

**MINUTES OF THE
LINCOLN SCHOOL COMMITTEE
January 18, 2007**

Present: Julie Dobrow (Chair), Laurie Manos, Sharon Antia, Al Schmertzler, Leta Allen (METCO Representative), Deneen Trask (Hanscom Representative) and Mary Goldstein (Hanscom Representative). Also Present: Mickey Brandmeyer (Superintendent), Paul Naso (Assistant Superintendent), Buck Creel (Administrator for Business and Finance), Stephen McKenna (Lincoln School K-4 Principal), Sharon Hobbs (Lincoln School 5-8 Principal).

Absent: Sandy Hessler (Vice Chair).

I. Greetings and Call to Order

Ms. Dobrow called the meeting to order at 7:10 P.M.

II. Chairperson's and Members' Reports

Ms. Dobrow congratulated seventh and eighth grade Lincoln School instrumental and vocal music students for their performance the previous evening. She remarked that the instrumental music program continues to grow by leaps and bounds. She thanked Susan Gottschalk, Laurel Reckert and Ray Aucoin) for their work with the students and the Friends of Lincoln Music for their continuing support of the program.

Ms. Trask thanked Mark Kaufman for parent information meeting that morning at Hanscom Middle School pertaining to the Math program. She reported that there was good participation and that the program included activities for parents to do at home with their children.

III. Public Comments

Sarah Liepert, parent of first grade student at Lincoln School, inquired about whether there would be an opportunity to comment during the discussion about the number of grade 2 sections. Ms. Dobrow assured her there would be.

IV. Consent Agenda

A. Accept Grant from Air Force Association

There was brief discussion about whether this amount would supplement or replace existing funds. MS. Dobrow moved that the School Committee vote to accept the grant. Laurie Manos seconded the motion. The motion was approved by the following roll call:

Ms. Dobrow – yes

Ms. Manos – yes

Ms. Antia – yes

Mr. Schmertzler - yes

Ms. Allen – concurs

Ms. Goldstein – concurs

Ms. Trask - concurs

V. Time Scheduled Appointments

A. FY '08 Budget Discussion

Mr. Brandmeyer reviewed the budget process as it has unfolded since September. He reminded the School Committee that at its last meeting it voted on the base budget amount without the final details. He explained that the goal for the current meeting is to finalize the base budget and finalize the preferred budget. These steps are in preparation for the January 23rd meeting with the Finance Committee.

Mr. Brandmeyer observed that the budget preparation has been a long process during which there has been an effort to maintain a balance between providing good programs for students and maintaining school operations in a fiscally effective manner. Mr. Brandmeyer also reminded the School Committee that pending the response to our proposal for the Hanscom contract, additional steps will be needed for the Hanscom budget.

Ms. Dobrow reported that a few members of the School Committee (Ms. Antia, Ms. Manos and herself) along with members of the administrative team (Mr. Brandmeyer, Mr. Creel and Mr. Naso) had met with the Finance Committee on January 9th.. She explained that they had a good meeting and outlined a few key points about the history of the relationship between the committees. In particular, she explained the longstanding agreement between the two boards to operate according to policy. She also explained the many ways the Finance Committee has supported the school department over the years, citing the mold remediation problems and auditorium problems during the past few years. She added that the Finance Committee support extends beyond facilities needs and mentioned the agreement about the use of circuit breaker funds as an example of

the collaboration that has helped the district avoid the draconian cuts to school budgets that have been necessary in many other communities.

The focus of that meeting was on class size policy, and Ms. Dobrow observed that the conversation was very helpful. She noted the longstanding agreement by which the Finance Committee supports funding for the opening of additional sections when the need becomes evident after the close of the budget process.

Ms. Dobrow also briefly reviewed the history of the class size policy. She mentioned that the School Committee considered a task force to review the policy in 2003, but they felt that more pressing issues at that time needed to be addressed. She said that it is now time for the district to conduct a study and review the policy in light of more recent developments in educational research and policy. She urged that it happen now so that at this time next year the district does not find itself with the same questions.

Steve McKenna and Sharon Hobbs joined the discussion.

