe; Judy Crocker, Clerk; Alessandro Alessandrini

OTHERS PRESENT: Dorothy Presser from the Massachusetts Association of School Committees, Dr. Tom Scott from the Massachusetts Association of Superintendents (for an hour).

The meeting was led by Dorothy Presser and the minutes were taken by Dorothy Presser and edited by the School Committee. The meeting began at 4:20 p.m., when Mr. Alessandrini arrived. At 5:30, Dr. Scott left the meeting. The meeting ended at approximately 8:20 p.m.

Mr. Alessandrini notified Ms. Steigerwald that he was detained, but would arrive as soon as possible. Ms. Steigerwald informed the committee and members agreed to wait until Mr. Alessandrini arrived to begin. Mr. Alessandrini arrived at 4:20; the chair called the meeting to order and Ms. Presser led the rest of the meeting.

Ms. Presser outlined the retreat agenda and the opportunity to revisit School Governance topics that had been discussed at the August 20th retreat when Dr. Czajkowski and members began outlining their roles and responsibilities, communication preferences and approach to conducting work during meetings. Dr. Czajkowski has now presented her 90-day evaluation to the School Committee (December 1, 2015), and in that presentation and other discussions, has shared reflections, concerns, frustrations, and areas where she would like additional support.

To open the meeting, Ms. Presser and Dr. Scott discussed the importance of having a high-functioning School Committee and strong partnership between the Superintendent and School Committee. Ms. Presser shared that she felt the committee could focus on the work they had begun relating to school governance and becoming a high-performing team as a committee, and with the superintendent. Ms. Presser asked what each member was looking for as an outcome from today's discussion. Members shared their views and all were supportive of finding ways to improve both the School Committee and the relationship with Dr. Czajkowski.

In her comments, Ms. Coppe noted the following items that she wanted addressed: 1. unrealistic agendas that lead to lengthy meetings; 2. the number of daytime meetings that she was unable to attend; and 3. communication about those meetings to the whole committee as well as other matters. Ms. Coppe said she wanted to support Dr. Czajkowski including if it meant a change in the chair. Ms. Coppe was also concerned about not having the superintendent present.

In response to Ms. Coppe's statement about changing chairs, Ms. Steigerwald affirmed that the chair served at the pleasure of the committee and the chairmanship was up to the members. For her desired outcomes, Ms. Steigerwald hoped members could improve meetings and follow agreed upon norms. She expressed that transitioning between superintendents while the capital

projects were moving forward was challenging, and that while meetings about capital projects were intense, she hoped the committee could improve the way those conversations took place. She hoped to review some of the concerns in Dr. Czajkowski's 90-day presentation about Lexington's culture, the number of meetings, and also consider other instances, including three separate times – in mid-July, late October, and most recently late November – when Dr. Czajkowski had said she might not remain. Ms. Steigerwald hoped Dr. Czajkowski would like to remain in Lexington, and, if so, Ms. Steigerwald wanted clarity around the way to move forward constructively – both in improving the School Committee dynamics, and in improving the communication between Dr. Czajkowski and the School Committee.

After members expressed their desired outcomes, Ms. Presser and Dr. Scott responded.

In response to Ms. Coppe's concern about Dr. Czajkowski not being present, Ms. Presser and Dr. Scott noted that they had specifically talked to Dr. Czajkowski about the retreat and that she had been invited to attend but Ms. Presser said that the School Committee would be more productive meeting without the Superintendent, and that a follow-up session could include Dr. Czajkowski as well. Ms. Presser observed that having worked with the School Committee and talking to Dr. Czajkowski, she believed a meeting between members to discuss the committee could be productive, and that a follow-up session could include Dr. Czajkowski as well.

Dr. Scott said that in his recent conversations with Dr. Czajkowski, including this morning, she had shared concerns about the relationships among School Committee members and about her relationship with the Chair. Dr. Czajkowski had expressed to Dr. Scott that the School Committee was not showing respect for one another and that she felt the Committee members meeting without her could help the members come to grips with their relationships with each other. Dr. Scott said that Dr. Czajkowski had identified to him that she saw only a couple of options in terms of the difficulties she was having with the Chair: Ms. Steigerwald could step down as Chair; Ms. Steigerwald could remain the Chair and run the meetings, but Mr. Hurley could be the interface between Ms. Steigerwald and Dr. Czajkowski in agenda setting and planning meetings; Dr. Czajkowski could resign. In response to Ms. Steigerwald's question about whether Dr. Czajkowski wished to remain in Lexington, Dr. Scott said he had talked to Dr. Czajkowski about her wishes in this regard and expressed for the superintendent that Dr. Czajkowski would like to stay in Lexington for multiple reasons, but that if things did not improve she might consider leaving.

