

MINUTES OF THE LINCOLN SCHOOL COMMITTEE
Thursday, December 6, 2012
Hartwell Building, Lincoln, MA
OPEN SESSION

Present: Tom Sander (Vice Chair), Al Schmertzler, Tim Christenfeld, Jen James. Also present: Becky McFall (Superintendent), Mary Sterling (Assistant Superintendent), Stephanie Powers (Administrator for Student Services), Buckner Creel (Administrator for Business and Finance).
Absent: Jennifer Glass (Chair), Lisa Pizarro (Hanscom Civilian School Liaison Officer).

I. Greetings and Call to Order

Mr. Sander, Vice Chair, called the meeting to order at 7:07 pm. He announced that there are no cameras at tonight's session.

II. Chairperson's and Members' Reports

Mr. Schmertzler visited Susan Taylor at the Trauma Unit at Lahey Clinic. She has multiple fractures, and they will wait for a week before she has surgery and a long recuperation. The Committee members sent well wishes.

Ms. James attended the Hanscom tree lighting on Tuesday and saw Principal Erich Ledebuhr playing the bells with the choir.

Mr. Christenfeld reported that the technology review committee had its first meeting today and is a big enthusiastic group comprised of Principals Steve McKenna and Erich Ledebuhr, Michael Haines, the technology staff, three teachers, and Mr. Christenfeld.

Mr. Sander reported 80 people attended last night's meeting in the Smith Gym. The Massachusetts School Building Authority's [MSBA] letter should be received by tomorrow, and the question is whether to withdraw from the MSBA process or to give the MSBA another proposal. The next joint meeting with the School Building Committee [SBC] and School Committee will be Tuesday, December 18 at 7:30 pm. They will arrange a conference call with the MSBA before that meeting, and the agenda will include a review of that call and a discussion about the letter. Between now and the end of February, they will gather input on the criteria used to weigh the school building proposals, alternative ideas, and there may be separate components, including a survey to the Town.

Mr. Christenfeld noted there will be a series of conversations and an educational effort with influential people in Town. They need to inform people of the costs of dropping the existing proposal. The SBC and School Committee will revise the process or look at different options. Mr. Schmertzler reported that his peers were furious that the project did not get the required two-thirds majority but noted it did receive a majority vote.

III. Public Comments

None.

IV. Consent Agenda

None.

V. Time Scheduled Appointments

A. Standards Based Reporting and Assessment

Documents: 1) Memorandum from Mary Sterling to School Committee, dated November 29, 2012, Re: Update on Standards-based Assessment and Reporting; 2) Sample Draft Grade 8 Report Card, dated December 2012

Dr. Sterling reviewed her report on standards-based report cards with a PowerPoint presentation. The work began in 2006. She noted that standards-based reporting focuses on what students learn instead of letter grades and is based on a four-point scale, and while it is still unusual, high schools and colleges will have to decide how to handle it as it becomes more popular. Good assessment informs instruction, is accurate and fair, gives useful feedback, makes progress possible, and provides challenge for those students who need more. Teachers are clear with expectations and can adjust their instruction for students. The scoring gives more information about student progress than a report card with letter grades.

They rewrote the English Language Arts [ELA] descriptors for grades K-6 last spring. This year they have focused on the key descriptors for grades 7 and 8, and it is a hard transition. They have

piloted scores in 8th grade for every standard. Communicating these new standards to parents is important, and she is hosting a scoring session tomorrow for the PTO at 8:15 am in the Story Room to score ELA, math, and science and will hold it again with parents at any time. She's had conversations and coffees about this information and reported one parent, who was skeptical at first, now loves the assessment system and understood it after the presentation at Curriculum Night. Another parent commented that standards-based report cards are more helpful than grades when students receive good feedback. Another parent said it is de-motivating for students not to aim for As.

Dr. Sterling asked for advice on her draft of a letter for 7th and 8th grade parents about the report cards. Mr. Schmertzler asked that she invite parents to give feedback. Mr. Christenfeld heard some parents are competitive and want to know the class rank of their children. Dr. Sterling said they do not keep rankings. Mr. Sander noted that this system changes the reference for parents as goals are set for students. He said teachers should also be assessed to see if they are meeting goals.

