

MINUTES OF THE LINCOLN SCHOOL COMMITTEE
LINCOLN SUDBURY REGIONAL DISTRICT SCHOOL COMMITTEE
SUDBURY SCHOOL COMMITTEE
TRI-DISTRICT PUBLIC FORUM
COMMUNITY FORUM ON DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION
Monday, October 23, 2017
Reed Gym, Lincoln Public Schools, Ballfield Road, Lincoln, MA
OPEN SESSION

Lincoln School Committee Present: Tim Christenfeld (Chairperson), Peter Borden (Vice Chairperson), Tara Mitchell. Also present: Becky McFall (Superintendent), Jessica Rose (Assistant Superintendent), Mary Emmons (Administrator for Student Services).

Absent: Al Schmertzler, Jena Salon, Laurel Wironen (Hanscom Educational Liaison), Simone Johnson (METCO Representative), Buckner Creel (Administrator for Business and Finance), Robert Ford (Director of Technology).

Lincoln-Sudbury Regional District School Committee Present: Kevin Matthews (Chair), Gerald Quirk (Vice Chair), Radha Gargeya, Craig Gruber, Nancy Marshall, Patricia Mostue. Also present: Bella Wong (Superintendent and Principal).

Absent: Noone.

Sudbury School Committee Present: Christine Hogan (Chair), Richard Tinsley (Vice Chair), Margaret Helon, Lisa Kouchakdjian. Also present: Anne Wilson (Superintendent), Kim Swain (Assistant Superintendent).

Absent: Lucie St. George.

1. Welcome and Introductions

Mr. Christenfeld, Lincoln Chairperson, called the open session to order at 7:13 pm. He thanked Ms. Hogan, Mr. Matthews, and all those attending. The forum is the third that the districts have held. The forum was taped and will be available for viewing on Sudbury TV and on the Lincoln School Committee's website, www.lincnet.org.

Mr. Matthews noted the tremendous turnout and said he hoped it would spark more interest in attending their Committee meetings. He said they would like to have an even more successful forum next year.

Ms. Hogan thanked Lincoln and Dr. McFall for hosting the event. She said that Mr. Christenfeld and Mr. Matthews are the best gentlemen with whom she has worked. She thanked Dr. Smith, who was the Principal of the Curtis Middle School in Sudbury and is now the Executive Director of the National Center for Race Amity. She said that the topic of diversity is near and dear to their hearts.

2. District Demographic Overview

Document: Document on Diversity of the School Districts, prepared by Timothy Christenfeld

Mr. Christenfeld said that the three chairs began discussions in July that led to the forum, sparked by a *Boston Globe* article about Lincoln-Sudbury Regional High School and the METCO program. Since the August events in Charlottesville, Virginia, the local conversation about diversity has become a national conversation.

Mr. Christenfeld asked what is meant by diversity. Some of the areas include ethnic, religious, sexual identity, neurodiversity, economic, and racial. He said that METCO and racial issues were not a focus of the evening; the focus was on diversity in many parts. He read statistics for the three districts. In the Lincoln School, 15.4% of the student body, or 84 students, are Boston students. In Sudbury K-8, 2.5% of the students are from Boston families, and at the Lincoln-Sudbury High School 5.8%. He noted that Lincoln has seen an increase in the number of students on Individualized Education Plans [IEPs]; 21% of students are now in Special Education. At the high school, it is 15.4%, and in Sudbury, 14.1%. 5% of students in each district are classified as ‘economically disadvantaged’ by the state. In Lincoln, 6% of students are English Language Learners – compared to 3.1% in Sudbury and 3.6% at L-S. Students with high needs make up 23.6% of the Lincoln student body and 22.3% of the high school student body, and 19.5% of Sudbury students. When the current students and their families self-select their race, 58.9% chose “white” in Lincoln, 79.8% chose “white” in Sudbury, and 80.6% at L-S.

