

MINUTES OF THE LINCOLN SCHOOL COMMITTEE
Thursday, February 11, 2010
Hartwell Building, Lincoln, MA
OPEN SESSION

Present: Julie Dobrow (Chair), Tom Sander (Vice Chair), Al Schmertzler, Jennifer Glass, Deb Leister (Hanscom 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, Debbie John (Boston Representative).

I. Greetings and Call to Order

Ms. Dobrow called the meeting to order at 7:06 pm.

II. Chairperson's and Members' Reports

Ms. Dobrow thanked Ben Aaronson, outgoing editor of the *Lincoln Journal*, for his work. Ben has been a terrific ally to the Lincoln Public Schools and amazing in terms of covering local issues. He has done what few editors have done; he's gotten to know students, staff, and administrators and also had students involved with the newspaper to provide opportunities for service and student leadership. His coverage of all issues has been thoughtful, accurate, and fair-minded. We will miss him, and we wish him well in his new job.

Mr. Schmertzler said the Capital Planning Committee [CPC] has officially approved the purchase of a van. He also thanked Mr. Brandmeyer for taking the time to see if he could help the Town's IT department, which may need to be moved if Town Hall gets rebuilt. The department needs updated equipment, but there is no place to house it. Mr. Brandmeyer said that the School's IT person will work with the Town's IT person to make things work. Mr. Schmertzler said he appreciated the efforts.

Ms. Glass thanked Principal Steve McKenna for hosting a coffee, at which there was a good discussion with parents. She also thanked Ms. Sterling for attending the PTA meeting, at which there was a good discussion of the many changes in the middle school curriculum, including the discussion of the wellness curriculum on reproduction and sexuality.

III. Public Comments

None.

IV. Consent Agenda

A. Accept Gifts

The School Committee was asked to accept the donation of \$50.00 from Lueders Environmental, Inc. to the Lincoln School. The School Committee was asked to accept the donation of a Yamaha flute and a Bach trumpet from the Hanscom Minuteman Thrift Shop to the Hanscom Middle School. Mr. Sander moved, and Mr. Schmertzler seconded, the motion to accept the gifts. The Committee voted unanimously to accept the gifts.

V. Time Scheduled Appointments

A. Report from DeCordova Appointee

Ms. Katherine Page, School Committee representative to the DeCordova Board, said it has been a banner year for the museum's contact with the schools. She spotlighted the correlation between art education and high academic performance. She then described some highlights of the collaboration. They have had five visits from the Lincoln Schools, including Magic Garden. Acting Director Lynn Thompson and the Lincoln art teachers brainstormed last fall with Ms. Page. The museum will hold an exhibit of student art work with a reception May 5. Admission is now free for teachers and METCO students, and the PTO web site has a pass to the DeCordova. Easels will keep families informed of what is going on at the museum. Colleen Pearce, Lincoln art teacher, will lead a discussion about the developmental stages of student art work at the DeCordova. They invited Lincoln art teachers to attend the docents' informational tours in advance of shows. They also have a pre-orientation program with the Lincoln Library and hold joint story hours where they provide a storyteller. There are cell phone tours inside and outside at the museum, and there is a special family-oriented cell tour. Last

Sunday, 60 parents and students met to discuss an exhibit with the artist. They also have scavenger hunt materials that families can pick up at the desk.

Dennis Kois, Director of the DeCordova Museum, visited the Lincoln Public Schools this year. He met with the art teachers and asked how to be of greater service. They are working on IMLS and NEA grants. They are studying how to reach out to teachers, and how to better integrate the sculpture park into academic education. They are trying to do more to get tweens involved, and have a text message scavenger hunt to engage this demographic group that typically drops out of museum-going. They lengthened the Summer Program last year that targets tweens, and filled it. They are also working with digital media. They are available for questions and ideas, and they want to be bothered!

Ms. Dobrow thanked Ms. Page and said she has done an incredible job. She also thanked Mr. Kois for his terrific staff. Ms. Page responded that this position brings her interests in art and education together. Her goal is to pull Hanscom in more; the geographical location makes that harder. Ms. Murdock asked if they have an art contest where students can win scholarships. Ms. Page said the *Boston Globe* sponsors an art contest, and DeCordova was concerned about promoting competitions and judging student art work. Mr. Kois also noted that there are scholarships for students to attend their Summer Program.

