

MINUTES OF THE LINCOLN SCHOOL COMMITTEE
Thursday, January 28, 2010
Hartwell Building, Lincoln, MA
OPEN SESSION

Present: Julie Dobrow (Chair), Tom Sander (Vice Chair), Al Schmertzler, Jennifer Glass, Debbie John (Boston Representative), Joe Connell (Hanscom Representative), Cecily Murdock (Hanscom Representative). Also present: Mickey Brandmeyer (Superintendent), Mary Sterling (Assistant Superintendent), Buckner Creel (Administrator for Business and Finance), Stephanie Powers (Administrator for Student Services).
Absent: Rob Orgel, Deb Leister (Hanscom Representative).

I. Greetings and Call to Order

Ms. Dobrow called the meeting to order at 7:05 pm.

II. Chairperson's and Members' Reports

Ms. Glass attended last night's grades 7 and 8 band and chorus concert. She thanked the teachers and students and said it was fun. She also attended a meeting where the Action Research Teams [AGARP] presented their reports on strategies to close the achievement gap. Three teams, working on the Lincoln and Hanscom campuses, shared the specifics on what they have done to help these students achieve proficiency. Mr. Schmertzler also attended and said that they had an interesting focus on a narrow idea that was working. Other teams had tried a few things that did not work. He said the approaches were clever but not so time consuming and is glad that their efforts are continuing.

III. Public Comments

Jonathan Hoch, Tower Road, supports the School Committee's efforts to address an electronic devices policy in the district. He thanked Mr. Brandmeyer for his support and raising the issue.

Nicolette Beerel asked the Committee to decrease the class size in 2nd grade for FY2011.

IV. Consent Agenda

None.

V. Time Scheduled Appointments

A. FY2011 Budget Discussion: Vote Preferred Budget

Mr. Brandmeyer gave a brief overview of the FY2011 budget process. The Finance Committee issued a base budget guideline 0.5% below the FY2010 budget, coming in at \$9,234,319. The District has deferred many improvement initiatives from the base budget to be funded by entitlement grants. He said they nevertheless still seek to improve the school program rather than merely continue the status quo. They have reduced staff, and cut one section in 2nd grade and one section in 5th grade, but they are still within the current class-size policy. The 2nd grade is projected to be one student above the preferred class size of 22 students, and the 5th grade is projected to be one student above the preferred class size of 23 students. They have reduced staff by two special education teachers, one on each campus. Special education enrollment has dropped, and the special education students will receive the same services that they do now. He noted that Lincoln's staffing case load is the envy of other districts. They decreased the district's contribution to the CASE collaborative by \$22,000 without any impact, and reduced the budget by having Magic Garden bear their own electricity costs.

He said the state budget forecast is hazy, and the state will be in the budget process until June. The word now is that there will be level funding for the Chapter 70 and METCO grants. He will meet with the Lincoln Finance Committee again; the Finance Committee may have more money to allocate, and he has asked the chairman to give the schools a portion of any extra money.

Mr. Brandmeyer asked the Committee to vote on the base budget tonight with the understanding that if the Finance Committee allocates any extra funds, he will bring a new vote to the School Committee on how to use such funds. Mr. Schmertzler said the Selectmen believe that there are enough town funds even if the state cuts funding mid-year. Ms. Glass asked whether the kindergarten grant was included in Governor Patrick's FY11 budget. Mr. Brandmeyer responded that they may get another \$20,000 for the district for FY10, and the grant was level funded for FY11.

Ms. Dobrow asked Mr. Brandmeyer to recap the district's class size policy and explain how Lincoln class sizes compare to other districts. The Hanscom class size is capped by their contract with the federal government. He recapped the Lincoln class size policy, reminding people that if one cohort [group of children moving through the Lincoln schools] is over the maximum target class size for any two years, in all subsequent years, the cohort will be assured that they will be at or below the maximum target class size, and if not, an extra section will be added to bring their class size below this maximum. Ms. Dobrow said they make sure the class sizes are smaller in the younger grades because research shows smaller class sizes make a greater educational difference there. Mr. Brandmeyer said the current budget is based on current projections for the number of students. If they get more students, the Finance Committee has reserve money and will cover any additional new sections. Mr. Sander said the policy was expressly designed with some flexibility because Lincoln is a small district and has greater fluctuation year to year in class sizes.