Mr. Christenfeld said that confidentiality and privacy can limit how much school officials can discuss specific incidents. He said tonight’s forum would be important because collaboration among the three districts is healthy, because the dialogue itself is important, and because the Committees could hear what works and what might not work in the schools.

3. Introductory Remarks

Document: None.

Dr. William Smith welcomed everyone. He said that Mr. Nix and Ms. Merra were his students when he was the Curtis Middle School Principal.

He hoped that the audience would ask questions and bring ideas to move the communities forward for more access and equity. A question is how to diversify the faculty, and out-of-the-box thinking on these issues is welcome. He noted that raising funds for these issues is necessary.

Dr. Smith said that when people hear race amity, it means friendship. They chose amity in the sphere of human relationships. While we love and treasure our families first in our relationships, we can love and treasure our friends even more than family members because friendship allows people to support, to advise, to correct, and to help friends become better humans. He said that cross-racial friendships are important and are in our history, as evidenced by the PBS documentary, *An American Story: Race Amity and Tradition*.

Dr. Smith said that we all know that there is racism in our country. He noted that we know much less about the parallel moral counterweight of cross-racial, cross-cultural friendships that are key. He said that we need to explore, to understand, and to celebrate these friendships. It was his wish that tonight, questions and ideas are critical and creative.

Dr. Smith said his wife served on the METCO Board of Directors, and she did many things to make these cross-racial friendships happen. He said we should draw on her ideas and experience. He said he was delighted to be in attendance and he hopes the evening does not begin and end on mere words instead of actions.

4. Invited Community Member Presentations

Document: None.

Reverend Manish Mishra-Marzetti, Senior Minister at First Parish in Lincoln, and Lincoln resident and parent, reiterated the importance of amity and friendship. He said there is amity across any difference, and in the spirit of love, each person can give the gift of their presence.

Reverend Mishra-Marzetti said it can be uncomfortable to hear about the experiences of others when they are not good experiences. Sharing experiences is a vulnerable thing and is hard in a way, but it is in the sharing of hard experiences that we learn and grow. Rev. Mishra-Marzetti said that he read the *Boston Globe* article about the METCO program in the Lincoln-Sudbury school, and he said that the vibe resonated with him, and he extrapolated from it.

Rev. Mishra-Marzetti shared two stories about his and his family's experience. As a newcomer to the area, there are get togethers, and he and his family met other families with students in the same grades as his two children, who are of African-American heritage and who have been adopted. He was talking with one parent, who was white, and another white parent came up to them and talked with the white person and ignored Rev. Mishra-Marzetti. This third parent invited the white person's children for a playgroup space. All of their children are the same age. Rev. Mishra-Marzetti was ignored and talked around as if he was not there. He noted that it was clear that all people are not welcomed to Lincoln in the same way. He said that they have been here for three years now, but his son has yet to be invited to a play date. While they have tried to get play dates for their son, it has not happened. He wonders about that.

The second story was in May, Rev. Mishra-Marzetti's son went to school on photo day, came home in tears, and cried for a long time. His son said he was not handsome, and the students said his skin was the color of poop, not brown. Rev. Mishra-Marzetti does not want any students to fall through the cracks. He said that the school staff and superintendent are very talented, but he asked what the social context is when some people are included more than others. He is concerned about his children's self-esteem and whether being excluded will impact them. He hopes the focus on social-emotional curriculum will include an examination of self-esteem.

Ms. Judy Merra, a former content specialist at the Lincoln Public Schools and a Sudbury resident, grew up in Sudbury. She said she has lived with privilege because she is a white woman. She said she has never experienced doors being shut to her, or being followed around in a store because someone was afraid she would shoplift. She and her husband have four children, three of them are their biological children, and they adopted one child from Ethiopia, so they have a transracial family. She said she has been at the intersection of roles as an educator in Lincoln, which is a unique district.