Mr. Brandmeyer said he was very encouraged and asked Mr. Kois if they could host a lunch with the principals and teachers at Hanscom. There are a total of four art teachers in the entire district. Ms. Dobrow suggested that they use art for social change to bring in older students. Green subjects in sculpture would also help. Ms. Glass said the Action Research Teams could think about art, math, science, and academic achievement and add art to the conversation.

Ms. Dobrow thanked Ms. Page for her report.

Mr. Schmertzler left at 7:35 pm.

B. Standards to Results: A Report on Using Data to Inform Instruction

Ms. Sterling said the quality of collaborative discourse with teachers has been great. What does it mean to be standards-based and data driven? These are educational buzz words. Ms. Judy Merra, English Language Arts Content Specialist, walked the Committee through what teachers are doing to score student work.

The Lincoln Learning Expectations augment the state standards. What targets should the district aim for in a given grade and a standard? They started to develop Lincoln learning expectations three years ago with teachers. The key outcomes of what they want the students to master are the basis for the common assessments. There are four strands to scoring student work in English Language Arts: 1) vocabulary; 2) reading and literature; 3) composition; and 4) media.

Ms. Sterling said that common assessments provide a degree of consistency, represent agreed-upon expectations, align with standards and key outcomes, help identify effective practices for replication, and make data collection possible. Ms. Sterling noted that teachers who teach the same groups of students share their experiences. She's noticed when they work on common assessments, the conversation with teachers spans grades, and the teachers strive to articulate what they are looking for in student work at a certain grade level. Consequently, common assessments are constantly being revised. They evaluate students both for *formative* assessment (assessing learning in progress so it can be readjusted for student instruction) and a *summative* assessment (to assess student mastery of the material). On Institute Day, teachers brought student work to discuss assessments together.

The School Committee did an exercise on common assessments to score student work for third grade English Language Arts. The student was asked to write about a time when they first did something. The criteria for success were craft and conventions, which include idea development, organization, sentence fluency, word choice, voice, spelling, grammar, punctuation, and capitalization. Committee members individually scored the piece on the other dimension – organization; then they discussed it as a group to figure out where they agreed or disagreed on what the student needed to do in order to demonstrate proficiency. As with the teachers, Committee members had to agree on a score of 1, 2, 3 or 4 with 3 showing proficiency and 4 showing that the student exceeded expectations. Scores of 1 or 2 showed that the student needed more work to achieve expected standards. Ms. Dobrow noted that it was hard to separate organization as a scoring criterion, and also that it was hard to grade all the criteria at once.

Mr. Schmertzler arrived at 8:07 pm.

Ms. Dobrow asked how they take into account a student's developmental issues. She suggested that the student be taught how to focus on rewriting. Mr. Brandmeyer said there are challenges of

thinking developmentally in a standards-based program. Ms. Sterling said that they do not allow scores between these whole numbers; they are striving for a more general reaction to a student's proficiency and a score of 2.5, for example, is too deep in the weeds. Mr. Sander asked how the scores play into motivation for students; is it more motivating for students to get a 2, indicating that they need to work a bit harder to master a topic. Ms. Sterling said that for now they just use the scores internally. There are many debates on how to motivate students, and they tease out all the other factors, such as effort, the individual student, whether the student is always in class, and the like. What are they looking for in June for a 3rd grader to be able to do? That is the focus of the common assessment.

Mr. Schmertzler asked that given that teachers learn how to teach to a particular goal this year, when they start next year, will they teach the same? Will they have a series of methods to use to get better results at the beginning of the year? Ms. Sterling said she hoped so, and she thinks it will happen. Ms. Merra said they focus on the students in the class at the same time. Ms. Sterling said they use the same criteria for success, and they give the assessments in September and January assessments and task prompts. Ms. Glass asked whether when they get the September task prompts, would second and third-grade teachers look at the writing? Ms. Sterling said it would be great to do that if they had time. The teachers hone their capacity for seeing what students can do. Ms. Merra said in response to Ms. Murdock's question that common assessments allow teachers to share lessons, resources, and strategies. Having consistent criteria helps this. Mr. Connell said they are doing the right things by getting rid of the bell curve. Ms. Sterling said it's about what students need to learn via the standards, not about what teachers teach. They are being specific about what is needed; students need to know where they stand.

Ms. Merra showed the scoring grid, used to identify where each student needed more help, and to differentiate in class. Ms. Sterling said they are pleased with their process and are using more localized tests with longer scoring and assessments. They are tuned into the students and their needs, and not just their scores on the MCAS.

