

**LEXINGTON SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEETING**  
**Tuesday, June 7, 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.**

**LPS attorneys Robert (Bob) Fraser and Colby Brunt were in attendance.**

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

**I. Call to Order and Welcome (Chair Stewart)**

The Chair explained that there is a monitor in the hallway for the overflow portion of the audience. The meeting may move to Cary Hall at 9:30 p.m. for the discussion on the Superintendent's contract.

The Chair then explained why the agenda had changed since the original agenda for this meeting went out.

There will be an additional meeting on June 15<sup>th</sup> to complete the items from the original agenda.

**II. Public Comment**

**Eric Eid-Reiner** (Russell Road): Why is the Superintendent's contract being discussed at 9:30 when it looks like 8:05 on the agenda?

The Chair explained that there could be some people who are under the impression that the Superintendent's contract is coming up later because of where it appeared originally on the agenda.

**Edith Sandy** (Town Meeting member precinct 6): I am glad the School Committee decided to modify its agenda to not take a vote tonight on the superintendent's contract but this should not have taken a public outcry. The original agenda gave no hint that the contract would even be discussed. No corrected agenda was sent out until late yesterday. Until the last minute the School Committee, through its chairman, expressed no willingness to hear or accede to parental concerns— this shows no respect for parents and the public at large-- and it is not a stretch to think that teachers too would feel disrespected, unsupported and unheard.

### **III. Superintendent's Announcements**

Dr. Ash and Director of Public Facilities Pat Goddard had a meeting at MASC about the design capacity for the Estabrook building project. MASC has agreed that we can proceed with a design capacity of 540 students for Estabrook, which will create extra space. Dr. Ash will ask the Chair to sign the document after tonight's meeting; he has already signed the MSBA Estabrook Project Design Enrollment Certification as has Town Manager Carl Valente. They will be laying out timetables for the project soon.

### **IV. Members' Reports / Members' Concerns**

**Sandro Alessandrini:** Congratulations to the seniors who graduated.

**Jessie Steigerwald:** Thank you also to Hank Manz who made a wonderful speech about collaboration at graduation. Thank you to all the people who wrote to us this week. Our Chair writes back but we all read all emails.

### **V. Discussion Items**

1. ING/MASBO Finance Award. Terry Finnigan from ING Financial Partners presented the first annual Donald D. Johnson Award for Operational Cost Efficiency to LPS. Lexington's proposal saved millions and millions of dollars. This was achieved through collaboration between: Paul Ash, Linda Chase, Carl Valente, Mary Ellen Dunn, Pat Goddard, the School Committee, the Appropriation Committee, the Board of Selectmen, the Capital Expenditures Committee and employees of student services and LPS. We have provided a \$2500 grant to fund student scholarships to three students, Kelsey Fenn, Andre Ho and Jacquelyn O'Connor.

Dr. Ash emphasized that collaboration among the committees and individuals honored was responsible for the savings LPS has realized. We have a one million dollar stabilization fund for Special Education. We have returned \$6.4 million dollars over the last several years. Saving money means saving jobs, which means better education. We have also reduced the operating budget by \$2.5 million.

(Note: Discussion Items listed on the agenda as 3 and 4 were taken up before number 2. These minutes reflect the order in which these items were actually taken up. Subject headings have remained the same).

2. FY12 Budget Changes. Introduced by Dr. Ash. We have had an excellent year. We have some money to turn back to the general fund. We will get at least \$500K in new money because of an increase in the circuit breaker reimbursement account. We could not have known about this money earlier.

Dr. Ash proposed three changes for FY12: 1). Rescind the 1.0 teacher cut in LHS; 2). Reduce the elementary music fee by half from \$300 to \$150 and 3). Add a .5 interventionist specialist position at the Bowman School.

Bowman Principal Mary Anton explained the interventionist specialist position. Dr. Ash hopes eventually this position will be implemented at all six elementary schools. Dr. Anton took questions from the Committee.

