

**MINUTES OF THE
LINCOLN SCHOOL COMMITTEE
December 14, 2006**

Present: Julie Dobrow (Chair), Laurie Manos, Al Schmertzler, Sharon Antia, Leta Allen (Boston Representative), Deneen Trask (Hanscom Representative). Also present: Mickey Brandmeyer (Superintendent), Paul Naso (Assistant Superintendent), Buck Creel (Administrator for Business and Finance), Teresa Watts (Administrator of Special Education and Student Services).

Absent: Sandy Hessler (Vice Chair) was absent but participated in part of the meeting by teleconference. Mary Goldstein (Hanscom Representative)

I. Greetings and Call to Order

Ms. Dobrow called the meeting to order at 7:06 PM. Ms. Dobrow noted that Ms. Hessler was participating by teleconference.

II. Chairperson's and Members' Reports

Ms. Trask said it was a busy week at the Hanscom schools. Randy Davis, the Primary School Principal, held a reception to welcome the new social worker. Mark Kaufman, the Middle School Principal, held his monthly coffee and chat. The Middle School concert took place with 78% of the students participating.

III. Public Comments

Ms. Dobrow suggested that parents with comments about whether a second grade section should be cut wait until the School Committee discussion of this subject. There were no other comments.

IV. Consent Agenda

None.

V. Time Scheduled Appointments

A. FY'08 Budget Discussion

Document: Proposal for Base Budget Reductions from Mickey Brandmeyer to Lincoln School Committee, December 12, 2006

Steve McKenna, Lincoln School Principal K-4, and Sharon Hobbs, Lincoln School Principal 5-8, joined the Committee for this discussion. Mr. Brandmeyer said this was a continuation of the budget discussion. At the December 7 School Committee meeting the first discussion of potential reductions to get to a base budget within the Finance Committee guidelines took place. A series of ideas to reduce the gap of \$580,730 were considered.

Mr. Brandmeyer said one of the proposals was to reduce a section of second grade resulting in three sections. With three sections the class would be at 22 students per class which is at target according to the class size policy instead of classes of 17 as there would be with four sections. Mr. Brandmeyer said the recommendation was made in accord with the class size policy and School Committee's guidelines to use that policy in formulating budget recommendations. He said this proposal has focused attention from parents affirming the value that the Lincoln community places on small class sizes.

Mr. Brandmeyer said he would like to talk about grade two class sizes without pitting this question against something else in the budget. He did not want to make a choice between a second grade class and other funding for assistants, school buses, the math specialist, or increasing fees. He said he was looking for direction from the School Committee on whether to stick to the proposed reduction in second grade classes. He would not be asking for a vote on the base budget tonight. If the School Committee determines that there should be four sections of grade two, Mr. Brandmeyer would go back and consider what recommendations to make to close the gap.

Mr. Brandmeyer said he made a presentation to the Finance Committee on Tuesday about suggestions for shifting

potential liability for out of district placements to the reserve fund and circuit breaker funds. He said he is confident that the Finance Committee will continue to provide support in a way that is fiscally responsible for the Town. He said he recommends using \$200,000 in additional circuit breaker funds to help close the gap. He said the Finance Committee has not yet voted on this but that it is a workable solution.

Mr. Brandmeyer said the cuts he recommends to get to base budget are in the memorandum. Only a few of these need be discussed tonight. A specialized program for two special education students who would otherwise need out of district placements is being recommended. This program could be created with existing staff and one additional tutor. This would be a good program and there would be significant savings for the District. The administration is prepared to move forward with this program. This would reduce the students probably needing outside placement from seven to five.

Mr. Brandmeyer said he still recommends that the second grade be reduced to three sections with 22 students per class from four sections with 17 students per class. He said if the enrollment were to change over the summer, the Finance Committee would be willing to fund another class out of the reserve fund. The classes would have 22 students, not more. If a class were cut, the savings would be approximately \$45,000.

Ms. Dobrow said she would like the administrative team to talk about the implications of other reductions such as fewer assistants or one less school bus. She said that everyone needs to know the tradeoffs.

Mr. Brandmeyer said two years ago for FY'05 the District requested and got funding for an additional bus through an override. He said when the community supports funding through an override the expectation is for that funding to remain in the base budget in following years. Mr. Brandmeyer said he would not want to take funding for a bus out of the budget and then need to ask to put it in again.