Mr. Brandmeyer said that as a result of the discussion with the Finance Committee, the administration recognizes the commitment to operate within the existing policy. He proposed two budget actions: 1) reduce grade 2 from four sections to three and 2) eliminate one bus route. These reductions would make it possible to move some items from the preferred budget to base budget. He stressed that he is not making any recommendations for reductions that would result in him not having confidence that the programs could continue to operate successfully.

Mr. Brandmeyer also reminded the School Committee that there is a safeguard in that there is a commitment from the Finance Committee to fund a new section if enrollment numbers warrant such action. He explained that the budget decisions are based on projected enrollment numbers. In April or May the administration shifts to "adjusted actual" enrollment figures and he is confident that if grade 2 class sizes exceed the maximum, the Finance Committee will support the additional section.

Mr. Brandmeyer added that even with the reduction in sections, there will not be a reduction in assistant time. Julie Dobrow added that she is one of the first grade parents and would like to hear about additional support that will be available, especially in reading and math fundamentals

Steve McKenna explained the classroom assistant support that is currently in place includes 15 hours per week per class. A portion of another 30 hours of instruction aide time is available. In addition reading support at that grade level is in place and will continue, ably directed by Helena England. Supports for mathematics are also there, but there is still work being done to make better use of those services.

Mr. McKenna had also checked in with the special education teachers at grades 1 and 2. The level of identified special need should not place any additional burden on those classrooms. Similarly, an assessment of the social emotional needs of students does not suggest that the level of need of current grade 1 students is unusually significant. He added that knowing the staff, he is confident that they are well capable of dealing with this. In addition, he checked out classroom space. It will be possible to accommodate additional students within the current set ups. Mr. McKenna said, "I wouldn't be saying this without feeling confident that we can make this work."

Ms. Dobrow asked if the class size difference would have an impact on teachers' abilities to differentiate instruction. Mr. McKenna explained the benefits of having the additional instructional assistant time and the training that assistants have received this year, and stated that he felt that the additional training would enhance teachers' and instructional assistants' abilities to provide differentiated instruction.

In response to a question by Mr. Schmertzler, Mr. McKenna explained how the total number of hours of instructional assistant time is distributed among the classrooms. He concluded by saying that there would be the potential for up to 10 hours per week of additional instructional assistant time per second grade classroom.

Mr. Brandmeyer observed that historically the question of class size often arises in the transition from grade 1 to grade 2. There is a pattern of reducing a section as a cohort moves from grade 1 to grade 2. He added that the school is used to dealing with this situation.

Mr. Brandmeyer elaborated on how class size projections are formulated and noted that at this point the projections show that the numbers are between target and maximum. In the spring, the planning moves from the projections to work with actual enrollment figures.

Ms. Manos expressed her appreciation for a good report and inquired about whether classroom spaces and environments can accommodate the increase. She urged Mr. McKenna and teachers to consider any actions they may need to take regarding space and environment to accommodate the changes. She stressed the importance of maintaining the ability for teachers to have breakout spaces and other accommodations for small group work. She also expressed concerns about possible noise level from more students.

Sharon Antia spoke in support of Ms. Dobrow's beginning comments and acknowledged the high level of respect between the School Committee and the Finance Committee and commitment to honor existing policies. Although she is hesitant about class size, she supports the need to remain faithful to the policy.

Ms. Dobrow reiterated her own efforts to separate her personal feelings and think about the larger picture. She explained that her own son is in the grade, and she is confident that his and all children's education will not be compromised with these larger sections.

Ms. Dobrow said that it is the judgment of the School Committee that the class size policy needs to be looked at and possibly revised. Although the impulse is to reduce the size of the sections, there is nevertheless a policy on the books and there is a need to go through a process to make an informed decision about if and how to revise the policy.

Mr. Schmertzler, recalling his perspective as a former member of the Finance Committee, remarked that 2/3 of people in town do not have children in schools and that it is difficult to get their support if the School Committee is not adhering to the policy. Mr. Schmertzler added that in upcoming years there will be a need for additional revenues and that support will be essential.

Sarah Liepert commented that the policy includes a range and that it does not seem to be a matter of disrespect to the Finance Committee to resist having a section with enrollment at the top of the range.

John Robinson, a member of the Finance Committee, recalled instances when his two daughters were in larger classes but nevertheless continued to have positive experiences. Mr. Robinson also clarified the policy by explaining that only one section would have to go over the maximum to prompt a request for an additional section.