Mr. Brandmeyer said in Weston and Concord, the class sizes are similar to Lincoln's; in Acton, Boxborough, and Harvard, the class sizes are 4 to 5 students higher than Lincoln's. Other districts are facing budget cuts of 3-5% instead of Lincoln's -0.5% cut. Belmont is facing a \$4 million shortfall and class sizes of 30 students. Lincoln is in great comparative shape.

Mr. Schmertzler attended a recent EDCO meeting. He attributed Lincoln's comparative great financial shape to the Lincoln's Finance Committee's foresight and their budgeting software, which makes five-year projections. He expressed appreciation for their work.

Nicolette Beerel asked how the school will support students coming off IEPs that still need extra help if the district cuts two special education teachers? She worried that the teachers in 2nd grade next year will be overwhelmed. She asked if they could set up parents to do reading support for these students. She also asked whether physical therapists and occupational therapists could balance sensory needs to help students who have ADD. Mr. Brandmeyer responded that he disagreed that the teachers will be overwhelmed. He said some students have IEPs for short periods of time, while some students go off IEPs and later go back on them, depending on their needs. Ms. Powers explained that they have had a reduction of 30 special education students; half of them went to high school, a quarter of them met their IEP goals, and the other quarter left the district. They can assure that students in need will receive needed services with the cuts. Ms. Sterling said they have a literacy coach working with teachers to differentiate class teaching based on student reading levels. They spend 120 minutes a day on reading and writing instruction and are seeing a difference. They are getting good feedback.

Ms. Beerel said the 1st graders are pretty rowdy, and she wondered how the teachers would handle it. Mr. Brandmeyer said they were not proposing an unmanageable class size; there will be 22 students per class. The teachers are skilled at handling students. They have the capacity to absorb more students if needed. If they find themselves in a situation where the needs shift significantly, they can go to the Finance Committee for resources. Ms. Dobrow and Ms. Murdock said they were confident with the administration's decision, and if needs change, they will make adjustments. Ms. Beerel thanked them for their care of her child.

Mr. Hoch asked if they had a preliminary number for the size of the kindergarten class, and Mr. Brandmeyer said they are projecting 48 students. They will have 16 students per section and would need 13 more students to require a fourth kindergarten section in Lincoln. They have not talked about Hanscom yet, but they will provide the same program for them. There has been no firm commitment on money yet from the federal government, but they will have money to offer a comparable program.

Mr. Schmertzler noted the CPC and Selectmen have asked departments to set aside money to replace equipment starting with FY12. Mr. Brandmeyer commented that for Hanscom the District has the money and does that each year because the accounting is different. He noted they would work with Finance Director Colleen Wilkins on this for FY12 for the Lincoln budget. Mr. Brandmeyer thanked Mr. Creel and all who worked on the budget. He said they were fortunate that the budget fell together as it did.

Ms. Dobrow moved, and Ms. Glass seconded, the motion to approve the FY11 Lincoln school budget at the amount of \$9,234,319. The Committee voted unanimously to approve the budget.

B. Mid-Year Report on 2009-2010 Work Plans

Mr. Brandmeyer said for the past six years, they have used the same work-plan format to operationalize the district's goals. They have ambitious plans; this year's plans had 93 benchmark events, and 75 of those events were targeted to occur in the first half of the school year. 82% of the

events have been completed or are substantially underway. They have worked hard and accomplished a lot, and it feels good. They moved a few of the benchmark events to February and March.

Ms. Sterling gave an overview of the Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment goal category. The Committee will get reports on Institute Day and the common assessment on writing at the February 11 meeting, on literary practices with Judy Merra at a March meeting, and on building a database that tracks student assessments at a March meeting. The Standards Based Reporting System is focused on assessing how students are doing compared to the district's specific learning expectations. The long process will ultimately entail redoing report cards, and they need parent involvement in this process. She hopes teachers will try the information on a new format 2nd term report card and ask parents for feedback.

Ms. Sterling said they are very happy with the new middle school mathematics program; they have had positive feedback, and she will report on it in April. She is also pleased with the new engineering program for grades 7 and 8 and the implementation of the restructured science program for grades 6-8. They have a wonderful consultant, and she will report at the April 29 meeting. The community service learning and civic engagement in middle school has been terrific, and they recently gave their report to the Committee. They have written intervention plans for students who have received MCAS scores of "needs improvement" or "warning." The district has also worked on developing advanced learning opportunities and differentiated instruction in classes, and a report is scheduled for the February 11 meeting.