Mr. Creel said each bus has a capacity of 77 students but this is with three students per row of seats. The buses are sometimes crowded because of students' musical instruments. Middle school students are crowded when seated three per row of seats.

In the 2001-2002 school year, ridership was at 600. In 2002-2003 the fee for students who live within two miles and for seventh and eighth grades was added and ridership dropped to 526. In 2003-2004 bus tags were added to verify that people who needed to pay had paid and ridership dropped to 470. In 2004-2005 ridership was 476. This year ridership is at 460. Mr. Creel said there are few parent complaints with the routes as they are at present.

Mr. Creel said if the bus routes are reduced, the routes will need to be restructured so that they are longer, buses will be more crowded, and there will be less revenue from ridership because there will be fewer spaces to sell. Students will be on the buses longer. Runs are now 30 minutes and could be 45 with only seven runs and there may be longer waits at the bus stops. The cost of one bus is \$48,428 for this year and next year but not all of this would be available because some of it would be offset by the decrease in revenues. There are currently eight bus runs and two additional kindergarten runs which each cost \$15,840.

Ms. Dobrow observed that many students do not take the bus because they are driven by their parents. Ms. Dobrow wondered if a bus were reduced would there be seats for seventh and eighth graders for whom busing is not required. Mr. Creel said the bus policy addresses which students are eligible to purchase seats if not everyone can have one. Apparently siblings of eligible riders get priority.

Ms. Antia observed that in FY'04 there were 624 students and for FY'08 534 are projected, 90 students less. This presents a changed circumstance from the years when funding was sought for an additional bus. Ms. Manos said enrollment is now in a contraction period and reducing a bus because the enrollment numbers have dropped would be a reasonable and prudent step.

Ms. Hessler suggested that the administration look at how many students go to after-school sports or drama, how many go to the after-school program, and how many are transported by their parents in a typical day to get a conservative estimate of how many students are actually using the buses. She believes that there are at least 100 students who are not riding the buses and has observed that the buses are not usually filled. Ms. Dobrow suggested that the administration also look into the potential impact reducing a bus might have on traffic, given the possible scenario of even more parents driving children than do so at present.

Mr. Brandmeyer said he is concerned about capacity and ridership. 400 to 425 students fit on the buses with two students per row instead of three. Before there was an additional bus, the mini-bus from Hanscom did an additional run in Lincoln. Mr. Brandmeyer said he is also concerned about the amount of time students are on the bus. One of the reasons the additional bus was added for FY'05 was that students were on the bus too long. Eight buses are needed because of the size of the town and the length of the bus runs. Mr. Brandmeyer said it is hard to calculate who will ride the bus and that the District has to prepare to support the maximum number of students who are entitled to ride buses.

Cindy Sweetser, parent, said the District should look at cutting a bus. She said a large number of students are driven to school and picked up. She also said Lincoln parents drive their students to the most convenient bus stop on their run so that they have shorter ride. Ms. Manos asked about the income from students who are not required to be bused. Mr. Creel said the fees are about \$30,000 but he would guess that they would be \$6,000 to \$7,000 smaller if a bus is cut because not all seats will be available. Thus the net gain from cutting a bus would be about \$41,000.

Mr. Brandmeyer said the work classroom assistants do is important. They support teachers and students and are a good deal for the amount of their pay. There are currently 390 hours. Twenty hours are paid for by the METCO grant. \$25,000 for aides is paid through the Kindergarten grant. The rest are paid for through the appropriated budget.

Steve McKenna said the classroom assistants perform a service to students. For grades K-4 they are used to enhance instruction. Mr. McKenna will be looking for more opportunities for professional development for assistants so they can continue to support classroom learning. For grades K-4 assistants work with small groups of students and check in with students to make sure they are staying on task. They know when students need sensory breaks and encourage them to take them. The team leaders have indicated that less assistant time would be a great loss at the K-4 level. Mr. McKenna also said some these assistants have been in these roles for many years and that it is important to think of the human factor before making cuts. Ms. Dobrow stated that contemplating any reductions in staff is exceedingly difficult, and that the Committee is always very much aware of the people involved.

Mr. Schmertzler asked about the assistants' role in helping students who are having trouble learning a subject. Mr. McKenna said their work is not targeted at students with special needs who have IEPs. He said the assistants work with all students and that their presence frees up the teachers so that they can provide individual instruction to small groups of students.