Ms. Merra said the friendship piece was important to her. She lives near the high school, and her children have friends from Boston who have enriched their lives. She has

noticed the differences between her white sons and black son. She said that at age five, only her black son was followed in the store, and she has had to address the “n” word that was uttered on the playground with her children. She noted that she has had similar experiences to Rev. Mishra-Marzetti. She is concerned about the implicit bias of white teachers and is working on a doctoral degree in the subject.

Ms. Merra said there are things that we can do better. She noted that when we hear the word diversity, we first think of race, but she asked all to consider what challenges there are to diversity. She noted that there is a difference between equity versus equality. For example, one of her children needed glasses, but three of her children do not. Treating her children the same would require that she purchase glasses for each child, even if three of them did not need them. She said the question that should be asked is “Is this fair and equitable to all of our student communities?” The senior class at Lincoln-Sudbury hosts a Jamaican Jam, which is an all-night celebration that ends at 5:00 am, making it hard for Boston parents to pick up their students. The school found ways so that Boston students could participate, and they have for the past two years.

Ms. Merra said that parents and teachers need to ask questions so that they can include all students in activities. One of her sons participated in a math club before school started, but Boston students cannot participate. She said that as educators, they need to continually ask if things are equitable. She urged that the towns and schools ensure an equitable opportunity and meet the needs of all students.

Mr. Scott Nix, Sudbury Chief of Police and a Sudbury resident, grew up in Sudbury. He noted that he and his father are graduates of Lincoln-Sudbury Regional High School, and he has known Dr. Smith for a long time. He said that there is a basic understanding that each person has to respect others. All need to be respected no matter their opinions, but when voicing opinions, they need to be voiced respectfully. He said that he was a Marine, where he learned that it did not matter who you were, and you were there for each other, and each person was respected. He noted that in law enforcement, they need to rethink things, and they are reflecting across the board on how to gain the respect of residents. Chief Nix said that sometimes the police do not deal with a great clientele, but each person is treated with respect.

Mr. Jason Medeiros, Associate Principal of Lincoln-Sudbury Regional High School, said that one lens for diversity at the high school is Project Lincoln-Sudbury. Students are being taught to have the willingness to ask tough questions. He said that he has heard voices this evening that echoed, “I don’t feel like I belong here.” He said two of the school’s core values are respect for human difference and cultivating community. He said the adults have to model these values for students. Mr. Medeiros said the Project started last year, and the school had two large assemblies, one for 9th and 10th graders and one for 11th and 12th graders, during World Language Week. He said the 9th graders have had diversity training, which addresses how to have tough conversations. Some of the pieces covered in the training are that it is okay to not know what to say, that students can accept forgiveness, and that it is also okay to be uncomfortable. A muralist will be at the school in two weeks and will address with students the question: Who will we be now? The muralist will engage students on what the mural should say. He said that Lincoln-Sudbury has a role in social justice, and there are murals in the school that address the role. He said they are reflecting on how to make reference to their core values in all

classes at the school. He said that one of their jobs is to prepare students to have difficult conversations.

Mr. Medeiros said the school is hosting an event on Monday, November 20, and they would like all from Lincoln, Boston, and Sudbury to attend to set the stage for a new era to reframe the core values at Lincoln-Sudbury Regional High School. There were flyers about the event.

Dr. Anne Wilson, Superintendent of Sudbury Public Schools, said it was important to have conversations on diversity and inclusion. She said that if there are individual issues, please reach out to school staff because they can help and they want to hear about issues. She said the stories can be very personal. The school staff hears stories, but the staff has a responsibility to maintain privacy. She said that there are federal and state laws, including the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act [FERPA], Massachusetts General Laws [MGL], and the Code of Massachusetts Regulations [CMR] that the staff and administration are bound by. She said they work together to figure out that each student is welcomed, and families are their partners.

Dr. Smith thanked each for their presentation and opened the floor for the public discussion.

5. Public Discussion

Document: None.

