

MINUTES OF THE LINCOLN SCHOOL COMMITTEE
October 2, 2007
Franklin Park Golf Clubhouse, 1 Circuit Street, Dorchester, MA

Present: Julie Dobrow (Chair), Sharon Antia, Tom Sander, Al Schmertzler. Also present: Mickey Brandmeyer (Superintendent), Mary Sterling (Assistant Superintendent), Buckner Creel (Administrator for Business and Finance, Christina Horner (METCO Director).

Absent: Laurie Manos (Vice Chair)

I. Greetings and Call to Order

Ms. Dobrow called the meeting to order at 7:20 pm.

II. Chairperson's and Members' Reports

Ms. Dobrow mentioned the summer's United States Supreme Court decision on school desegregation and said that the Committee does not yet know the impact of that decision on the METCO program. This school year METCO will remain at status quo. The Committee is concerned about the program and will keep abreast of developments. To that end, Ms. Dobrow announced that she sent a letter to Governor Patrick, State Senator Susan Fargo, and State Representative Tom Conroy informing them how important the METCO program is and that the Committee supports the program. Lincoln was one of the first districts to join the program, and they want it continued. Ms. Dobrow also sent letters to the superintendents and school committees of the other 31 Massachusetts cities and towns that participate in the METCO program, urging them to support METCO by writing letters to their political leaders. She stated that the Lincoln School Committee would continue its political advocacy for METCO.

Ms. Dobrow reiterated the need for a Boston representative to the School Committee. She asked that anyone who was interested should contact her or any School Committee member.

Ms. Antia told the group that today's 5th grade trip to Thompson's Island was a roaring success.

III. Public Comments

IV. Consent Agenda

The Committee considered the 8th grade field trip proposal to Gettysburg, PA and Washington, D.C. for May 27-30, 2008. The Committee voted unanimously to approve the field trip proposal.

V. Time Scheduled Appointments

A. METCO Improvement Plan

METCO Director Christina Horner presented the METCO Improvement Plan. The plan has four goals: 1) evaluate current programs that support successful transition into the Lincoln METCO program and research possible programs for early interventions; 2) provide more opportunities for students to develop leadership abilities essential for effective citizenship, leadership, and advocacy; 3) increase focus on opportunities for Lincoln and Boston resident families to learn from and about each other and to make better connections that support learning activities in school for their children; and 4) evaluate emergency communication systems and crisis plans as they pertain to Boston resident families' needs.

For the first goal, Ms. Horner stated that Project JumpStart will be offered again but that she would like to fine-tune it. She would like to bring in kids at the preschool level and reported that Brookline and Weston have done this. Ms. Horner talked to those leaders because they kept data on how these students did. The committee spent lots of time last year looking at the preschool program. They need to consider space and funding in order to expand the preschool program. Ms. Horner responded that she is looking for funding sources to provide the tuition and transportation costs. There may be a source in the new Governor's grants.

On the second goal, Ms. Horner discussed the series of workshops planned.

Mr. Schmertzler asked whether the programs showed that the students involved had a better quality of life, and not just in a financial sense. Ms. Horner responded that parents want their kids not just graduating from high school. When kids do better in school, research shows that they are less apt to get in trouble with the law. She said that better grades equate with a better quality of life.

Ms. Dobrow raised the issue of whether kindergarteners did better and how that was assessed. Ms. Horner said that the children made gains on their counting skills. Ms. Dobrow said the research data can make a case for the METCO program. The data needs to be assembled in a concrete manner, and the successes make an interesting story that should be publicized. Ms. Dobrow mentioned that she was concerned about Ms. Horner's time, but she likes her ideas and thinks they are important. She suggested that Ms. Horner delegate the building of research to the METCO Coordinating Committee, or

at least get their assistance. Ms. Antia said that she loved the idea of preschool, but reiterated that Ms. Horner had “a lot on her plate” and she too is concerned about her time.

Ms. Horner continued with her presentation of goal two; providing more leadership opportunities. METCO students were involved in many activities, but they were not involved with the student council. She is concerned about whether the students have a voice for their concerns as they are a very diverse group, coming from countries such as Vietnam and China. Their diversity presents challenges to getting a voice. Ms. Horner suggested that affinity groups could help in getting students involved in school life. She said that she was exploring whether to join the ELNA [Education and Leadership for a Nonviolent Age] Collaborative, Inc. to get Lincoln students working with others.

Mr. Sander said that he liked the items that had been presented, but he is concerned about protecting Ms. Horner’s time. He suggested that the METCO Coordinating Committee help her with some of these projects.

Ms. Horner presented goal three; getting Lincoln and Boston families to connect. She is concerned that Boston families come to Lincoln events but that Lincoln families do not go to Boston events. There is no host family program, and the goal is to have a true partnership between Boston and Lincoln families.