Ms. Hobbs said that in fifth grade assistants work in ways that are similar to their work with grades K-4. But for grades 6, 7, and 8 the work done by assistants is more clerical. This provides relief for teachers so they can devote more time to teaching. For instance, an assistant might do clerical work freeing up a teacher to set up a lab.

Assistants are deployed as follows. Each Kindergarten class has 28 hours of an assistant per week. Grades 1 and 2 have fifteen hours per week. Grade 3 has twelve hours per week. Grade 4 has ten hours per week. Grade 5 has ten hours per week. Grades 6, 7, and 8 share one assistant for twelve hours per week. The specialists share one assistant for twelve hours per week.

Ms. Antia commented that the K-8 Task Force Report said the assistants are very valuable especially at the K-3 level. She asked why they are needed for grades 6, 7, and 8. Becky Eston said in the past in middle school each grade level team had an assistant for fifteen hours a week. The number of assistants for the middle school and the amount of time they work has been reduced over the past several years. Each time assistant time is cut it changes something you do in the classroom. Terry Green, who teaches sixth grade engineering, said she has an assistant do clerical work so that she can look at the work students have done and plan for the next day. She said this frees a small chunk of time for ongoing assessment of what students know.

Mr. Brandmeyer said assistants are used in different ways at different grade levels to support learning needs of students. He favors a dynamic model to deploy assistants so that they are moved as needs shift. He said the District is well staffed but not overstaffed and that it is not fruitful to pit assistants against a second grade classroom.

Ms. Manos said she understands the value of the assistants and she would not consider reducing their hours if there were not a substantial gap to close. She noted that there is a contraction in enrollment and there are fewer sections than there have been in the past. She asked whether when a section is reduced assistant hours are reduced. Mr. Brandmeyer said this depends on resulting class sizes. He said when resulting class sizes are large sometimes assistant hours are actually increased.

Mr. Naso addressed the importance of the math specialist. He said concerns have been raised about the initial intentions when the position was created a few years ago. He said it is important to look at the current realities. He said the assistants are currently halfway through developing common assessments, that they are doing a lot of professional development, and that much work is still needed. They are currently involved in rethinking materials and resources for the math program. To eliminate the specialist position now would dampen the progress the District has made and the District will not realize all the gains it is poised to realize.

Ms. Dobrow asked about the original intent to have the math specialist for a time and then to rotate to another specialty or another model. Mr. Naso said the District has managed to put together people in other roles (teaching) to do curriculum work and instructional improvement in other subject areas. Because of this there is not need now to rotate the position occupied by the math specialist to other subject areas.

Mr. Brandmeyer said when the specialist was first hired in FY'03 he said the specialist would definitely be needed more than one year, might be needed for three years. He never said the position would be cut after three years but did say he would consider switching to another subject area specialist. Now the District has created a different structure to address these needs in other subject areas. Curriculum work is never done. It is always a work in progress.

Ms. Hessler asked about the model being used for science curriculum with work being done by Dave Joseph and Terry Green and the cost difference between the science model and the math model. Mr. Naso said the two models are not addressing the same kinds of needs. Ms. Hessler asked how each model is different. Mr. Naso said in the environment of high stakes testing in math and ELA there is need for a much more intensive focus. He also said math can be complicated for elementary teachers who benefit from professional development, guidance, and help with assessment from the specialist. He said there are bigger and more difficult challenges in math. He said the District needed a common direction in math. He said in the long term he would not rule out a model like that used for science curriculum development but not now because there are still a couple steps that need to be taken. Ms. Green said diagnostic testing is used more in math than science to identify needs and provide remedial services.

Aradhana Narula-Tam asked whether the District is heading in the right direction with its curriculum. She asked what kind of progress the District has made on MCAS. She also asked about the contemplated curriculum changes. Mr. Naso explained that the District has worked on learning expectations, assessments to identify where students are before instruction, common assessments, in an attempt to make sure that all strands of learning tested

on MCAS are making their way into the curriculum. Ms. Dobrow said last week the Mr. Naso reported on MCAS results, this information will be placed on the web site, and that Mr. Naso and the principals will be finding a way to talk with parents about this. She suggested that the discussion tonight should focus on the budget.