Ms. Sharon Antia, Lincoln resident, said she is glad to have the conversation. She said that she thought Ms. Merra was asking the right questions and noted that the issues are about how adults model the core values at the schools. She asked how many people had friends and relationships with people who are different from themselves. She was thrilled that Mr. Medeiros told about the work at L-S on difficult conversations because she said she was raised that if one does not have anything nice to say, one does not say anything. She asked what the ways were to have these difficult conversations.

Dr. Smith said there are resources that teach how to have the conversations. The National Center for Race Amity developed Breaking It Down Towards E Pluribus Unum, a race dialogue board game to promote cross racial/cross cultural amity.

Superintendent Wong said that education comes from school, home, and the world, and each place contributes one-third. She said students need role models who show them how to talk about feelings and ideas. She said that adults have to step up and be the models. She asked that each person share his or her thinking and talk. She noted that the Facing History protocol shows people to trust themselves and trust their communities, and practice these conversations. She said that the communities are fortunate because we can practice with each other because there is a safe environment where people can express themselves.

Ms. Chris Damon, who grew up in Lincoln and has been a substitute teacher at Lincoln-Sudbury, has an adopted son from El Salvador. She noted that the Lincoln Public Schools have done a great job educating him. She said that Lincoln is too white, and she said her son is losing his racial identity. She said that white parents of children of color work to find safe playmates, but as her son has grown older, he was perceived as a bad playmate. She urged the schools to do more outreach to hire teachers who look like their students. She said when her son arrived, he had a tutor who looked like him, but

there are no tutors who look like him now. She said she was concerned about the way those problems were solved at Lincoln-Sudbury, and that there was a choice on how to solve them. She has heard not great things, and conflict is pushed under the rug. She mentioned the students who call themselves confederates, and hiring decisions where a person of color was not hired and a teacher who was in an anti-group was not brought back. She is asking whether her son should go to Minuteman instead of L-S and is worried that L-S be a safe environment. She said her son told her that they cannot talk about politics in school because the Republicans might be offended.

Dr. Smith suggested that there are strategies for hiring, and he wanted to keep the discussion going beyond tonight's meeting.

Mr. Gerald Quirk said that they could not comment on personnel decisions and noted that there are multiple sides of these stories. He said he has heard that some issues are swept under the rug. He said there are things floating around on social media that do not happen at school, but they do affect students at school. He said that the Boston *Globe* article discussed issues that are not unique to L-S, but students came to the Committee and told them that they did not feel welcome at L-S. He said that these conversations need trust, and it was good that the students came to them because at least there was trust there. Mr. Quirk said they talked with Ms. Merrra about the issue of Boston students being able to participate in evening and weekend activities, and that while it is tough, they can do things to help students. He said that this year, seniors have shuttled Boston students to Alewife. These activities build bridges to develop trust. He thanked everyone for coming.

Superintendent Wong said the *Globe* article gave perceptions to people in the room. She said that while she is usually reticent with reporters, she spent lots of time with the reporter. She said the schools are committed to deal with issues when they arise. She said there is a lot to say about their struggles, but they also do proactive work. They promote feelings of belonging and continue to work on it. She said students still face microaggressions even though the towns are committed to the METCO program. She said it was hard work to do together, and she acknowledged that some students feel that they do not belong. She said the *Globe* article did not represent the community.

Dr. Smith suggested that they not dwell on the *Globe* article, and he had heard only one person mention it this evening. He said they want ideas to advance the change that they want. Adults need to model behavior and set examples. He noted that a new law in Massachusetts has established Race Amity Day, which will be the second Sunday in June. The Governor will issue annually a proclamation to all 351 cities and towns to promote cross-cultural activities.