There were questions and comments from members, and all five members expressed a shared goal of retaining Dr. Czajkowski as superintendent, finding ways to improve, and supporting her in her adjustment to the new position. Some were concerned about a pattern of expressing the possibility of resigning. Mr. Alessandrini said losing Dr. Czajkowski would mean losing one of the best if not the best Superintendents in Massachusetts. Mr. Alessandrini was concerned Lexington would go back to the days of "revolving-door Superintendents". School Committee members concurred. Dr. Scott left the meeting at 5:30 p.m.

Ms. Presser asked members to next take up the specific practices in School Governance and encouraged members to focus on what each could do to improve the School Committee, rather than on changing other members. For the next three hours members discussed ways they could

improve practices around following norms, constructive ways to disagree, and managing discussion in an efficient and respectful manner. They also discussed the new Executive Assistant to the School Committee and areas where she needed support from the administration. In addition, they talked about ongoing challenges due to the current items on their plate, including capital projects and work with other boards and committees. These items were discussed throughout the three hours, so this portion of the minutes captures the themes. Highlights of major themes are presented first, and then Ms. Presser's summary of the agreements that were reached is included below.

Superintendent: Members discussed the other instances when Dr. Czajkowski said she might not remain in the position. [This was discussed briefly when Dr. Scott was present, and again after he left. The summary is included here.] In late November, it followed a heated conversation with Ms. Crocker and Ms. Steigerwald related to displeasure with the number of questions from members and from other Boards and Committees that were directed to Mr. Goddard, Director of Facilities, and the number of questions in general about the capital projects. There was also tension around the Chair's requests to Dr. Czajkowski for support for the newly hired Executive Assistant to the School Committee, including an appropriate location, equipment and training. At the end of the November conversation, Dr. Czajkowski directly informed Ms. Crocker, Ms. Steigerwald and, later that morning, Mr. Hurley, that she might leave her position.

Discussion about the Chairmanship: Ms. Coppe suggested changing the chair. Ms. Steigerwald affirmed that the chair serves at the pleasure of the committee and wanted to hear member views. No members offered to serve as chair at this time. Members discussed the annual reorganization meeting which takes place at the meeting following the March election. There was further discussion between members. Ms. Coppe's suggestion was not pursued. Consensus was reached by [all] other members that any change in Chairmanship at this time would not be in the best interests of the school district and that the Committee should address the topic at the annual reorganization meeting after the March elections. Members continued the discussion to consider the arrangement proposed by Dr. Czajkowski (through Dr. Scott). The agreements that were reached are captured below, in the summary provided by Ms. Presser. Ms. Steigerwald expressed reservations about the interface proposal, but was willing to try it. She hoped for a direct (or facilitated) resolution to Dr. Czajkowski's concerns with her and an opportunity to resolve any difficulties. She shared with members that earlier the same day she, Dr. Czajkowski and Mr. Hurley had held the regular agenda setting meeting together, that it had been a productive and efficient meeting, and that the message that Dr. Scott delivered earlier in today's meeting – that Dr. Czajkowski wished her to step down as chair – was unexpected.

Discussion about minutes: There were conflicting views about minutes as some members would prefer shorter minutes and others prefer more detailed minutes. Ms. Steigerwald expressed concern about the process for production of minutes during the extended period when there was no recording secretary. She had wished all members had been willing to pitch in to support the record keeping and thanked Ms. Crocker for offering assistance during this period. Ms. Coppe felt preparation of the minutes was the Chair's job in the absence of a recording secretary.

Discussion about agendas, length of meetings, and timing of meetings. Multiple members continued to desire shorter meetings, as they had at prior retreats. Members held different

viewpoints about the cause of long meetings, whether it was agendas, the complexity of the capital projects, the unpredictable timing for the way capital project information was delivered to the committee (often on the day of the meeting, or at the meeting), or the interest of members in having extended discussions during the meetings. Some members noted that the length of meetings have remained relatively close to expected end times with a few exceptions, in contrast to the previous few years. When meetings are held in the daytime, it is frequently at the request of staff and other town committees. Some members felt it was unreasonable to expect staff and other committees to accommodate the preferences of individual School Committee members.

Discussion about capital projects and other Boards & Committees: Members agreed the timing for the capital projects was critical and fast-moving, and that the 18+ month period when alternate school capital projects had been rejected had been difficult. Members discussed meetings that included the chairs plus one member from the Selectmen, Appropriation Committee, Capital Expenditure Committee, and sometimes Permanent Building Committee. They reviewed participants: as chair and liaison to the Appropriation Committee, Ms. Steigerwald participated, and had most often been joined by liaison to the Capital Expenditures Committee, Mr. Hurley and, sometimes by liaison to the Permanent Building Committee, Ms. Crocker. The Town Manager, Director of Finance/Comptroller, Superintendent and Director of Facilities also attended most meetings. Members who had not attended had expressed in a regular meeting that they felt excluded, which was a concern for all members. Though they were then invited to take turns participating, the meeting times did not work for their schedules, and a member expressed displeasure at the daytime scheduling, or the days that were selected. Another member noted that scheduling was coordinated by the Selectmen, to align with multiple people, including staff. Another felt it was not reasonable to ask staff to attend additional night meetings. Members who had attended noted that updates to all members were shared after most meetings and that any policy questions that were raised in these meetings were brought to the full School Committee so all members could deliberate about them in open sessions. Even logistical questions that were discussed in these meetings – for example, proposed timing for TMMA information sessions – had been communicated to the full group. Members had different views about the value of these meetings, some felt they were important to help the capital projects come to fruition, and some members would prefer that they end.