**Motion to rescind the 1.0 teacher at LHS, reduce the elementary instrumental music fee from \$300 to \$150 and add a .5 intervention specialist at Bowman (Steigerwald, Brodner). The motion passed 5-0.**

3. FY11 Budget Changes. Dr Ash recommended that we spend a portion of the surplus FY11 funds and return the balance to the Town to the general fund. The principals have determined which needs would make the most difference in the lives of the children. Dr Ash read the list of items, which included: technology, textbooks, resource room materials for freshman and sophomore interventions, furnishings, emergency response readiness kits for REMS (Readiness Emergency Management for Schools), Elmos, completion of wireless in both middle schools, iPads, secretarial support for June, printing equipment to produce secure i.d. passes for school bus riders. The request totals \$299,432.

There were comments and questions from the Committee.

**Motion to amend the FY11 budget and approve the \$299,432 funding request across all nine schools and the Central Administration (Coppe, Alessandrini). The motion passed 5-0.**

4. Superintendent's Employment Contract.

The Chair gave students present an opportunity to speak.

**Amy Patterson** (LHS class of 2011): I started a survey of teachers and have spoken to sixty of them. I do not have a complete data set but I already have a sense that there is a problem with morale. Some comments I have received included: The culture of the current administration is one of intimidation and punishment; Teachers and custodians are treated like children; Creative approaches are not encouraged; There are bureaucratic miscommunications and inconsistencies in leadership.

**Benjamin Ruesch** (LHS class of 2010): I am concerned about things I have heard. It is alarming to hear of the recent retirements of three of the most loved and valued teachers: Mr. Bogart, Mme Girondel and Dr. Fiveash. Mme Girondel reached out to me in a way I have not seen from the younger teachers. The school district needs to take account of its most experienced teachers. The faculty of the music department, especially Mr. Leonard, were very important to me. Experienced teachers must be valued. They are very important to the development of students.

**Michaela** (LHS class of 2011): I had both Mme Gironel and Dr. Fiveash and I have seen them get frustrated with how the school is run. It is not fair that Dr. Fiveash's Latin 3 class was eliminated. Both of these teachers arrive very early in the morning and put their heart and soul into their work. Their experience cannot be passed on through pieces of paper. It is unfair that older teachers are being pushed away for younger teachers. They are needed for guidance.

**Josh Melnick** (sophomore at LHS): I had Dr. Fiveash for one year. What has been said is a wide-ranging opinion. Dr. Fiveash has done more for my education in one year than multiple teachers have done in many years. He is a true teacher. We need these kinds of teachers at all the schools. They are hard to find and we need to retain them when we have them.

**Angela** (LHS class of 2007): I want to reiterate the concerns regarding Dr. Fiveash, Mr. Bogart and Mme Girondel. It is common in organizations that out of the box people can get shut out. A way to make Lexington outstanding is by honoring these teachers. I visit Mme Gironel and Dr. Fiveash whenever I come back to Lexington and they are better than some of my professors at Mt. Holyoke.

**Sonya Taeffe** (LPS graduate 12 years ago): I went to Brandeis and then to Yale for classics. The ways that I learned to think about academia, comparative literature and interdisciplinary work I got from Dr. Fiveash's classes. I also learned that the study of dead languages is a worthwhile endeavor. I don't want this to disappear from Lexington before its time. I would like that environment to survive and thrive. Three teachers of this ilk to disappear at once is a bit drastic.

**Eric Eid-Reiner**: (LHS class of 2007): I had Mme Girondel and Dr. Fiveash. Dr. Ash said that fifteen teachers are retiring this year. He said Lexington has a 6.5% turnover rate compared to a national average of 15%. A national average is meaningless, we need to look at comparable school districts. We need to listen to what teachers, students and parents are saying. The level of response here tonight and the vibe in the schools is a cause for serious concern. I hope the School Committee will continue to listen to these concerns.

**Chair Stewart**: Thank you to all the students who spoke. The School Committee also cares about the schools. We have gone through many changes in the last few years with respect to state and federal mandates. We need to ask ourselves if we are pushing toward standardization at the expense of creativity and flexibility. The School Committee would like to look more closely at standardization, morale, and our vision for our schools, and in doing so engage community members in effective ways.

