

MINUTES OF THE LINCOLN SCHOOL COMMITTEE
Thursday, January 3, 2007 – Open Session

** This meeting combines the December 20, 2007 (cancelled due to inclement weather) and the January 3, 2008 scheduled meetings*

Present: Julie Dobrow (Chair), Laurie Manos (Vice-Chair), Sharon Antia, Tom Sander, Louann Robinson (Hanscom Representative) and Sharon Gillepsy (Hanscom Representative)

Absent: Al Schmertzler

Also present: Mickey Brandmeyer (Superintendent), Mary Sterling (Assistant Superintendent), Buckner Creel (Administrator for Business and Finance)

I. Greetings and Call to Order – 7:08pm

Julie Dobrow called the meeting to order at 7:08pm.

II. Chairperson's and Members' Reports

None

III. Public Comments

None

IV. Consent Agenda

None

**V. Time Scheduled Appointments – moved to later in meeting*

**VI. Superintendent's Report – moved to later in meeting*

VII. Curriculum

**A. Report from Foreign Language Department Regarding Starting Language in Earlier Grades.
(Report: *Elementary Language Program Information*)**

Mary Sterling and the Content Specialist for Foreign Language, Karena Hansen, had been working together on a report to present to the School Committee with regard to implementing foreign language into the lower grades (K-3). Ms. Sterling noted that one of the district's goals this year in Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment was to evaluate the feasibility of extending foreign language instruction into earlier grades. The agenda noted the work plan for this goal called for the following:

1. Involve world language teacher in researching models in comparable communities.
2. Develop possible options for Lincoln Public Schools
3. Report to School Committee on options with implications for hiring and resources.

Mary Sterling and the SC recognized Karena Hansen to present. Ms. Hansen reiterated the goals and added that the "Elementary Language Program" would require books, software, staff training, etc. She emphasized that there were many things beyond the initial funds that were needed to make this program successful, noting that the first and most important was making sure that this program was implemented in a way that it would be sustainable long-term.

Julie Dobrow complimented the report, commenting that it was very professional and informative. She concurred that it needed to be thoughtfully planned out to keep it ongoing. She asked if there were ways to use current equipment and only invest in needed software which would lower the initial investment costs. Ms. Hansen responded that they were looking at the software now. She felt that with the current active school year, it wouldn't be until the summer before the tech department was freed up to work on completing her request. Ms. Dobrow inquired about the 7th and 8th grade students and if this program would allow for them to visit the lower grades as "mentors" in order to get the lower grade students excited and engaged about language study, even if there was no other formal instruction in grade K-3. Ms. Hansen replied that it would be very possible and felt that the only constraints would be the scheduling conflicts.

Tom Sander felt that expansion of language in an earlier age could lead to higher SAT scores. Karena Hansen responded that foreign language instruction that begins in grades below the 3rd improves cognitive thinking; especially abstract. She noted that sources have stated that tests grades, including the SAT, have been higher since implementing the second language but added that she could provide specific citations from research at the next meeting.

Tom Sander questioned if there were any schools that had stopped the program due to reasons other than a loss of grant or unqualified teachers. Ms. Hansen responded that there were none. Mr. Sander then asked for an explanation and elaboration between the "FLES" and "Content Base FLES" programs. Karena Hansen replied that the CBF, or "Content Base FLES",

involved learning the language and content material. She added that this program model integrated content like science and math. She stated that the program that would be used, FLES, was more simplified where the student is basically learning the text of the language only. Mary Sterling added that the CBF was absolutely dependent on the relationship of the classroom teacher and language teacher which required the two teachers having sufficient time to plan together. She noted that this could make the CBF program challenging. Ms. Sterling then addressed the FLES program noting that it only required a language teacher although it was always helpful for the classroom teacher to observe so that the foreign language teachings can be reflected during regular class time.

Laurie Manos noted that she was concerned about the math and science curriculum now so she didn't feel more needed to be added to those that could potentially overwhelm a student or cause confusion. She did request information on the budgeting implications. She also inquired about the districts that were included in the report that did have foreign language in the lower grades and how they were chosen to be included. Karena Hansen noted the question about the budget and stated she would have a specific cost estimates soon. She answered the second question about the districts as being the ones close in proximity. She added that as part of the EDCO program she already knew many of the directors and had met with them. She noted that more could have been included but that there was a deadline for the report and many coordinators of the program were not available or did not respond to her inquires about their program. Ms. Hansen said that the initial list for participating districts came from the DOE and that the list was fairly old and possibly didn't reflect the districts that had recently implemented the program. She also noted that there were schools on this list that no longer had the program.