Ms. Powers reviewed the assessment and reporting goals. The Preschool, Lincoln kindergarten, and Hanscom kindergarten have all been pursuing NAEYC accreditation. The NAEYC visited the Hanscom Primary School, and the visit went well. The district is working on refined processes and procedures for the Instructional Support Teams that are used before students reach the stage of needing special education; it is going well. She has completed a draft of the new 504 manual to expand the capacity to respond to students with disabilities who are served through 504 Accommodation Plans (for students who have physical needs and not learning disabilities). They also have regulatory training on PowerPoint that teachers can do on their own time.

Mr. Sander asked what the timing was on the common assessments and when it will reach critical mass? Ms. Sterling replied that they continue to work at it and it keeps evolving and is being refined. They need practice to figure out what exactly they are looking for students to be able to accomplish. Teachers have had three iterations with literacy assessments so far. She noted that common assessments are tough to use in subjects where teachers see the students only weekly. Mr. Brandmeyer noted that in one sense they are ahead of other districts in their common assessments. If the Commonwealth wins the Race to the Top federal grants, these assessments will be important. Mr. Sander asked at what level have the common assessments filtered into practice. Mr. Brandmeyer responded that not only are they used in district events, like Institute Day, but also in teacher meetings, but haven't yet become a day-to-day occurrence.

Ms. Murdock is happy they are tracking individual students. Are they seeing higher achieving students and giving them extra work and homework? Ms. Sterling said teachers know who is advanced, and they have differentiated instruction. She will report on this issue on February 11.

Mr. Brandmeyer reviewed the Teacher Excellence and Professional Development goals. In the Supervision and Evaluation goals, they worked on a new teacher performance rating system, in conjunction with the Lincoln Teachers' Association, that has four levels. They have worked to overcome teachers' initial angst about the new system. They are also working on refining expectations and professional development for paraprofessionals in light of new NCLB and NAEYC regulations. Ms. Powers addressed the Professional Development goal. The paraprofessionals attended training sessions on mathematics and literacy, and two training sessions on specialized topics based on specific students' needs. They made plans for special education teachers to expand their assessment skills and administer an assessment tool. The special education teachers will also expand their knowledge and expertise in providing specially designed instruction. Special education teachers have updated the district's student services asset map with their skills (for example, if there's a teacher who has experience working with blind students).

Ms. Sterling reviewed the last goals in professional development. They established teams of teachers and administrators in action research projects to identify strategies to narrow achievement gaps. She is encouraged by the teachers' work and how they embraced this effort. They used student data and got specific about the students' needs and what could be done to help. The Action Research Teams were successful and they will build on them. The last goal was to provide professional

development for the implementation of the new middle school math program. Faye Ruopp, a co-author of *Impact Mathematics*, will continue to work with teachers. Five teachers and administrators are going to take an online course from the Harvard Graduate School of Education called Datawise.

Ms. Dobrow wants to show student work examples at the Town Meeting and suggested they also talk about professional development. Mr. Sander mentioned that the community service learning should also be included.

Ms. Sterling reviewed the Leadership and School Culture goal category. The district supports opportunities for teacher and student leadership through instructional and extracurricular programs. They have more assemblies than they did two years ago, and the morning meetings that the Responsive Classroom recommends are useful in giving students a chance to step forward and for a larger community to develop. Mr. Schmertzler asked that the students be taught to slow down when making presentations. He said they have accomplished a lot, but when they present it so quickly, it is not as effective.

Ms. Powers addressed the Communications goal. The goal of enhancing community awareness of general and special education policies, procedures, and services was completed by writing student and parent handbooks, a special education student services guide, and a Lincoln Parent Information Book, all of which have been distributed to the appropriate communities. Mr. Brandmeyer addressed the goal of redesigning the web site. He explained that they write their own content for the site and need to keep it current. He congratulated Mark McDonough for all of his work in this area. It is a work in progress; some teachers have web pages, some have parents register with their students' classes to get class-specific information. Ms. Dobrow suggested that they send a document with screen shots on how to register on the web site because she had trouble doing it. Ms. Glass noted that it works well. Ms. Dobrow also suggested that they ensure the calendar is updated with concert dates and other items of interest. Mr. Brandmeyer said there are filters to get to certain events on the site. Mr. Sander suggested that they use students to update the site, and Mr. Brandmeyer said they are training more teachers to do it, and they will have them teach the students. Mr. Sander asked that they convey their appreciation to Mr. McDonough for his work. Mr. Brandmeyer will send a letter to him.