Mr. Brandmeyer addressed fees. He said several years ago the District compared their fees with other districts and ours were the highest. Athletic fees have been cut in half but are still high in comparison with other districts. There has been greater participation in athletics since the fees have been reduced. The instructional music program is now funded in the budget. Requests for scholarships have increased. Mr. Brandmeyer has heard complaints about costs for fieldtrips. In Lincoln there are still families who cannot afford to participate. He recommends that fees not be increased and notes that participation might go down with increased fees.

On whether to retain the fourth second grade classroom, Mr. Brandmeyer said in September the School Committee provided guidelines for the budget. The Committee said to continue to value small class sizes but to adhere to the class size policy. They advised that where class sizes can be adjusted to target to do so. The administration originally presented a budget with four sections for second grade and after discussion has recommended a reduction to three classes bringing class size to 22, the target class size. Mr. Brandmeyer said he has received some e-mail which express fear that the class size will go to 23 or 24. This will not happen. The Finance Committee will support opening of another section if the second grade class increases from the numbers currently projected.

Ms. Allen asked whether a METCO student is being cut to ensure that there are only 22 per class. Mr. Brandmeyer said the District will not un-enroll any METCO students. Some children leave the program and others join it. The target number is 91 METCO students. When students leave spaces are generally filled in lower grades. Given target class sizes if grade 2 were to stay at four sections then another METCO student could be added at grade 2 but if a section is reduced additions will be made to other grades instead.

Ms. Dobrow asked about comparative data for other peer districts. The Lincoln School current class size for second grade is 21, 21, 21, and 18. For next year class size would be 22 for two sections and 23 for one section with three classes, or 17 per section with four classes. Mr. Brandmeyer said for Weston the policy is 18-22, current is 19-20, next year will be 18. For Wellesley, the range for grades 2-5 is 22-24. For Concord, the policy is an average class size of 22, second grade is currently 19.5 and will be the same next year. For Carlisle, the goal is 18 students, the current class is 22.7 and next year the class will be either 15.5 or 21. For Harvard, the range is 18-22, the class is currently 22.5, and next year will be from 21 to 22.

Mr. McKenna said he has observed current second grade classes with 21 students per class. There are not space issues. One teacher he observed had a smooth flow and routine and the students were well served in the class of 21. The assistant was instrumental in meeting students' needs. He said he cannot say that classes of 17 would not be better but he is looking at the entire program and believes this would be a reasonable cut. He said he has had conversations about this with members of the School Improvement Council who have concerns about whether students' needs will be met in these classes. He said the literature does show that lower class sizes at early grades have a positive effect on student achievement.

Mr. Schmertzler said the class policy has a range for second grade, that there is a reason the School Committee set a range, and that it reasonable to follow the policy having class sizes of 22 for second grade. He noted that families with students who were in first grade this year with classes of 17 were lucky to have classes at the low end of the range set in the policy.

Ms. Manos said if you look at recent history in Lincoln there are only 6 or 7 times when there were 22 or more students in a class. This has been less than 10% of the time. There has never been a class of 22 in the second grade. The last time there were 22 students in a class it was the fifth grade in FY'05 and the next year this class went back to 17. Mr. Brandmeyer said this was because the middle school moved to the grade level team model.

Ms. Manos said there is a disconnect between the policy and what Lincoln thinks of as a small class. She suggested that the School Committee should reexamine the policy. Ms. Manos said her preference is for there to be four sections of second grade. She said this is an important year. She said when the School Committee directed the administration to bring class closer to target she had middle school classes in mind.

Ms. Dobrow said the School Committee should look again at the class size policy. She said it doesn't make sense to have a large class in second grade and a small one in eighth. Ms. Hobbs explained that with the middle school model teachers teach in grade level teams which meet together twice a week, once to talk about individual students progress and once to discuss teaching. If there were fewer sections, teachers may need to teach across subject areas. Middle school teachers now need to be licensed in their subject area. This restricts how teachers can be deployed and results in smaller classes to retain the team model. She said the middle school initiative is looking at how to engage middle school students in learning.

Ilana Newell suggested that the School Committee take a serious look at why the class size guidelines exist. She said the classrooms are integrated classrooms, that teachers need to extend to support students at the high end of the spectrum, and that this is challenging with 22 students. Ms. Newell said if there will be 22 students per class she asks that the number of assistants be increased.