Using the data to set instructional goals, teachers teach to the goal and reassess their progress at the end. In writing, Ms. Merra said that teachers have to decide on which subskill to focus, and then meet in March to evaluate their progress against this goal. Ms. Sterling said in 6th grade science, they measure formulating hypotheses, figuring out the variables, and other items. Teachers can change the process. Their effort is bubbling up and the principals have been very involved in the scoring sessions. The data informs instruction, and the principals are encouraging professional learning communities with teachers.

Ms. Dobrow thanked them for their fabulous presentation.

C. Report on Differentiated Instruction and Advanced Learning Opportunities

Ms. Sterling presented a progress report on efforts to differentiate instruction and provide advanced learning opportunities. Differentiated learning and teaching is an enormous subject. Differentiation means variation of instruction in a class. She means not individual attention, but in smaller groups of students with comparable needs. They have an ongoing commitment to differentiated instruction, and they do it in English Language Arts and Mathematics. In order to teach differentiated instruction, they need three dimensions: 1) assessments, 2) curriculum and content knowledge, and 3) classroom instruction. If a teacher has an assessing mind, they can separate students into groups to do different work based on what students need. When parents do not help students do homework, it makes an effective assessment tool. They use the mid-year or end-of-year math assessment for new students who arrive in the district mid-year, and it is working well. A good assessment shows where the student is strong and not just where the student is lacking.

Ms. Sterling said they are working on concept development in the lower grades of math. What does it take for students to develop conceptual understanding? Since the Task Force on High Performing Students reported out, the School is focusing on building and promoting students working in different ways and at their different paces. The Responsive Classroom has helped, and differentiation flourishes in that environment. Mr. Schmertzler asked whether bullying was a problem in this area. Ms. Sterling said there is always a danger and an issue, and it may happen academically, but in a climate where students are doing different things, it isn't as bad, and they are working on preventing it. She is amazed at the District resources to help with differentiation. The Special Education teachers also effectively at times provide small group differentiation.

Mr. Schmertzler asked whether this concept could be presented to parents and the community. She asked what is needed; she's happy to come to a parent or PTA meeting. One parent mentioned

that parents should come to class to see it. Mr. Schmertzler asked what the Committee could do to help. Randy Harrison, a parent, suggested doing videos for YouTube, and Ms. Murdock suggested "Bring a Parent to School Day". Ms. Sterling said she was open to whatever works, she can do an informal talk to parents and make a video. Mr. Schmertzler suggested they show people what they are getting for their money. Ms. Dobrow asked that they discuss these ideas at a later date.

Ms. Sterling discussed advanced learning opportunities. The culture of the classroom is for all students to excel, with different paces and different projects. It can be tough for teachers to execute on but it is very worthwhile. Ms. Sterling thought about art at the DeCordova; they have some terrific art students, and it could be another opportunity for them.

Mr. Sander thanked her for her thoughtful comprehensive report and said it was great that they were starting to back up the goals with reality. He asked about getting data via a student survey to get a sense across grades and students as to whether some grades or classrooms were doing better in differentiation. He asked whether they were getting better from year to year and how they can improve performance. He said it is really useful to have a metric as a Committee to evaluate overall progress on this score: where are we now and where should we be? Ms. Sterling said the principals know what's happening. There is more discussion between teachers. If your interest is in student opinion, that's one thing they could measure, but if you want to know about differentiating, the teachers and principals should assess this. The question is how pervasive is differentiation and the practice of it. How often do they do x, y, z? She would take his comments back to the principals. They have targeted where they are going. Mr. Sander said he looked forward to hearing back from the Principals and coming up with some effective metric of progress both from the teachers' perspective and the students.

Ms. Dobrow said it is very exciting to see how things have been implemented. She was concerned about more ineffable qualities; sometimes qualities are hard to teach and inculcate in teachers. They have come a long way on differentiation. Her concern is how to teach teachers to tell students that differentiation does not mean extra work for students. She also thinks it's important that they not single students out when they need to put a student in a smaller group. For example, high barrier pullouts from classes that happen during recess can feel like a punishment, not a reward. Ms. Sterling said they are working on the scheduling, which is tough. Ms. Glass asked from the faculty point of view, do they have enough hours in the day; is the school day long enough? She asked whether there was good attendance at after-school activities. Ms. Sterling said there is good attendance at them. She reported that the science and engineering fair will be held on April 13 on the Lincoln campus. They are looking for coaches to help students. Any 5th to 8th grade student can sign up for the fair, which is optional. The science inquiry process is in the classroom.