Laurie Manos requested additional information that would include:

1. Evidence to show the academic benefits of introducing second language study at earlier grades and its possible relationship to academic achievement
2. 1 to 2 studies that showed the capacity of the school and students to take on this expansion. Ms. Hansen noted this and stated she would bring this information back to the SC.

Sharon Gillespy expressed concern about the turnover at Hanscom and noted that it would be difficult to use this program as it was intended which is to build year-to-year. Ms. Hansen noted that the turnover at Hanscom is always a concern and a challenge. She commented that Hanscom would need more of the content base (CBR) teaching than the FLES program which is only effective if built on yearly.

Julie Dobrow asked Mary Sterling and Karena Hansen if there would be a way to introduce this program in "baby steps" to Lincoln, like it is at Hanscom, by adding it to the 4th grade first. She added that the goal was still to make the two campuses more parallel. She inquired what the schedule shifts would be. Mary Sterling responded that the schedule had to allow for the program in addition to the budgeting so all that would have to be looked into.

Sharon Antia stated her concern on the availability of resources, adding that although it was important that it would add to the struggles the district and schools already have with scheduling and the budget. Louann Robinson asked implementing an after school program like a Spanish Club.

Laurie Manos noted that the bigger districts have more resources for these types of programs. She noted that the brighter students can handle the load and reap the benefits of studying a second language whereas other students, especially emergent readers, will drop out. Karena Hansen mentioned that this was why the FLES program is more widely used (which was the lowest contact with the language instructor to learn the basics of the language; develops interest for studying the language in a higher grade).

Julie Dobrow stated that she felt the SC wanted to learn more and requested there be more research done so that questions brought up could be answered. She also noted that determining the cost is an important factor.

Mickey Brandmeyer asked that a few things be addressed concerning the additional research on the "Elementary Language Program":

1. Bring more research, or studies, to show academic benefit
2. Ask principals about the implementation and placement of the program in schools
3. Discuss what an after school program would look like

Mary Sterling voiced her concern with limiting the language choice to Spanish noting that it may deter students from choosing another language later. She added that she didn't feel implementing the "FLEX" program would be beneficial since it would only meet once a week. She noted that the placement of the program could either be started in Kindergarten or worked down the grades slowly from fourth grade. She also stated that to approve and implement this program would really require a multi-year commitment to it.

B. Update from Task Force on High Achieving Students

(Document: *Members and Scheduled Meetings*)

Mary Sterling presented an update on the Task Force Committee that was established to study the issues of high achieving students, evaluate the existing program options, and propose additional strategies to meet the needs of those students. She provided a list of the members and noted they had already met twice. She reported that David Henry Feldman, a professor from Tufts University, had met with the group at their last meeting and discussed how there had not been many changes in the fundamental issues facing the field of gifted and talented education in the last thirty years. Ms. Sterling added that Professor Feldman had acknowledged that the field was in a transformation stage right now as educators faced the issue of identification and the definition of gifted and talented students. She felt the meeting was very positive because it allowed the member to be informed and educated before trying to make important suggestions for the district to consider. She shared the book they had been using as a resource: “Critical Issues and Practices in Gifted Education”.

The members list showed all the dates for the meetings of the Task Force and Tom Sander asked if there was a plan for how the remaining four meetings (there were six in all) were going to be utilized to get everything accomplished. Mary Sterling responded that they were almost there, noting that the meetings established beliefs and defined where the district stands to implement the plans. She reiterated that the information and knowledge that the members were learning was vital. She reflected on remarks by Professor Feldman noting that he said instead of IQ tests or labeling children, it was better to look at each child’s individual needs; that nothing was black and white.

C. Update from K-5 Math Materials Review Committee

(Report: *Progress Report on the Work of the Math Materials Review Committee*)

Mary Sterling reported that the K-5 Math Materials Review Committee, which had been convened to select core materials for mathematics instruction for grades K-5, presented a report that showed what the committee had done, is doing, and plans to do. Ms. Sterling reported that the committee had been looking at schools and districts that had already implemented programs in which Lincoln was interested in. She noted that the setback of getting information and doing observations was that some places didn’t fully implement the programs and/or had adapted them to fit their preference and not necessarily meet the Massachusetts standards. She also noted that many publishers would not give out any sample materials without payment. She commented that there were three programs of interest selected and that a trial run would be done on the three. Ms. Sterling reported that they had already asked for volunteer teachers to implement the trial and had 6 signed up already, adding that each teacher would have a committee partner with whom to share the experience. She said there would be a letter sent home to make parents aware that a teacher has volunteered and that a trial run of the program was being implemented into the classroom.