**Dr. Ash**: I came to Lexington because of its deep commitment to education. Thank you for coming here and challenging me. We hear a lot about standardization. I recommended that we not participate in the Race to the Top program. The United States is moving towards a national curriculum. We are moving towards nationalized standardized tests. The DOE is going to pass new regulations on teacher evaluations and will mandate that multiple measures of student performance including performance on MCAS be included. I deeply believe that we need a balance between a tight fit and a loose fit. Hyper standardization will

not lead to an outstanding education. Good teachers need to deeply know their students and how to teach. Our schools were built around a factory model. There has never been a public school district in the United States that has educated every student at a high level both academically and socially. That is our mission. We have individual instruction when necessary, not standardization.

I am heartbroken about the teachers who are leaving. I have spoken to all three of the teachers who are leaving and told them I respect what they have done and I wish they were not leaving. I cannot speak to personnel decisions; they are a private matter. I look forward to listening and learning from you.

**Chair Stewart** outlined the background on the superintendent's contract. The discussion is on extending the current contract to June 20, 2015. This discussion began following Dr. Ash's evaluation. The Chair described the process by which the evaluation was done and stated that the superintendent received a strong evaluation. Based on that evaluation Dr. Ash asked the Committee to consider extending his contract for two additional years. They discussed this in executive session. On June 1 there was a motion to extend Dr. Ash's contract for two more years, the Committee took a voice roll call vote and extended the contract for two more years. They added ten vacation days, continued the annual increase of 3%, took out the requirement for an annual physical and extended the amount of notice Dr. Ash is required to give of his intention to leave. The LPS attorneys suggested that this item be placed on the agenda. It was posted it within the forty-eight hour window required. All that is needed to implement the new contract is a signature from the Chair and the Superintendent.

**Zeynep Bursal** (Diamond and Fiske parent): Who is the School Committee responsible to? Have our voices been heard? Why did you not hold a public hearing? What happens if the community is not happy with this? Everything that made Diamond Diamond has been taken away: teams, project day. The parents are truly unhappy. Standardization will result in training robots. If you take away the individuality of the teaching styles there is no creativity left.

**Bob Fraser** (LPS attorney): The School Committee as a matter of law is an agent of the state. There are some circumstances in which the School Committee can take action independent of state requirements but they are few. School Committee members are the only government officials primarily responsible to a non-voting segment of the community. The Superintendent is hired by the School Committee. The School Committee is authorized to enter into a contract for as much as six years. From a legal standpoint there is no mandated role for the community in negotiating a contract with the superintendent.

There were comments and questions from the Committee.

**Jessie Steigerwald** described how the School Committed conducted a survey at the time of the evaluation of the Superintendent. In prior years it was only the five School Committee members who had input. She explained why the survey was not put out to more people. She said that Dr. Ash has been open to discussions with Committee members. There is a difficult

balance between mandates and fostering creativity. She told the audience that it is better if the public participates more.

**Sandro Alessandrini:** There are two different issues: standardization and teacher morale. We are going to look at this. I hope that we continue to attract good teachers and maintain them. Teacher morale is very important to us. If we have made policies that are making teachers unhappy we should change those.

**The Chair** noted that this is only the beginning of the conversation and opened the floor to continued Public Comment:

**Jerry Harris** (Parker Street): Why weren't the negotiations done in public?

**The Chair** indicated that the negotiations took place in executive sessions and that they were posted. Only action items can be reported from executive session.

**Bob Fraser:** No two negotiations are exactly the same. There are roughly ten reasons for which the School Committee may go into executive session. In my experience contract negotiations with superintendents have been done in executive session.

**Jerry Harris:** The important thing is: How are you going to engage the community on the teacher morale issue? The culture of an organization is determined by the boss. Concerns about fear, low morale, and retaliation do not come from standardization. That is the culture of the group. The worst case will be that teachers will disengage. The School Committee should form an independent committee to look into this.