Dr. Sterling reviewed the draft of the 8th grade report card, which will have letter grades in five subjects in addition to the other information this year. Mr. Christenfeld remarked on the slight disjunction between ELA and history; if you receive a 2 on the Revolutionary War, you cannot go back to change that, but with English, you can work on many things. Dr. Sterling said there are content and process/skills standards. The standards-based cards are based on the summative assessments (can you show me what you have learned) and not whether students have completed homework. They will decide later whether to continue to use letter grades for 8th grade next year. As 8th grade is the transition year, and parents believe the high school needs letter grades for placement in appropriate classes, it is a hard issue. The Lincoln-Sudbury high school curriculum leader indicated that the standards-based report cards give more information for them to place students, and Mr. Christenfeld suggested that information be shared with parents.

Mr. Sander thanked her for the huge amount of impressive work and looks forward to more information on the process.

B. Discussion of FY2014 Budget Document: Budget Book, FY2014

Dr. McFall said the Committee will meet with the Finance Committee on December 12 at 6 pm for dinner and at 7 pm the meeting will start in this room, and she will make a presentation on the school budget.

Dr. McFall updated the Committee on the Governor's budget, which had a shortfall of \$256 million the end of October, and they are projecting a shortfall of \$540 million in FY2013. Chapter 9C funding cuts will affect the circuit breaker reimbursement for special education costs by 5%. Mr. Creel received conflicting views on the exact amount of the cuts, but there are no anticipated cuts in transportation for regional schools. Dr. McFall said the Governor is looking for expanded powers to cut unrestricted local aid, and many are mobilizing against this. The concern will be raised at the next few meetings.

The budget proposal for FY2014 for the Lincoln schools is \$10,008,928 with \$144,820 in improvement initiatives. The proposal for the Hanscom schools is \$11,426,485 with improvement initiatives of \$180,778, and the Band 3 price is \$11,259,242, making a gap of \$167,243. Dr. McFall showed PowerPoint slides with the improvement initiatives for FY2014. Additional details are in the budget book, where the improvement initiatives are listed at the end of each section. Mr. Christenfeld asked if they have ranked the initiatives in order of priority in case there are state budget cuts.

Mr. Sander asked Dr. McFall to look at the Lincoln enrollment and the class sizes in grades 1, 4, 5, and 8 to see whether they could conserve resources to possibly cut two sections. Lincoln is high in per pupil costs compared with the neighboring towns. Dr. McFall noted that in two grades—2 and 3—the class size is above the maximum. Kindergarten and grade one class sizes are just below the maximum. Mr. Sander agreed that it was too risky to cut the number of kindergarten sections. While other members were willing to talk about making cuts, they were not sure that cutting sections was the answer.

Mr. Creel noted the question is the amount of risk they are willing to take by having more sections versus the risk that the Finance Committee would take on to open another section, should it be needed. The Finance Committee would need to be willing to make a reserve fund transfer, and the school administration would need to hire a teacher, always more challenging at the last minute.

Dr. McFall raised that the district invests in each teacher and asked if we would want to let a teacher go. Usually the first teacher to be let go is the last one hired. Dr. Sterling worried that while

there are enough teachers in their first three years, they could lose the freshness and energy of younger teachers. Ms. Powers mentioned that as a highly inclusive school district, when we lose class sections, it limits options for special education students. Dr. McFall said while it was possible to cut sections, it was not preferable.

Dr. McFall will bring additional information on what it would look like to cut sections in Lincoln for the next meeting.

Dr. McFall noted that the Hanscom gap of \$167,243 is driven by enrollment and recommends that it be handled with a reserve fund transfer. The enrollment is at the top end of Band 3, but the staffing level is at Band 4 with additional special education tutors and preschool.

Dr. McFall will contact the contracting officer at Hanscom to discuss what would happen if sequestration occurs with the federal government. Mr. Creel said they have the funding for FY2013, the issue would be with FY2014. He noted the Hanscom Middle School building project has gone out to bid, which is positive, and he heard at 4:30 pm today that the charrette for the design of the Hanscom Primary School will be held the end of February. Both developments give them hope that the contract to operate the Hanscom schools will be exercised for each of the five years.

