

MINUTES OF THE LINCOLN SCHOOL COMMITTEE
Thursday, February 26, 2009
Hartwell Building, Lincoln, MA
OPEN SESSION

Present: Julie Dobrow (Chair), Tom Sander (Vice Chair), Jennifer Glass, Rob Orgel, Louann Robinson (Hanscom Representative), Cynthia Nunes-Tajeron (Hanscom Representative), Thadine Brown (Boston Representative). Also present: Mickey Brandmeyer (Superintendent), Mary Sterling (Assistant Superintendent), Buckner Creel (Administrator for Business and Finance), Stephanie Powers (Administrator of Student Services).

Absent: Al Schmertzler.

I. Greetings and Call to Order

Ms. Dobrow called the meeting to order at 7:07 pm.

II. Chairperson's and Members' Reports

Ms. Dobrow welcomed the newest member of the School Committee, Thadine Brown, the Boston Representative, saying the Committee is so thrilled to have her after working on getting a Boston Representative for two years.

Ms. Glass reported that the two principals' coffees provided a nice opportunity for a range of conversation. She thanked Sharon Hobbs for her session that morning, and Steve McKenna for the one before before February vacation.

III. Public Comments

Ms. Linda Hammett-Ory recommended a holistic approach in responding to concerns about the Tripod survey, incorporating parents', teachers', and community views as well. Ms. Jillian Darling asked that the Committee or the schools conduct exit interviews of parents taking their children out of the schools and report on these surveys.

IV. Consent Agenda

None.

V. Time Scheduled Appointments

A. Proposal for Regionalization/Consolidation

Ms. Dobrow said Lincoln has been brought into the conversation over Sudbury's financial troubles, as several of their ideas have implications for Lincoln. Mr. Brandmeyer said that this discussion is coming up because Sudbury has a structural deficit, and they have a hard time passing Proposition 2 ½ overrides. Sudbury had to cut \$2 million for their K-12 schools. Sudbury convened a Budget Review Task Force [BRTF] in January 2007 to look at their issues. They were charged with studying Sudbury's revenue stream and where they could find potential savings. The proposals that have gotten the most attention are those to consolidate the schools. L-S Superintendent and Principal John Ritchie's retirement gave them an opportunity, and there has been much conversation on the amount of money that could be saved. A work group has been convened by the Lincoln and Sudbury Chairmen of the Boards of Selectmen to look at several options surrounding the schools. The first one is a Superintendency Union, which has many legal issues to grapple with; the second one is an entire Lincoln-Sudbury K-12 school system; and the third one is one administrative team in the Sudbury K-12 schools. Ms. Dobrow is the School Committee's representative to the working group, which has not had its first meeting.

Mr. Brandmeyer said he thought the Committee should assess whether there are any benefits for the Lincoln K-8 school in any of the options. He said that there are challenges, one being not jeopardizing the partnership with our "regional partner" Hanscom. He noted that having a public conversation is good, but close attention needs to be given to whether there are short-term or long-term dollar savings, on what this would mean for Lincoln's input into administrative questions, on how administrative issues would be staffed, on curriculum, and on busing.

Ms. Dobrow discussed the process. The working group is comprised of representatives of the Boards of Selectmen, the Finance Committees, the School Committees, and Sudbury has appointed a Sudbury citizen and teacher. Lincoln will be able to appoint someone, but there are only two people in Lincoln who teach in the schools and live in the town. Ms. Dobrow told the working group that they would need to do due diligence to find someone to serve. The Committee will publicize the opening and solicit letters of application. Ms. Dobrow and Mr. Brandmeyer will draft a letter for applicants. Ms. Dobrow said that the first meeting date has not been set.

Ms. Dobrow said that they need to think about starting to encourage dialogue with parents and the community. Once the work group meetings have started, the School Committee will host a coffee to discuss the issues with parents and the community to get their feedback. Depending on what they hear from the community, and if people want them to consider consolidation, things might go one way. Mr. Brandmeyer said if they think they want to consolidate, they should think of the short-term and long-term implications. He said that when Lincoln regionalized with Sudbury 50-60 years ago, the values of the two towns may have been more aligned than they are now. He warned them to be careful who they pick as partners, maybe they should think of regionalizing with someone else. Mr. Orgel and Ms. Dobrow said they should

resist pressure to move quickly on this issue. Ms. Dobrow credited Gary Taylor and Robert Steinbrook for slowing this down. Nothing will happen for this school year or in 2009-10.