Mr. Creel presented the Facilities, Operations, Health and Safety goal category. Under Facilities, the Massachusetts School Building Authority [MSBA] invited Lincoln to participate in a feasibility study to see what type of school building project will be built. The Selectmen are putting a placeholder in the Town Meeting warrant about the school buildings. He is continuing to work with the Department of Defense to improve Hanscom school facilities. They developed a capital project proposal for the Capital Planning Committee. He and Mr. Orgel negotiated a one-year extension to the Hartwell Building lease with Magic Garden, and Mr. Creel is managing the process for the RFP to lease the Hartwell Space. Concerning Budget and Operations, the budget has been developed and voted on for FY11 and this went smoothly. They implemented the Nutrakids Point of Sale system, with which he is very impressed, and they are implementing the Food Service Review recommendations. They monitored the federal stimulus money from the ARRA, but there are no opportunities for additional funding through competitive grants. On Health and Safety, they have planned for the possibility of pandemic flu.

Ms. Dobrow thanked Mr. Brandmeyer, Ms. Sterling, Mr. Creel, and Ms. Powers for their work. She said it was amazingly impressive what they have taken on and accomplished this year. The Committee thanked the Administration for their work.

VI. Superintendent's Report

Mr. Brandmeyer said the Action Research Teams have done terrific work, and the teachers are very committed to it. He is at the point of giving mid-year reviews for teachers in their first, second, and third years of teaching for the district. They are giving teachers feedback, and this week they will review 50 people. They will leverage the reviews into a conversation on hiring. What specifically does the phrase "great teacher" mean? They will be ready to move forward with hiring in March. Mr. Schmertzler asked whether they are making progress on diversifying the staff. Mr. Brandmeyer said they are still conducting outreach and working on this goal. Ms. Sterling was pleased that they had a diverse interview pool.

Mr. Brandmeyer reported that he attended the Superintendents' Association mid-year meeting, where all in attendance reflected on their local budgets. The Associate Commissioner of Finance predicted that the state budget will be very tough for three years. All districts are working hard, but there are not enough resources, and it is very discouraging.

Ms. Dobrow thanked him for his report.

VII. Curriculum

Ms. Sterling attended a 3rd grade math class where the teachers were providing differentiated instruction for the entire hour, using teaching assistants well. Six things were being taught in the same classroom. The math specialists are coaching teachers on math learning strategies for smaller groups of students. The teacher gets to know individual students better. She said good things were happening.

Ms. Dobrow thanked her for her report.

VIII. Policy

A. Proposal to Establish Subcommittee to Revise Acceptable Use Policy and Develop a Policy on Use of Cell Phones, PDAs, and Electronic Devices

Mr. Brandmeyer wants the Committee to revisit the Student (and Employee) Computer and Internet Use (Acceptable Use Policy) and develop a policy on Use of Cell Phones, PDAs, and Electronic Devices. All technological equipment can both be good and distracting. He asked them to form a subcommittee as they did with the class-size policy, and for the Committee to have a liaison to this subcommittee. They will research what others were doing and also get parental feedback. He would like to have the policies implemented for school year 2010-2011. Ms. Dobrow said it is a great idea. She would like to see it tied in with a broader initiative with media literacy in the district. It should also be used as a learning opportunity, and she encouraged them to get parental involvement. She thought it is too ambitious to have the policy by the end of the year. Mr. Brandmeyer said they will accomplish this in steps and will report back to get guidance and feedback. Ms. Glass said there is PTA interest in it. Mr. Schmertzler asked how to get the faculty involved in this on the education side. Mr. Brandmeyer said they want to protect against problems but also be able to use technology to teach students. Mr. Schmertzler said the teachers will have to live with whatever policy is developed. Mr. Brandmeyer said they will have a teacher representative on the subcommittee. Mr. Sander suggested that parents need to be informed and they should have a forum and dialogue about it, and that parents would benefit by learning more both about the upside and risk of technology with regard to learning, as this has relevance at home. Ms. Murdock noted that at a previous school her children attended, the school gave 9th graders laptops, but they bypassed the firewalls and used the computers to download music. So she said this needs to be carefully thought through.