Mr. Brandmeyer commented that there is process in place to respond if a section exceeds the maximum and that the administration does not have the latitude to disregard the policy. He stressed that the administration is not interested in doing something that is detrimental.

Sarah Liepert said that it is good to hear about all of the plans and procedures in place but she is concerned about communication. Specifically she referred to a *Lincoln Journal* article explaining that the School Committee would likely support four sections at grade two. It is possible, she added, that some people may be thinking that this reduction is not going to occur.

Mr. Brandmeyer responded by saying that this is a point well taken. He reminded everyone that School Committee sessions are televised, that the budget preparation is a process, and that budget details change throughout that process. He pointed out that neither the school administration nor the School Committee have any control over what is written in the *Lincoln Journal*. He invited Ms. Liepert to help him assess if grade one parents would like to meet about this issue.

In response to another question by Ms. Liepert, Ms. Dobrow explained that as the School Committee continued through the budget process and received more data about bus routes, it was possible to eliminate one school bus from the transportation budget.

Staci Montori asked how people can find out about these changes. She observed that the comments appear to be a switch in what the School Committee had discussed at its previous meeting.

Laurie Manos responded that she can understand that impression and acknowledged that Ms. Montori's sense of what had occurred at the previous meeting is accurate. Ms. Manos urged people to subscribe to the School Committee news email listserv and mentioned that a message sent prior to this meeting would have made some of these changes clear. An agenda and a blurb about what will be key discussion topics are sent out a few days in advance.

Richard Jewett commented that as a citizen he has been coming to School Committee meetings for a number of years. He said that this is the fifth budget preparation process he has seen. He has noticed that at various times parents may come for one or two meetings to inquire or speak about particular issues. He can understand that most people are not familiar with the

big picture. He urged the creation of a guide to the development of the school budget and proposed that this might be a reason to reactivate the Communications Committee.

Steve Kutenplon a parent of a first grade student, commented that he was surprised by the proposed budget with a one section reduction at grade two. He observed that it is not likely that parents at an earlier meeting could have predicted that outcome.

Al Schmertzler responded that he understood the surprise. He urged people in the audience to recognize that by taking these reductions it is now possible to fund services the district would otherwise be unable to provide, services that improve the overall educational process.

Mr.Kutenplon said he understood that difference but did not understand the inherent conclusion that a class of 17 instead of 24 is a lower priority than these extra services.

Sarah Liepert asked how it was determined that it was better to reduce the number of sections rather than number of assistants.

Mr. Brandmeyer answered that the recommendation is based on need to live within the policies and agreements not according to the relative benefits of those two options.

Mr. Robinson suggested that if it is possible to manage with one less bus then those funds can be used as well for preferred budget items.

Mr. Creel confirmed that data show that it is possible to reduce one bus. One negative consequence is that there will be fewer seats to sell. A reduction of one bus translates to a savings of about \$41,000.

The School Committee then considered items that may be moved from the preferred budget to the base budget as a result of these changes. Mr. Brandmeyer recommended items that will have an instructional impact. These included...

Instrumental Music Teachers	\$3,800
Mathematics Core Program Resources	\$10,000
Recorder Classes	\$720
Musical Instruments 5-8	\$5,100
Piano for K-4 music Program	\$5,546
Restore Library materials	\$6,000
Restore Professional Development Registration	\$5,000
Buildings and Grounds	\$1,915

These amounts total \$38,081 leaving the base budget at \$8,604,403.

The preferred budget totals \$8,727,975. It includes additional items totaling \$123,573. Additional items in the preferred budget are as follows:

Personnel	
Maintenance Craftsperson (50% FTE)	\$31,188
Technology Support Technician	\$45,000
Secretary for Curriculum and PD Office (25%)	\$14,000

Equipment	
Classroom Furniture	\$7,000

Operations	
Restore Legal Services	\$2,500
Restore Advertising	\$2,500
Special Education legal Services	\$2,500
Buildings and Grounds	\$8,085
Buildings and Grounds Overtime	\$5,000
Restore Community Service	\$5,000

Ms. Dobrow asked if there were additional questions about items to be moved to the base budget. There were none.