Aradhana Narula-Tam pointed out that class sizes of 17 are also within the class size policy. She said she noticed that there is a lot of concern about increasing the bus runs by 15 minutes. She said the students who are in the classes of 22 will be there for six and a half hours per day.

Elizabeth Graver suggested the policy should be revisited taking into account the importance of small class sizes in low grades versus higher ones. She said in first and second grades students are at a wide range developmentally. These are formative years. Studies have found that for grades K-3 class size matters.

At this point it was observed that Ms. Hessler was no longer on the line. The Lincoln phone was hung up at this time.

Marlene Major-Ahmed said second grade is a crucial year in determining which students will need special education. Small classes and assistants are important. She would rather lose a bus than a teacher.

Steve Kutenplon said every alternative to increasing the grade two class sizes should be weighed heavily. He said buses are relatively empty. He is surprised by the large percentage of Lincoln students who go to private school and wondered whether more people would leave with larger class sizes. Mr. Brandmeyer said the percentage of families who leave to go to private schools has been decreasing in recent years.

Ms. Dobrow thanked everyone for their comments and thanked those who have e-mailed comments to the School Committee. She said she had responded back to every email she had received. She said public comments are important. Ms. Dobrow asked the administration to come back with additional data on the bus so the School Committee can think in terms of reduction of a bus. Mr. Brandmeyer said he wants to come back with other options which could be taken in lieu of eliminating a bus. Mr. Brandmeyer said some of the data on bus ridership may be hard to obtain by the next meeting because the students will be on vacation preventing counting of actual bus usage.

Staci Montori asked why the Lincoln School doesn't have any mixed grades. Mr. Brandmeyer said this has been discussed in the past and always comes up at budget time. He said financial reasons are the wrong reasons to consider mixed grades. It is important to consider them for educational reasons. He said the learning standards and MCAS present issues for mixed grade classes. He said this is a separate conversation from the budget.

Mr. Brandmeyer asked if it is the School Committee's preference to take the reduction of a second grade section off

the table. Ms. Dobrow said she wants to know what the alternatives are. Mr. Schmertzler said it would be nice to come up with another solution and if there is another solution the District should go for it. He asked where the line should be drawn on class sizes and he said he hopes he does not see these same parents back again when their students are moving from second to third grade.

VI. Superintendent's Report
None.

VII. Curriculum
None.

VIII. Policy
None.

IX. Facilities and Financial
A. Warrant Approval

Ms. Manos said she had examined warrants and that they appear to be in order. She moved that the School Committee vote warrants in the amount of \$765,994.06. Ms. Dobrow seconded the motion. All elected members voted in favor, with Ms. Allen and Ms. Trask concurring.

B. Approval to Award Contract for Electricity
Document: Recommendation for Electricity Commodity Supply from Buckner Creel to Lincoln School Committee, 11 December 2006.

Ms. Dobrow was not present for the discussion of approval to award contract for electricity. Mr. Creel said he is recommending a 53 month contract with Direct Energy. He said his memorandum describes the process and quotes from all vendors as well as costs with NSTAR. Some quotes were all-inclusive and others would pass through certain additional charges. The Direct Energy quote is all inclusive and the modeled annual cost would be \$118,368. A parent company guarantee is provided so that if prices escalate and Direct Energy is unable to supply at the contracted amount the parent company would make up the deficit. Mr. Creel said the contract would offer four years of budget stability. The price would be fixed so the weather would be the only element of chance. Under the contract, if the auction price exceeds a certain amount Direct Energy can ask for an adjustment for the last five months of the contract. The Water Department will be going forward with the same vendor and the Town may also take part.

Mr. Schmertzler moved that the School Committee vote to grant the administration permission to enter into a long-term contract of up to five years for commodity electricity with Direct Energy, to be effective no later than the first meter read after January 1, 2007. Ms. Antia seconded the motion. Ms. Manos, Mr. Schmertzler, and Ms. Antia voted in favor, with Ms. Allen and Ms. Trask concurring. Ms. Dobrow was not present for the vote but returned immediately after it was taken.

X. Old Business
None.

XI. New Business
The School Committee will have a short meeting on December 20 at 11 AM.

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. Allen and Ms. Trask concurring. The meeting was adjourned at 9:23 PM.

Respectfully submitted,
Sara Rolley, School Committee Recording Secretary