In reference to the criteria scale, Laurie Manos asked if there was something exact that would determine if the particular program worked or not. Mary Sterling responded that it would be determined by the score from the criteria rating. She added that many of the publishers produce research to support their program but that the findings could be unreliable based on how the groups was selected and bundled. She noted that the research had to specify if it was covering the original format or a revised edition. She commented that to compare two programs is also challenging since they may not be parallel (i.e. – one may be unit based while another is spiraled).

Sharon Gillespy asked which programs are best for schools like Hanscom, where students transition in and out with frequency. Mary Sterling replied that the Math Review Committee was looking into that. She added that in addition to that question, the committee was looking at how the program would allow parents to be able to extend the teachings and help the students.

Tom Sander asked if the Math Review Committee had looked into what the private schools were doing. Mary Sterling responded that they had researched which schools had which programs and wanted to visit them or obtain information on how the program was working. Mr. Sander questioned that if there were good elements in all but not one stood out among the rest, would there be a way to purchase more than one to combine them without it costing too much. Ms. Sterling replied that they have to pick one to allow for common texts and vocabulary that are common year-to-year. She added that there may be a different from a lower grade, like Kindergarten, then the one purchased for 5th grade but that this was in discussions only.

Julie Dobrow reflected on Tom Sander’s inquiry of the private schools and questioned if the private schools would be adapting the programs since they usually have more resources yet fewer requirements to adhere to state curriculum standards like the public schools do. Mary Sterling agreed and noted that the private schools usually do not start the focused math curriculum until 5th grade or so which would eliminate the lower grade. She stated that she would research this more. Laurie Manos asked if during the correspondence with the private schools if the principals could be asked how much time was spent on math and homework a day because she had heard it was a lot. Ms. Sterling stated that she would do this.

Mickey Brandmeyer commented that the programs must be looked at as a whole and that they must avoid “cherry picking” programs. He added that there will probably not be one program that addresses everything but that the chosen program could have areas of supplementing to meet needs without the teachers getting leniency to “cherry pick”. Mary Sterling added to Mr. Brandmeyer’s comment by noting that a program could cost more if it includes the letters home to parents about the program. She noted that another program that was just as effective but didn’t include the letters home would cost less and the supplement would be the letters home which would be very minor.

V. Time Scheduled Appointments

A. Discussion of the FY’09 Budget (Report: *FY’09 Preferred Budget*)

Mickey Brandmeyer reported that the preferred budget was set at \$150,000 for Hanscom and \$200,000 for Lincoln so the discussion is to decide whether to restore some of the cuts made and/or add more initiatives.

The Hanscom’s Preferred Budget items are listed below in order of priority:

- 1.) 2.0 FTE positions - \$104,000
 - 2.) Instructional assistants -- \$13,565
 - 3.) Achievement Gap initiative - \$8,300
 - 4.) The funds for initiatives for high performing students - \$11,450
- * The above are expected to be all covered by the preferred budget.

Lincoln’s Preferred Budget items are listed below in order of priority:

- 1.) Restoration of instructional assistants - \$50,000
- 2.) Full-day Kindergarten (two-year program) - \$17,000
- 3.) Drama Instructor - \$6,000
- 4.) Achievement Gap initiative - \$8,300

*Other items prioritized below these items are unsure to be covered by the preferred list.

Mickey Brandmeyer stated that the Finance Committee had met and reported that there was discussion of avoiding an override by allocating revenue and contributing some additional funds to each of the town agencies. He noted that it could be possible to add \$120,000 with an override.

Laurie Manos asked for better understanding when comparing instructional assistants and tutors, specifically which one was more valuable. Mary Sterling responded that the instructional assistants were “seamless” as they were constantly in the classroom as opposed to the tutor that comes in and out. She added that the instructional assistant’s mainframe was to work with smaller groups, especially during guided reading. Julie Dobrow inquired if the instructional assistants reached more students. Mickey Brandmeyer replied that, across the board, they do whereas the tutors do more specific teaching with fewer students.