Ms. Dobrow asked if there were additional questions about the preferred budget.

Ms. Dobrow asked why there were reductions initially in fees for legal services. Mr. Brandmeyer explained that the administration has reconsidered and believes it does make good sense to fund at the preferred level in light of upcoming contract negotiations.

a. Finalize Base Budget

Mr. Schmeitzler moved to accept the base budget as presented. Ms. Antia seconded the motion. The motion was approved.

b. Finalize Preferred Budget

Mr. Schmeitzler moved to accept the preferred budget as presented. Ms. Dobrow seconded the motion. The motion was approved.

B. 2007-2008 School Calendar: First Reading

Mr. Brandmeyer presented a draft of the calendar for the 2007 2008 school year. He reminded the School Committee of various requirements that need to be followed with the formulation of the calendar. He noted that it is very similar to the current year calendar. He added that there is also a need for talks with the LTA about the school calendar. The School Committee packet includes some attendance data to monitor teacher and student absences in days near religious holidays. Ms. Dobrow made an appeal for scheduling of parent conferences dates in less disruptive ways especially considering parent concerns that they are not always aware of these dates. There was brief discussion about best ways to communicate to parents about conference days and whether the calendar should note these dates in red.

Ms. Manos suggested starting on Wednesday after Labor Day rather than Tuesday. Ms. Trask responded that later starts would be a problem for base families.

VI. Superintendent's Report

- A. Mr. Brandmeyer reported that a notice inviting people to serve on the Assistant Superintendent Search Committee would be going home tomorrow. He explained that he would be asking the School Committee to interview finalists. The schedule indicates that School Committee interviews would occur on March 15th. The next scheduled meeting, at which he would ask the School Committee to vote on his recommendation, occurs after the town election. He proposed moving the meeting from March 29th to March 22nd.

Ms. Dobrow moved to accept the proposal to reschedule the March 29th School Committee meeting to March 22nd. Ms. Antia seconded the motion. The motion was approved.

- B. Mr. Brandmeyer acknowledged the effective work of Lincoln School library specialist Alice Sajdera and Library Assistant Jennifer Doherty have done weeding the library collection of outdated material. They have been consistently working on this task and accomplishing it at a faster rate than expected. Although this may mean some disruption in the next few weeks, the result is that a new system will be up and running soon. He added that there is an appeal for some parent volunteers to help bar code for the new system. The suggestion was made that such an appeal be sent on the District news.

VII. Curriculum

A. Report on Health and Wellness

Mr. Naso reported on the district's progress implementing the Wellness policy that was approved by the School Committee in June 2006 in response to federal law, the WIC Program with particular attention to childhood obesity.

His report address areas of the policy which the district is responsible for monitoring.

Curriculum: instruction in nutrition and physical activity.

Mr. Naso indicated that the district's instruction does address these content areas but would benefit form clarity to identify skills and knowledge that every child will develop and clear learning standards as presented in other content areas. In the area of physical education he indicated that there is a difference between physical education classes and the school's responsibility to provide physical activity during the day. One issue that needs to be addressed is the unequal standards for physical education classes. In some of our schools the range can be between 55 and 90 minutes of instruction

In Area 3 of the Policy – Nutritional Standards he reported deliberate and extensive efforts to improve the nutritional value of the food offered in our cafeterias. He reported that we are seeking a balance between health food and advertising free packaging. It was suggested that this is an issues that could be discussed by the Health Advisory Committee for recommendations to the School Committee.

Area 4 addresses other school-based wellness activities which included helping teachers and parents make better choices for celebrations in schools and for fund-raising activities. Cathleen Higgins, Administrator for Food Services recently distributed resource materials to Principals to help them provide guidance on good food choices for these purposes.

Mr. Naso reported that he has convened the District Health Advisory Committee, which will meet approximately three times this year. It is comprised of parents, teachers, police, social workers and the school nurse.

Overall the policy has been taken seriously and that the district is in compliance with all of the policy’s requirements.

Ms. Manos inquired about who is serving as the district’s Health Content Specialist. Mr. Naso said it was Melissa Nordstrom.

Ms. Manos also inquired about strategies for connection with the PTA/PTO. Mrs. Trask said that the policy has been shared on several occasions with Hanscom parents. Ms. Manos said that we would be remiss if we did not share it more broadly with Lincoln parents. Mr. Creel said that the Food Service department discusses this with parents and the PTA whenever they have helped with events.