Parents Sheila Webber, Jillian Darling, and Linda Hammett-Ory said they have not heard anything favorable from Lincoln parents about the potential consolidation with Sudbury. Ms. Dobrow noted that even if the School Committee ultimately opposes the consolidation, we need to have a seat on the committee and participate in the conversation. She also said that they need teacher and administration input. Mr. Orgel said that if the shoe was on the other foot, we would need to give deference to the process. Mr. Sander said that if they decide to jointly hire the core administrative staff, there isn't a direct Lincoln role in that decision, but we can learn what position we should recommend.

Ms. Glass said the upcoming Town Election is important; two Lincoln-Sudbury School Committee seats are up for election. Lincoln's representation on the L-S School Committee could decrease to one seat. Ms. Dobrow thanked everyone for their feedback and said she would report back when the subcommittee has the first meeting.

B. Discussion Relating to Lease of Space in Hartwell Building

Mr. Brandmeyer presented the report about leasing 5 classrooms in the Hartwell Building. Magic Garden Preschool is in the ninth year of the ten-year lease, which expires August 31, 2010. Massachusetts General Law requires an open Request for Proposals [RFP] when the rental value of property exceeds \$25,000. The Hartwell space is 5,000 to 6,000 square feet, also with shared use of the multipurpose room and the pods. Mr. Creel explained they will advertise the RFP and the packet will be available on March 5. There will be a proposal conference on March 12. Mr. Creel said that the lease period will be five years instead of ten. He has heard from several institutions' business managers and professional development organizations that they are looking for space. To determine the minimum rent required in the RFP, Mr. Creel said that he allocated expenses incurred by LPS for the upkeep of the space to the current lessee, Magic Garden Pre-school. The goal is not to make money but cover the LPS' expenses of \$100,000. He said commercial space rents in Lexington and Waltham are not applicable because no rent is charged. LPS covers heat, electricity, cleaning, various supplies, phone, and Internet for the lessee, which are in addition to commercial rents. So, in commercial rent terms, the rent is zero.

Tim Christenfeld, President of the Board of Magic Garden, asked whether it was justifiable that their current rent of \$19,169 would rise dramatically to \$100,000? Gustav Beerel, a member of the Magic Garden Board, said \$100,000 was \$16 to \$20 per square foot and that class A office space in downtown Boston goes for \$25 per square foot. They asked whether this is comparable to the rent determination for Pod C, which LEAP recently won in an RFP. Sheila Webber, parent of a Magic Garden student, asked that the Committee look at things differently. She said Magic Garden is a wonderful preschool that connects to the Lincoln campus. Linda Hammett-Ory said Magic Garden is a worthy organization.

Mr. Brandmeyer and Mr. Creel responded, noting 1) the Pod-C space had to be rented to an after-school program as a public good which supports the larger school program, and since the after-school program operated only several hours a day and 9 months a year, it has fewer costs to recover; 2) Commercial rents are in addition to all the services which cost LPS over \$100,000 a year; and 3) there is no justification for Lincoln taxpayer dollars subsidizing a private pre-school to the tune of \$80,000 (the \$100,000 costs minus roughly the \$20,000 payment by Magic Garden) and it would be better in the worst case to leave the space vacant and ensure that these funds can be put into enriching the K-8 educational experience.

Mr. Sander asked if LPS could abstain from providing custodial services to the new lessee and not incur those costs. Mr. Brandmeyer said that they could restructure the services to the space and not include custodial services, phone services, and other expenses and offer it at a lower minimum rate. Mr. Sander suggested that the new RFP note that the lessee would have to agree to provide custodial services by a provider acceptable to LPS to ensure the space is properly maintained. The Administration withdrew tonight's proposal and will bring another to a future meeting. Ms. Dobrow thanked them for their work and noted that the Committee will revisit the issue.

VI. Superintendent's Report

Mr. Brandmeyer updated the Committee on the Hanscom Middle School Principal search. March 5 is the forum to meet the two finalists, Marguerite Connally, Program Director for Curriculum, Assessment and Placement at the Dearborn School in Boston, and Erich Lederbuhr, Principal at the Oak Street Elementary School in Franklin. Mr. Lederbuhr spent the day at Hanscom meeting with the Base leadership and students and had an hour-long interview with Mr. Brandmeyer. The students liked Mr. Lederbuhr. Mr. Brandmeyer said that they are two strong finalists, and he looks forward to the Committee's feedback. He will visit their schools next week.

Mr. Brandmeyer shared the good news that Julia Smith told Mr. Brandmeyer that the federal government will exercise its option for the contract with the Hanscom schools for next year. Ms. Glass asked whether there was an increase in the number of families moving to the Base. Mr. Brandmeyer noted that since the occupancy level of the Base is below the threshold, the waterfall goes into effect to fill the homes on the Base. Ms. Robinson explained that military families from the other military services become eligible to live there and if that is insufficient, civilians will be allowed to live in Hanscom housing.