Other topics discussed: There was a lengthy discussion about how to communicate updates. Some members currently take time to prepare and communicate written meeting updates regularly within a reasonable period of time for those unable to attend. Some members currently carry a larger share of the liaison roles and some felt that it would be helpful for others to share the work more evenly. Some members would prefer to provide verbal updates at meetings.

Members discussed how individual comments impact fellow members and the committee as a whole. Some members expressed their displeasure with individuals who 1) repeated topics that the Town Manager specifically requested not be discussed in open meetings held by the Selectmen, School Committee, Permanent Building Committee, or Finance Committees and 2) perceived grandstanding in doing so over 5 meetings. This was stated to be embarrassing and having placed the remainder of the committee in an awkward position with the other boards and Town Manager. Concerns were discussed about preserving the Committee's level of trust with these committees and of not using meeting time to purposefully repeat the same individual

comment content without adding new information. Committee members discussed respecting the concerns of fellow colleagues.

This is a summary of the items the committee agreed to try going forward. There were three areas in which committee members agreed, by consensus, that some changes would be made: meetings, communications and the relationship with the superintendent.

School Governance - Meetings:

Members continued to share a goal of making meetings more efficient. There was discussion of the plan to implement the NOVUS agenda software and practice of writing out all motions. The committee agreed to stick with the recently introduced Consent Agenda as aspects of it seem to be working. Members talked about streamlining the minutes so that they were simpler and could be completed and approved more quickly. The timing of audience and public comments will be implemented. The process for discussing a topic involving a vote was agreed to include 1) making a motion, 2) topic discussion, followed by 3) voting. Members agreed that the chair would speak last on any topic. This would include giving very short, if any, introductions to the topic at hand. On complex discussions, Chair Ms. Steigerwald would like to “go down the row” to recognize people to speak. Members agreed to try this.

Members agreed to each take personal responsibility for improving the atmosphere during meetings. Members agreed to observe the norms they had previously agreed to, and to treat one another with respect. There was a request and agreement to try to avoid purposeful repetition of content, and to avoid interruptions. Members affirmed that they had each signed the unanimously voted upon Committee Operating Norms.

Communications: For sharing information with fellow committee members regarding liaison meetings, it was decided that people attending the liaison meetings would report back to the full committee no later than the next School Committee meeting if possible. Members would use their judgment as to whether there is important communication to be passed along before that time and, if so, make sure the information gets to fellow committee members. It was recommended that this be done by getting the information to the School Committee Executive Assistant, Ms. McDonough and having her distribute it to members and Dr. Czajkowski.

For communicating with Dr. Czajkowski, the Committee agreed with her suggestion that questions would go through Ms. McDonough, who could work with Dr. Czajkowski’s Executive Assistant, Ms. Sousa, to ensure the questions are channeled to the correct place. Members felt they wanted to have direct access to Dr. Czajkowski on occasion, so the circumstances under which this would happen need some more exploration with Dr. Czajkowski. The Committee discussed the possibility of one-on-one meetings periodically, perhaps once a quarter, with Dr. Czajkowski, as some members currently do. This needs further discussion with Dr. Czajkowski.

Roles and Responsibilities - Relationship with the Superintendent: All committee members agreed that Mr. Hurley, Vice Chair, would be the conduit for direct communication with Dr. Czajkowski. This includes agenda-setting meetings and day-to-day communications regarding Ms. McDonough’s work. Ms. Steigerwald will continue to serve as Chair, will run the meetings and conduct all other School Committee business. Mr. Hurley was charged with talking with Dr.

Czajkowski on Monday morning (December 7) about Ms. McDonough's position. The conversation would cover finding an appropriate location for her and a discussion of how the position could work smoothly going forward.

Mr. Hurley will also continue to discuss with Dr. Czajkowski and with Ms. Steigerwald how communications and responsibilities of the Superintendent, Chair & Vice-Chair can work smoothly going forward. Members thanked Ms. Crocker for providing snacks and beverages.

Everyone expressed an interest in a follow-up workshop that includes Dr. Czajkowski. A time and place for the follow-up was not determined. The meeting ended at approximately 8:20 p.m.

Materials: Agenda; Operating Norms for the Lexington School Committee, September 29, 2015; "Liaison Report" blank sheet and sample; "Agenda Item Summary" blank sheet and sample; Job Description for Special Assistant to the Superintendent for Communication, Residency, Central Registration & Special Projects"; 90 Day Summation "Listen, Learn, Lead with Balance" December 1, 2015, Dr. Mary Czajkowski.