Ms. Dobrow thanked Ms. Sterling for her report.

VI. Superintendent's Report

Mr. Brandmeyer said these were great reports, and all are working hard and seeing the fruits of their work.

They held a successful lock-down drill, like a fire drill, at 9:30 am; the Lincoln police came. They evaluated the process, and it worked well.

The Hanscom 5th grade spent time with Meteorologist Jeremy Reiner from Channel 7 and did a weather hunt and a weather broadcast. He was very energetic, and the students responded well and asked many intelligent questions. He thanked Jen and the team for the session.

Mr. Brandmeyer reported that he and Ms. Dobrow met with the Finance Committee last Thursday. He alerted FinCom that the District might need more for METCO and faculty requests to send their kids to the school, and thanked them for their help. The Finance Committee realized that because of their conservative approach, for FY11 they can allocate an extra \$300,000 to town departments and the schools. They gave another \$55,000 to the Lincoln School's base budget. He said they have managed the School Committee budget well, and recommended that the District add back a section of 2nd grade with the extra money as the Committee had requested earlier. He asked that the Committee vote to revise the FY11 budget from \$9,234,319 to \$9,289,319. Mr. Sander moved, and Mr. Schmertzler seconded, the motion to revise the FY11 base budget from \$9,234,319 to \$9,289,319. The Committee voted unanimously to revise the FY11 base budget.

Ms. Dobrow said one Finance Committee member said they have done an excellent job of managing the school budget and being transparent about it. Mr. Brandmeyer said they revisited past

years' mistakes, but they have worked on the relationship with the Finance Committee and things are good now.

Ms. Dobrow thanked him for his report.

VII. Curriculum

None.

VIII. Policy

None.

IX. Facilities and Financial

A. Warrant Approval

Mr. Creel presented the payroll warrants totaling \$603,304.27 and the accounts payable warrants totaling \$214,354.11 for a total of \$817,658.38. Mr. Schmertzler reviewed the warrants. Ms. Dobrow moved to approve the warrants, with Mr. Sander seconding the motion. The Committee voted unanimously to approve the warrants.

B. Special Revenue Account Limits

Mr. Creel presented a request to raise the fund limit for certain Special Revenue (Revolving) Accounts. The Schools would like to revise the fund limits for the preschool user fees from \$90,000 to \$135,000 and for the school bus fees from \$70,000 to \$80,000, for a total of \$215,000.

He asked that the Committee vote to approve the request to adjust certain revolving fund limits at the next Town Meeting.

Mr. Sander moved, and Mr. Schmertzler seconded, the request to revise the fund limits for the preschool user fees to \$135,000 and for the school bus fees to \$80,000, for a total limit of \$215,000. The Committee voted unanimously to raise the fund limits.

X. Old Business

A. Report on Status of Clean Air for Kids Initiative

Mr. Creel reported on the Clean Air for Kids initiative, which seeks to reduce diesel emissions from school bus engines. They have enforced the five-minute rule on bus engine idling, which is also mandated by the Massachusetts DEP. The bus drivers are children-oriented, and wanted to have the buses heated for them during the winter, but they have worked together to change this practice.

The Doherty's buses, which bus Lincoln students, were retrofitted to reduce emissions, and the Eastern buses, which bus Boston students to Lincoln, are newer and did not need to be retrofitted. The Administration recommends that the School Committee authorize the Administration to send letters of appreciation to both Doherty's Garage and Eastern Bus, recognizing their commitment to both components of the Clean Air for Kids initiative: the five-minute rule and reduced-emissions diesel buses. The Committee approved and asked Mr. Creel will send letters of appreciation on the Committee's behalf.

XI. New Business

Ms. Glass said that the Finance Committee is putting together a small working group to discuss the cost drivers on the school budget. Mr. Schmertzler is willing to be included in the group.

XII. Approval of Minutes

Mr. Sander moved, and Ms. Glass seconded, the motion to approve the minutes of the December 17, 2009 meeting. 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 purposes of legal issues and contract negotiations. Ms. Dobrow, yes; Mr. Sander, yes; Mr. Schmertzler, yes; Ms. Glass, yes; Ms. Leister, yes; Ms. Murdock, yes; Mr. Connell, yes. The Committee would not be returning to open session. The open session adjourned at 9:55 pm.

Respectfully submitted,
Sarah G. Marcotte
Recording Secretar