Mr. Sander thanked them for their work.

C. Discussion of 2013-2014 School Year Calendar

Documents: 1) Lincoln Public Schools 2013-2014, Draft 1, dated November 29, 2012; 2) Lincoln Public Schools 2013-2014, Draft 2, dated November 29, 2012; 3) Lincoln Public Schools 2013-2014, Draft 3, dated November 29, 2012

Dr. McFall reviewed the three draft calendars for the next school year. One big issue is the Hanscom Middle School building project, where the goal is to be ready to be moved on July 1. Mr. Creel noted that it takes a few days to pack and a week to move, and there will be a “drop dead” moving date in the contract.

The drafts differ on the dates that school would start for teachers and for students, with the key being whether teachers return before or after Labor Day. If the School Committee votes on a calendar that has teachers returning before Labor Day, the Lincoln Teachers’ Association [LTA] needs to vote to approve the pre-Labor Day start. The Lincoln-Sudbury Regional High School calendar is the same as Draft 2.

The Committee indicated its interest in Draft 1 that has teachers returning before Labor Day and students returning after Labor Day. Dr. McFall will send the three versions to the LTA to learn their preference, and their meeting is tentatively scheduled for January 16, 2013. Dr. McFall will let the Committee know the results of the LTA vote, and the School Committee will vote on the calendar at its January 24, 2013 meeting.

VI. Superintendent’s Report

Document: None.

Dr. McFall attended many conferences and workshops this week. She and Dr. Sterling went to the Leading Forward conference in Boston about student engagement. Ms. Glass and teachers Fred Lipton and Terry Green attended a conference on the Educator Evaluation process with Dr. McFall. Lincoln K-4 Principal Steve McKenna, Hanscom Middle School Principal Erich Ledebuhr, and Dr. McFall went to a workshop on a technology plan, which will help the Technology Review committee.

Dr. McFall will attend the METCO conference tomorrow.

She also reported that KLT Recycling Industries visited the 8th grade science class of Julie Reynolds. The 8th grade engineering class donated \$500 to the Birthday Wishes Foundation, which gives birthday parties to homeless children. Dr. McFall asked if the press release could go in the Lincoln Journal and the PTO Link.

Mr. Sander thanked her for her work.

VII. Curriculum

Document: None.

Dr. Sterling attended a 4th grade math class that was differentiated with student groups divided according to four levels of achievement. Students were not so excited to communicate their reasoning on math problems.

Dr. Sterling also attended the 7th grade class that is studying the carbon cycle. The Drumlin Farm naturalist, funded by the Lincoln Land Conservation Trust [LLCT], had student groups sketching

the series of carbon cycles, and Dr. Sterling said it was great to see the grant in action for outdoor learning.

Mr. Sander thanked her for her work.

VIII. Policy

None.

IX. Facilities and Financial

A. Warrant Approval

Document: None.

Mr. Creel presented the payroll warrants totaling \$656,646.32 and the accounts payable warrants totaling \$91,422.12 for a total of \$748,068.44. Mr. Schmertzler reviewed the warrants and recommended that they be approved. Mr. Schmertzler moved to approve the warrants, with Ms. James seconding the motion. The Committee voted unanimously to approve the warrants.

X. Old Business

None.

XI. New Business

None.

XII. Approval of Minutes

None.

XIII. Information Enclosures

Document: Letter from Jennifer Glass to Mary Pichetti, Director of Capital Planning, Massachusetts School Building Authority, dated November 15, 2012, Re: Lincoln Public Schools—Failed Town Meeting Vote

There was no discussion on this item; it was for the Committee's information.

XIV. Adjournment

On motion by Mr. Sander, seconded by Mr. Schmertzler, the Committee voted unanimously to adjourn at 9:37 pm. The next School Committee meeting is scheduled for Thursday, December 20 at 7 pm.

Respectfully submitted,
Sarah G. Marcotte
Recording Secretary