Dr. McFall thanked everyone for attending. She felt a thickness in the air and that there was something that the audience wanted to hear from the school committees and administrations. She said they were not here to talk about single events, but this was about the day-to-day interactions between students and families. She said there is much room for growth. Dr. McFall acknowledged that there are areas of challenge, such as the number of Boston students who are on IEPs and have had disciplinary actions taken against them. She said they do not know the answers, but students learn one-third from society, which amplifies all that happens at school. She said another issue is how to guide the faculty in navigating the political and social terrain. She agreed that they need conversation, there are problems, and they want growth. How do we engage the right

people in the room? Harvard graduate students are going to be working in the Lincoln Public Schools for the next four weeks, and they will ask what the experience of African-American students is and what the experience of white students is. They will look at how they identify students who need to have IEPs and discipline data. She will ask if they are approaching the students in equitable ways.

Mr. Morgan Molloy, a Sudbury resident and parent, warned that when the community starts conversations like this, that we can think too broadly. He noted that there were some Sudbury residents, most Lincoln residents, and one Boston resident in the room. He urged people to make connections and make it easier for Boston residents to come in and connect.

A former Sudbury Superintendent said that some things have not changed. He said that we should continue to push our families and ourselves. He said they made mistakes 40 years ago, and while they increased the METCO program, they did not provide much help. He said the schools are doing a better job than before, and that the students go to wonderful schools, but the task is not ever finished.

Ms. Margaret Helon started her teaching career in 1995. She said diversity means all colors. The question is how do the students acclimate into the district. She mentioned that diversity has been an issue in the four school districts that she has taught in. She had one Latino 2nd grader tell her that "I don't like white people." She and her white husband have multiracial children, and she said that people should be proud of who they are individually. She said she has been harassed for not being white. She said that the majority of students do not know their heritage.

Another woman was grateful for the forum, and she has four students in the district. She said that diversity is a community and not a school issue. She is upset that she has heard many say that Boston students should be grateful that they are coming to school in Lincoln and Sudbury. She said it is tough for African-American students. She suggested that they get all stakeholders together. She is grateful for L-S, and she asked if there was a way that coaches and club advisors get a piece of this information. She looks to coaches to teach, but it feels like there are no checks and balances on coaches. L-S culture feels like belonging, but only if you are in that community. It can be a tough choice, for example, if a Boston student wants to go to basketball practice, they need a ride home or have to stay overnight.

Another woman from Sudbury said there a Sudbury Action Group on Facebook made up of Sudbury parents and residents, and that the group should perhaps include Lincoln residents too. She asked that people please join the group. She commended the schools and said that we can do more. She said their group is a safe environment for the community, and we have a lot to learn.

Another woman, parent of two students in the schools, said that she applauded the 1/3 of education from school, home, and the world and said we need to act. 1) It is important to celebrate differences and cultures, and she sees a lack of that. She said that students need to understand different cultures, and if the schools can do that, it is great. 2) Teachers should choose books that make their students think, and they can make a difference in the curriculum. 3) Open ended projects and questions are key because they promote give and take and the pushing of ideas and discussing differences of opinion.

Mrs. LaRonda Shedd, a Boston resident and parent of a Lincoln 7th grader, noted that many of the comments has focused on Boston families, but there are children of color who live in Lincoln and Sudbury who face the same challenges.

Another person asked where the men were as they were talking about diversity.

Ms. Kate Molloy, a junior at L-S, said they can do small things to influence. The Girls Rugby Team is the most diverse team at school. She said they should ask themselves why it is the case. She said it was the coach who helps to organize rides and places to stay and provides support to the team. She said the coach and the team has had a great impact on her.

Dr. Smith reiterated that it was all about relationships. He said that in our homes, we should make every effort to address the question who are our friends. He said there is a National Amity Conference and clinic where they talk to students. His website is www.raceamity.org. He hoped that people would also attend in the spring.

Dr. Wilson said we all have biases that may not be ill intended but can have an impact.

Dr. Smith thanked everyone for coming.

6. Adjournment

The forum ended at 9:08 pm.

The next Lincoln School Committee meeting is scheduled for Thursday, October 26, 2017 at 7:00 pm in the Hartwell Multipurpose Room, Ballfield Road, Lincoln.

Respectfully submitted,
Sarah G. Marcotte
Recording Secretary