**Kevin Johnson** (Concord Ave., SEPAC board member): I have seen steady improvement in the schools since my kids began. A lot of progress has been made, particularly in home-school communication. I support the School Committee while they work to improve Lexington schools. Changes must be pursued if improvement is to be made.

**Diane Biglow** (precinct 8): Thank you to Jessie for her comments. Everyone needs to vote. You waited until 8:30 to tell us that the contract was already signed; you should have told us that at the beginning of the meeting.

**Nancy Rozier** (Concord Avenue, Former LEF Board member): I applaud Amy Patterson who has come here with qualitative and quantitative data. I support the parents, teachers, School Committee and Dr. Ash. We use collaboration and teamwork because we all want excellence in our schools. During Dr. Ash's tenure I have noticed a real shift in the effort to raise student achievement. All teachers retire including great teachers. I am going to feel just as bad when Dr. Ash retires as when Steve Bogart retires.

**Dawn McKenna** (precinct 6): We are over capacity in this room and there are over thirty people in the hallway; I have concerns about that for Open Meeting Law.

According to the Attorney General's website regarding executive session if you go into executive session to discuss a contract you need to declare that a discussion in open session would have a detrimental effect. Why would this have been detrimental?

**Bob Fraser:** I have never seen any decision that requires that the Committee to go beyond just saying that there would be a detrimental effect in conducting the negotiations in public.

**Dawn McKenna:** I publicly request that on June 15 you state the dates that you went into executive session for this issue and that you release those minutes on June 15.

**Dr. Faruk Bursal** (Adams St., Fiske and Diamond): Financial achievement should not be a measure of our success as educators. The needs of those who are high achievers are not being met and these kids will become disinterested in education. I would like to vent my frustration about standardization, which can lead to mediocrity. We must combat this with the School Committee's and the school administration's help. Standardization helps underachievers not overachievers. Lexington children have traditionally been overachievers. We are passionate about our children's futures.

**Kathleen Lenihan** (Bloomfield Street): As the co-PTA president of the Bowman PTA, for the past two years I have had the pleasure of working with Dr. Ash and I have always been impressed with his openness and his commitment to our children's education. Lexington is not merely surviving in this difficult economic climate but we are adding programs and staff and increasing access to cutting-edge technology. While finances are not everything, if we do not keep our financial house in order many of the things that we take for granted will disappear. I am pleased that Dr. Ash will be continuing.

**Andre Radelescu Banu** (Cedar Street): The Chair used to always respond to emails and I would like to ask you to resurrect that tradition.

**Chair Stewart:** We do respond within a week. I am sorry if I missed an email from you.

**Andre Radelescu Banu** (Cedar Street): Can the School Committee investigate the assigning of teachers to classes?

**Theodora Martin:** I saw a very different attitude at the April meeting. Dr. Ash acted like a bully when a student read a letter about Dr. Fiveash and Mme Girondel, and he lied. He said that these teachers chose to retire. Do you think we are idiots? What good is a superintendent who lies?

**Tim Zhu** (LHS Junior): I commend you on the progress you have made this year. Which is more important: listening and acting on the ideas of the community or abiding by rules made by people who are not in the community? I suggest that you break the rules when necessary so that every student can get a high quality education.

**Harvy Simkovits** (parent, Estabrook, Diamond and LHS): Thank you for listening to us. I am an organizational consultant. Culture and leadership are not about numbers but about a

feeling. Since you arrived, Dr. Ash, there has been a change of feeling in Estabrook. There was less parent involvement when Principal Batten came on the scene. Parental presence was not as strongly felt. This issue also came up around the Extended Day issue. There was a feeling that the parents were not welcome in the room. I have no doubt that there has been good management of LPS in the last five years but I wonder about the leadership. Are the teachers being inspired to be and do their best? Do we allow diversity in the way that they teach? Can we manage well and lead well in a way that inspires the teachers to do more and more for the students and not less and less.

**Gloria Bloom** (Reading from a letter from **Robert Gartside**): LHS has been known as one of the finest public schools in Massachusetts. The resignations of Brian O'Connell and the latest three teachers are disturbing. Clearly the great teachers are leaving, allowing the superintendent to appoint young teachers who cost less. This happened to Oberlin College, where the quality of the faculty declined. Poor teacher morale has far reaching effects. I have already heard of one young family that was advised not to move to Lexington because of the turmoil here.