Mr. Brandmeyer reported that the third edition of Knightly News, the student newspaper, has been published, with the writing and layout improving with each issue. He said the Committee should consider inviting these students to a Committee meeting.

Ms. Dobrow thanked him for his report.

VII. Curriculum

Ms. Sterling told the Committee that she has visited the five middle school classrooms that are doing the trial classes for the new grades 6-8 math program. It is wonderful to be with them, and she has greatly enjoyed the willingness of students to comment on the new materials. She said it has been a pleasure to listen to them. She will ask them about student engagement from the new curriculum in the upcoming students' questionnaire. The Committee thanked her for her report. Ms. Sterling left the meeting.

VIII. Policy

A. Policy Adjustments: Second Reading and Vote

AC Non-Discrimination

ACA Policy Against Harassment

JK Discipline Code

JKF Physical Restraint

TBD Accessibility of Extracurricular Activities

Ms. Powers explained that she has updated the four policies to reflect federal and state regulations and Mr. Sander's revisions. The State's Department of Elementary and Secondary Education has approved the changes. Ms. Barthold reformatted the documents, and their content is the same as the documents provided at the last meeting.

Ms. Dobrow thanked Mr. Sander and Ms. Powers for their work on these policies. Mr. Brandmeyer said the Committee could vote for all of the policies at once.

Ms. Dobrow moved to approve policies AC, ACA, JK, JKF, and TBD, with Mr. Sander seconding the motion. The Committee voted unanimously to approve the policies.

IX. Facilities and Financial

A. Warrant Approval

Mr. Creel presented the payroll warrants totaling \$592,250.88 and the accounts payable warrants totaling \$245,095.18 for a total of \$837,346.06. Mr. Schertzler reviewed the warrants. Ms. Dobrow moved to approve the warrants, with Mr. Sander seconding the motion. The Committee voted unanimously to approve the warrants.

X. Old Business

Ms. Dobrow drafted a letter to Governor Patrick on behalf of the METCO program, which took a big hit in the latest round of budget cuts. The cuts will decrease what the district receives. Lincoln has been a strong advocate of METCO and has retained the highest percentage of METCO students of any participating district. The letter will also be sent to Lieutenant Governor Timothy Murray, Representative Robert DeLeo, Senator Susan Fargo, Representative Tom Conroy, Representative Jay Kaufman, Commissioner of Education Mitchell Chester, and other Committees.

Mr. Orgel asked what the Committee will need to do. Mr. Brandmeyer said there will be a reduction this year, and they need to figure out how to minimize the impact. They will freeze the METCO budget. The cuts for FY 10 may be \$40,000 to \$50,000, but they are unsure. Depending on the magnitude of the cuts, the District will make recommendations to balance the budget, including potentially taking in fewer METCO students, although this would further decrease the amount of grant money the District would receive. The District currently has 91 METCO students.

Ms. Darling and Ms. Hammett-Ory voiced support for how essential METCO is, how it diversifies the schools, and said we should look for ways that parents could fundraise for the program, before we cut the program. Mr. Orgel said there was unanimous support for METCO. Mr. Brandmeyer said it was premature to discuss cutting the number of current METCO students and noted that once a student begins in the Lincoln schools, they can stay in the schools until they graduate. Mr. Sander noted that the recent fundraising policy of the School Committee would probably prohibit parent fundraising for core METCO expenses such as personnel. Mr. Brandmeyer said METCO enhancements are not part of the core program and parent fundraising for those items would be appropriate. Mr. Sander thanked Ms. Dobrow for drafting the letter. Ms. Dobrow will send the letter.

XI. New Business

A. Annual Evaluation of the Superintendent

Ms. Dobrow reminded the Committee that they need to evaluate Mr. Brandmeyer. She emailed evaluation forms to each member and asked them to please fill them out and return them to her by March 7. She will put together the materials and draft a document to be discussed at the next meeting. The evaluation must be done in public, and she asked the Committee to give Mr. Brandmeyer constructive feedback.

XII. Approval of Minutes

Ms. Dobrow moved to approve the minutes of December 4, 2008 with the corrections, and Ms. Glass seconded it. Ms. Glass moved to approve the minutes of January 8, 2009 with the corrections. Mr. Sander seconded it. The Committee voted unanimously to approve the December 4 and January 8 minutes with the corrections.

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; Ms. Glass, yes; Mr. Orgel, yes; Ms. Robinson, yes; Ms. Nunes-Tajeron, yes; Ms. Brown, yes. The Committee would not be returning to open session. The open session adjourned at 9:15 pm.

Respectfully submitted,
Sarah G. Marcotte, Recording Secretary