Ms. Manos also complimented Mrs. Green and her work with third grade student on food pyramid. She also inquired about a School Committee policy on commercialism.

Mrs. Trask asked if we were complying with time requirements for physical education at Hanscom Middle School. Mr. Naso reported that there is a requirement to have PE class but not for a specific amount of time. He indicated that this is more of a scheduling issue than one of personnel.

Ms. Antia asked about vending machines and said that she was glad that we did not sell soda. She was wondering if we could increase the restrictions and not sell Izzy drinks. Mr. Creel responded that all of the drinks we sell, including Izzy drinks, are compliant with the wellness policy. Ms. Manos also asked if we could review size restrictions on drinks in the vending machines.

Ms. Allen asked if this policy would prohibit bake sales as fundraising events. Mr. Naso responded that the policy does not rule bake sales out but hat we would prefer not to give mixed messages.

VIII. Policy

A. Proposal to Establish Subcommittee to Review Class Size Policy

Mr. Brandmeyer introduced a proposal to establish subcommittee to review class size policy. He explained the intention and charge of the committee and a timeline for its work. He asked for authorization to advertise to recruit subcommittee members, explaining that it is the School Committee’s responsibility to appoint members of subcommittees

Ms. Dobrow urged that the work on the policy be system-wide. Mr. Brandmeyer said he was assuming representation from all communities but will add language to make that more evident. There was brief discussion about composition and size of the committee and, based on a question from Ms. Antia, the benefits of reviewing the socio-economic data when looking at other communities. There was also discussion about whether it is relevant to inquire about a school district’s METCO participation when getting comparable district information. Additionally Ms. Trask asked to investigate the reasoning behind the class size numbers used in the federal solicitations applicable to the Hanscom contract.

Ms. Manos said she was pleased with lightening fast turnaround.

Ms. Dobrow moved that the School Committee approved the establishment of a class size policy subcommittee. Ms. Manos seconded the motion. The motion was approved by the following roll call:

Ms. Dobrow – yes

Ms. Manos – yes

Ms. Antia – yes

Mr. Schmertzler - yes

Ms. Allen – concurs

Ms. Goldstein – concurs
Ms. Trask - concurs

B. Policy Subcommittee Update

Richard Jewett came to the table. He and Laurie Manos reported on their work to revise and update the organization of the Policy Manual. Ms. Manos introduced the physical prototype and distributed a handout to explain the organization of the prototype. Mr. Jewett guided the School Committee with a walk through exercise to acquaint them with the new format.

Ms. Dobrow thanked Ms. Manos and Mr. Jewett for their great work on this project. The prototype will be available in the Superintendent’s office for School Committee members to spend some time to become familiar with the format. Mr. Dobrow explained that there will be a vote on the reorganization of the policy manual at the next School Committee meeting.

IX. Facilities and Financial

A. Warrants

Ms. Manos reported that she has reviewed the warrants and they appear to be in order. She moved that the School Committee vote warrants in the amount of \$7,792,22.87. Mr. Schmertzler seconded the motion. All elected members voted in favor with Ms. Trask, Ms. Allen and Ms. Goldstein concurred.

X. Old Business

Ms. Dobrow presented a letter to be sent to the Lincoln Board of Selectmen and the Lincoln Conservation Commission regarding the construction of an unpaved second emergency egress from the Ballfield Road complex. She asked for any suggestions or edits and permission to send the letter. The School Committee agreed that it should be sent.

XI. New Business

Ms. Antia reported that a member of the METCO Coordinating Committee had inquired about whether the School Committee or administration had a response to the Coordinating Committee’s recent letter regarding the diversity of faculty and staff. The School Committee discussed their concerns and Mr. Brandmeyer offered to respond by letter to the Coordinating Committee.

XII. Approval of Minutes

None

XIII. Information Enclosures

XIV. Adjournment

Ms. Dobrow moved that the meeting be adjourned. Ms. Antia seconded the motion. All elected members voted in favor with Ms. Trask, Ms. Allen and Ms. Goldstein concurring. The meeting was adjourned at 10:18 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Paul Naso