**Michaela**: It is absolutely true that Mme Girondel and Dr. Fiveash were pushed to retire. Mme Gironel was taken out of the exchange. We had eleven students for a literature class and twenty-three for the AP class. They decided to have two AP sections, instead of one AP class and one literature class. I am active in the foreign language department and they are getting aggravated. The department is not going in the right direction. They are losing two great teachers and keeping some not so great ones.

**Elizabeth Dalamito** (LHS class of 2011): I have had three siblings to go through LHS. There is a trend towards oppression of teachers. They are afraid to speak their minds and take risks because there is a culture of retaliation and oppression. Many teachers and students are very unhappy with the current leadership of Dr. Ash. All of these teachers were pushed out. This leadership is not good. The backhanded way the contract was discussed is very disturbing. It should have been made more public—we should have had more opportunity to discuss out feelings about Dr. Ash's contract.

**Debbie Strod** (parent): Change is hard. I hope that you will do more community building before big decisions. Help us in building our partnerships with teachers. I want our teachers to know we appreciate them. Quality improvement is best if there is not a culture of fear and blame. One person in a kid's schooling experience can make a difference in a kid making it or not.

**Josh Melnick**: A question to attorney: Where is the conflict if no constituency is against deciding this in public?

**Bob Fraser**: Both parties must agree to have the discussion in open session.

**Josh Melnick**: Could the School Committee member whose child who could have had any of these teachers please comment?



**Bonnie Brodner:** Thank you for asking that question. Clearly the teachers who are leaving are beloved. It is a testament to our community to see all this interest. It is clear we need to look into morale. There are fifteen teachers retiring. I am sure the other ones will be missed as well. We need to figure out the best way to discuss morale.

**Sandro Alessandrini:** I also have children in the schools. I admire Dr. Fiveash. When we make decisions we look at the big picture. We also take into account the concerns of the public. I don't want to see Dr. Fiveash leave. We care about the students and the teachers.

**Jessie Steigerwald:** As a parent my daughter would have had Mme Girondel and has been looking forward to having her. She is sad that Mr. Bogart is leaving. As a School Committee member I look through a different lens. We don't micromanage. We give feedback. We should be a synthesizer of community concerns. The fiscal part is important because it allows us to keep teachers. Where does teacher input belong in the school system and what role do we play in that? We are an intellectual community, we want teachers who question.

**Noah Coolidge:** As a student at LHS, I have worked with both Mme Girondel and Dr. Fiveash on Student Senate. There was a tearful goodbye party for them. I was going to take a class with Dr. Fiveash next year. PLCs are important and standardization does have a place in some school systems. LPS needs to find ways to use its talented teachers and committed parents and I hope to help with that.

**Britta McCarthy (Mass. Ave.):** I want to commend that you are maintaining the budget. It is difficult to quantify teacher morale. There should be a safe place for teachers to express their concerns. Please reconsider how you approach the teachers and staff. We pride ourselves in controversial theater.

**Margaret Coppe:** I want to commend everyone in this room for the tenor of tonight's meeting. It has been constructive and informative. I take seriously an obligation to act on what we hear tonight. It has been a difficult week for all of us.

**Dr. Ash:** Thank you for coming tonight. A healthy school culture is a place where you can have disagreement and dialogue. What is important is what is in the best interests of students. I took copious notes tonight and I really want to look into how we make LPS a caring and respectful place for everyone. I am genuinely sad to see good teachers retire. Where we have made a mistake we need to learn from those mistakes. Part of that is getting feedback. There was a voluntary survey to all teachers in Massachusetts—the Mass TeLLS Survey. From it we learned that our professional development needed improvement. My heart and soul is in personnel not in numbers. A school system is only as good as the people you hire and retain. Good teachers really know their students. I will be pushing back hard on the common core curriculum. Because we are so high performing my hope is that the state will leave us alone. My job, working with the School Committee and the principals is to address issues like morale. I have never worked with a stronger group of principals. Next year we will repeat the Mass TeLLS survey and we will share the results and come up with an action plan. There are four drivers of a really good school system: an environment of honesty, collaboration,

capacity building and leadership everywhere. I apologize for where we have not done a good job. I look forward to opportunities to have dialogue face-to-face.