Ms. Sterling said they are building a level of competence with media literacy with students and mentioned the Horizon Report, an annual report about the uses of technology. One parent, Kevin Karty, mentioned that parents may not want students to have some devices and asked that they build a curriculum that would not require students to have technology but also not put students who did not have access to that technology at a disadvantage. He mentioned the radiation issues with cell phones. Ms. Sterling said they will look carefully at employing handheld devices. Mr. Brandmeyer said he did not know the answers. Jonathan Hoch, a parent, said that recreational and instructional uses are different; cell phones do many things now, such as shoot films or pictures. He is concerned about the commercialization to students and does not want that. Mr. Brandmeyer asked that the Committee vote to establish the subcommittee. Mr. Schmertzler said he was interested to learn and contribute to the issue.

Ms. Dobrow moved, and Mr. Schmertzler seconded, the motion to establish a subcommittee to discuss possible revisions to the Student (and Employee) Computer and Internet Use policy and to develop a policy on Use of Cell Phones, PDAs, and Electronic Devices. The Committee voted unanimously to establish the subcommittee.

IX. Facilities and Financial

A. Warrant Approval

Mr. Creel presented the payroll warrants totaling \$1,154,971.28 and the accounts payable warrants totaling \$240,012.22 for a total of \$1,394,983.50. Mr. Schmertzler reviewed the warrants. Mr. Schmertzler moved to approve the warrants, with Mr. Sander seconding the motion. The Committee voted unanimously to approve the warrants.

B. FY2010 Fiscal Report: Second Quarter

Mr. Creel updated the Committee on the FY2010 second quarter fiscal report. In Lincoln, 94.1 % of the budget is committed at this point in the year. Some items have not been directly encumbered.

They have had additional maternity leaves. A few teachers on each campus have health issues, requiring the schools to get long-term substitutes. Legal fees have increased, and Mr. Creel anticipates more fees. He has done a mid-year review with budget managers. This year's budget picture is good, but the facilities support line item could run over if more snow falls. Each snow event costs \$800 in custodial overtime on the Lincoln Campus, and \$650 on the Hanscom Campus.

Ms. Dobrow noted that they just voted to reduce money for legal fees in the FY11 budget, but Mr. Creel is saying they might need more money for legal fees. Mr. Creel responded that they may not have the same legal issues in FY11. Ms. Dobrow thought of three legal needs; she noted that two of them will continue into FY11. Mr. Brandmeyer said they reduced the legal fees in the gap closing measure, but they may need extra funds. He said there was some room and they could rely on the Finance Committee if they had to on legal issues. They will monitor it closely.

Ms. Dobrow thanked Mr. Creel for his report.

X. Old Business

None.

XI. New Business

Mr. Sander said he talked with Dan Pereira of the Recreation Department about the Healthy Communities Project. The Project has a questionnaire, and Mr. Sander asked that someone in the Administration answer them for the schools. Mr. Brandmeyer said Ms. Powers could pull together the information on community assets for the questionnaire and draft a response. Ms. Dobrow heard from Assistant Town Administrator Anita Scheipers. She was interested to see what issues were important and how the schools participate in community health. Mr. Schmertzler encouraged Ms. Powers to get information from Mr. Creel about the wellness program and the food service program. Mr. Sander asked that Ms. Powers bring a draft back to the Committee for approval at a future Committee meeting, ideally the next one, but advised her not to spend too much time on this issue.

XII. Approval of Minutes

Mr. Sander moved, and Ms. Glass seconded, the motion to approve the minutes of the November 12, 2009 and December 10, 2009 meetings. The Committee voted unanimously to approve the minutes.

XIII. Information Enclosures

None.

XIV. Adjournment

On motion by Ms. Dobrow, seconded by Mr. Sander, the Committee voted unanimously to go into Executive Session for the purpose of contract negotiations. Ms. Dobrow, yes; Mr. Sander, yes; Mr. Schmertzler, yes; Ms. Glass, yes; Ms. John, yes; Ms. Murdock, yes; Mr. Connell, yes. The Committee would not be returning to open session. The open session adjourned at 9:40 pm.

Respectfully submitted,
Sarah G. Marcotte
Recording Secretary