Laurie Manos expressed her concern with regard to the general education assistants being lower on the list of priority stating that they keep students from falling into the SPED and IEPs. She wondered how many students got off of IEPs. Mickey Brandmeyer commented that there are reading specialists to help. Ms. Manos responded that the reading specialists were already spread thin. Mary Sterling reminded everyone that there were not any general education tutors two years ago and that the SPED tutors were moved down to obtain the general education tutor positions. Ms. Manos asked if there should be a trade between the instructional assistants and the general education tutors, adding she felt the tutors were more valuable. Mickey Brandmeyer offered to revisit with the principals to determine the needs for the instructional assistants versus the general education tutors.

Tom Sander noted the proposed Foreign Language initiative, which is at the bottom of the priority list on the *FY’09 Preferred Budget* for Lincoln, and asked what the cost would be to make Lincoln parallel with Hanscom. Mickey Brandmeyer offered to research this information but noted that the override may not cover everything on the list. He added that the Foreign Language reflected .5 FTE because they are unsure of the model for the program.

Sharon Gillepsy voiced her concern about the “Achievement Gap” being so low on the Hanscom list and wondered if there could be a reduction in the 2 FTE positions to cover this. Mickey Brandmeyer replied that they were already projecting another FTE in the 4th grade and, without knowing the enrollment, needed to keep the FTE at 2. He added that if in May they do not see a need for 2FTE that the extra funds could be put into summer programs to address the achievement gap.

Tom Sander questioned if the district will cover with \$100,000 liability, could the liability be adjusted to cover more than FTE. He specifically inquired about lowering the FTE to accommodate the summer programs since they happen before enrollment. Julie Dobrow responded that were still summer programs but they had been adjusted to be more focused on certain initiatives.

Sharon Antia commented that these topics should be out in the community for their input and noted that other districts had forums for this. Ms. Dobrow noted that all School Committee meeting at which the budget was discussed – as well as Board of Selectmen meetings and Finance Committee meetings – are open meetings and the SC agendas are posted in advance.

Mickey Brandmeyer announced that the Finance Committee would be meeting the next week and that final recommendations would be done during the month January.

VI. Superintendent’s Report

Mickey Brandmeyer reported attending the Hanscom Middle School Winter Concert on December 19th. He noted that it was the 4th – 8th grades and that 90% of the students participate in music. He stated there were at least 600 people that attended, which was standing room only. He added that the Lincoln concert was in January.

Mr. Brandmeyer displayed the book, “Primary Engineering”, which was written and published by a Lincoln teacher, Terry Green. He added that it was a three year project and complimented her on her hard work and success.

Mr. Brandmeyer discussed the Tripod Project (student’s perceptions of priorities in school/classroom) and the “Student Engagement, Achievement Gap Goal”, noting the December 12th district-wide faculty meeting. He reported that the speaker was Nancy Love and that the focus was learning a process to evaluate data. He noted that the Administrative Council, which is a team comprised of Central Office administrators, served as the Tripod Project Steering Committee. Mary Sterling commented that the data was broken out by gender, race, and GPA. Mr. Brandmeyer stated that it was a tool used to give the teachers feedback on student perception of support and expectation by their teachers. He commented that Administrative Council coordinating the series of meetings (faculty meetings, Institute Day and district-wide faculty meeting in April; planning activities and inviting speakers.

VIII. Policy

None

IX. Facilities and Financial

A. Warrant Approval

I. On a motion by Laurie Manos, seconded by Sharon Antia, the School Committee voted unanimously to approve the warrants in the amount of \$2,244,838.14.

X. Old Business

None

XI. New Business

None

XII. Approval of Minutes

None

***Additional Discussion**

Before the adjournment Laurie Manos, in conjunction with a comment that had been made earlier by Louann Robinson, questioned the reason for students having so much indoor recess, noting that the students were missing out on physical activity. Many SC members commented on the issues of inclement weather and frigid temperatures. Ms. Manos inquired about the conditions that would suggest having the recess time indoors instead of outdoors. Mickey Brandmeyer replied that if the temperature outside is below 20 degrees then the students stay inside. He recognized the Recording Secretary, Christy Waters, as a teacher’s assistant to discuss this topic. Ms. Waters noted the limited space when there is snow and ice on the blacktop, acknowledged that not all students have snow gear which limits the snow areas as a place for them to play, and commented that it is more difficult to watch and control 20 – 30 students when there are more dangers such as ice, snow, and slippery blacktops. She added that when there was a decision made for the students to stay inside for recess, it was made solely based on the safety of the students.

XIV. Adjournment –

On motion by Julie Dobrow, seconded by Tom Sander, the School Committee voted unanimously to adjourn the meeting at 10:02pm.

Respectfully submitted,
Christy Waters, School Committee Recording Secretary