**Jessie Steigerwald:** I want to clarify that my understanding was that we voted on terms in executive session and were going to ratify the contract in public.

**Bob Fraser:** The vote was to accept the last position of the Superintendent that was on the table so it was *de facto* accepted. The School Committee could take another vote publicly either on the terms of the contract or to authorize the Chair to sign on behalf of the School Committee.

**Motion to formalize the contract in public and authorize our Chair to sign for our convenience (Steigerwald, Brodner). The motion passed 5-0.**

**Frank Sandy (precinct 6):** I am disturbed that a vote was taken in executive session where not all the members of the Committee knew what they were voting on. Does what these parents have said have *any* effect on any member of the School Committee? Will you take a vote now that takes into account all the things the parents and students have said tonight?

**Chair Stewart:** I believe that our lawyer clarified that the vote taken on June 1 was a legally binding vote. We have listened to all the comments; this is the beginning of a process.

**Dawn McKenna (precinct 6):** Taking a vote in public at this point does not solve the problem. You cannot vote on the contract in executive session. Has it been appropriately done? The point of the open meeting law has not been honored.

There was a short break before the Action Items were taken up at 11:03 p.m.

## **VI. Action Items**

1. Vote to Approve 2012-2013 School Calendar. Carol Pilarski noted several changes to the calendar: The professional development day will take place on September 13; Back to School Night will take place on September 20; Elementary conferences will take place on October 31, November 1, November 7 and November 8. Also, Election Day, November 6, will be a full-day professional development day.

There were comments and questions from the Committee.

**Dawn McKenna** raised concerns about the post-Labor Day start.

**Motion to approve the 2012-2013 School Calendar (Steigerwald, Alessandrini). The motion passed 5-0.**

2. Vote to Accept a \$100 Donation to the William G. Tapply Memorial Fund.

**Motion to accept with gratitude a \$100 Donation to the William G. Tapply Memorial Fund** (Alessandrini, Coppe). **The motion passed 5-0.**

3. Vote to Approve School Committee Minutes of April 11, 2011.
4. Vote to Approve School Committee Minutes of May 10, 2011.

Margaret Coppe suggested an amendment to the May 10 minutes: Removal of the words "...and not to those who do not" at the end of the "Superintendent's Announcements."

**Motion to accept the School Committee minutes of April 11, 2011 and May 10, 2011 as amended** (Steigerwald, Brodner). **The motion passed 5-0.**

**Dr. Ash:** The letter reminding people to register their children is not meant to be disparaging in any way it is just a reminder to perform a clerical task. At some point we will have to assume that people who have not registered are not living in town. There were 1800 students not on the census. After the first letter that number dropped by 1000.

**VII. Motion to adjourn** (Coppe, Steigerwald). **The motion passed 5-0.**

**The meeting was adjourned at 11:25 p.m.**

**Documents:** *Meeting agenda; memo from Paul Ash, to the School Committee, re: June 7, 2011 School Committee Meeting memo from Bowman Principal Mary Anton and Elementary School Principals, to Superintendent Paul Ash and Members of the Lexington School Committee, re: Creation of a Pilot Response to Intervention Specialist Position; Lexington Public Schools FY11 Available Funds Request; Lexington Public Schools 2012-2013 School Calendar draft; Lexington Public Schools 2012-2013 School Calendar updated draft memo from Mary Ellen Dunn, Assistant Superintendent for Finance and Business, to Superintendent Paul Ash, re: Acceptance of Donation of \$100 for the Tapply Fund; School Committee minutes of April 11, 2011; School Committee minutes of May 10, 2011; revised meeting agenda; Evaluation of the Superintendent by the Lexington School Committee, July 12, 2009 through March 1 2011.*