Ms. Dobrow mentioned one more goal: to find a Boston School Committee representative. Ms. Antia asked whether Lincoln families could go to the workshops, raised during discussion of goal one, that were offered to the Boston families, held at the Franklin Park Golf Clubhouse. Ms. Horner said yes. Ms. Antia asked whether Lincoln families could go to the ELNA workshops. Ms. Horner had talked to the PTA about the workshops. She wants all families—Hanscom, Boston, and Lincoln—to participate in them. Mr. Sander stated it was great that Lincoln families could go to the workshops.

Christina Yee from the METCO Coordinating Committee added information about goal three. She said that they are planning an event for Lincoln families in Boston the weekend before Thanksgiving, after many sports programs have ended. Committee members were thinking about grade-wide activities such as going to Drumlin Farm, and the Frog Pond for skating, in addition to sewing.

Ms. Horner continued with goal four; to evaluate emergency communication systems and crisis plans as they pertain to Boston resident families’ needs. There were some threats made last year to the METCO program. Someone said that they hated the program and wanted to bomb the bus. As a result, METCO bus routes are no longer posted, bus monitors have cell phones in case of emergency, and each grade has representatives who make sure that 3 to 4 people are contacted in an emergency. These measures will help in any emergency, such as a bus accident. They are making sure that each Boston child has a family in Lincoln with whom they can go home. She reported that many Lincoln families are willing to help, and the PTA and the METCO Coordinating Committee are working with her. Kids’ safety is top priority.

Mr. Brandmeyer reminded the audience that all principals write improvement plans, which was what Ms. Horner was doing. He thanked METCO social worker Amy Hood for her good work.

Ms. Dobrow moved to accept the METCO Improvement Plan. The Committee unanimously voted to accept the plan.

B. District Work Plans

a. Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment

Mr. Brandmeyer said that the administration was feeling pressure to do good work, that there are many things to do, and they want to do all of them well. He mentioned that they need to find balance and that they intend to do better.

Assistant Superintendent Mary Sterling presented the work plan. She said that they are focusing on student assessments. How do we report on student progress to kids and parents? We’re looking at our strengths and weaknesses and asking other communities how they assess their students. They will have information ready for the spring. They need Committee guidance on how to prioritize it.

Ms. Antia commented that involving parents in these assessments is great. Mr. Sander asked what Ms. Sterling’s sense of timing was for the plan. Ms. Sterling responded that they will propose options by year’s end.

Ms. Sterling explained that there are two initiatives this year for learning and curriculum. The first is to give better and clearer learning expectations. They will be posted on the website. The second is to have common assessments, especially in science and math.

Ms. Sterling next presented the key concept of assessment of student progress and student support as they relate to the achievement gap and student engagement. They worked with FreshPond Associates on a survey of student perceptions, called the Tripod survey, to understand students in grades 3 through 8 and how to increase their engagement. There will be a district-wide faculty meeting on December 12 to discuss this data. Faculty will meet about the subject on March 20 and April 30, 2008. Ms. Sterling said that they will learn many strategies to work on these issues, but did not elaborate on them.

Ms. Dobrow indicated her interest in the Tripod data and wants a report to the Committee on it. Ms. Antia asked when parents were involved with the survey. Ms. Sterling replied that she was not sure how to involve parents. They could be helpful in the second half of the school year.

One public comment was about the Tripod survey. Did parents receive copies of the questions that the survey asked? Superintendent Brandmeyer said that the school has copies of the questions, and they can be shown to parents. There are two sets of surveys, one for grades 3 through 5 and the other for grades 6 through 8. He stressed that they want to make sense of the data.

Ms. Sterling next presented program planning and implementation. MSRenew is an initiative to look at the quality of the middle school. In addition, there will be a task force that will begin the process to review and select core K-5 math materials, a Task Force on High Achieving Students, and another group that will study the possibility of expansion of the World Language Program to younger grades. Finally, the administration will respond to the state's Department of Education Coordinated Program Review findings. November 1 they will report on initiatives on communication issues and student engagement.

Ms. Antia expressed that parents are curious about when the school will share information with them and they would like to be involved in these committees. Ms. Sterling responded that Sharon Hobbs, one of the principals, has three people on the committee. Information regarding these initiatives will be in parent newsletters, or parents can call Principal Hobbs. There is no website link on the school website to MSRenew. The trick is getting parents to access the information. Principal Hobbs can speak more to this concern, but she was not in attendance.

Mr. Sander expressed that we need to find ways to get parents involved and attending School Committee meetings. Parental involvement is important, but there can't be so many activities because it makes it hard to find enough time. Ms. Dobrow added the November 1 School Committee meeting is important for parents interested in MSRenew. She would like it televised and also asked that all get out the word so that parents attend. The school has two emailing lists: SCNews and Lincoln School. If parents are interested in the School Committee News, they must opt in to receive the emails. She said that the emails are a wonderful way to stay informed. The school website is helpful.

Ms. Sterling continued with the new initiatives: K-5 math material for next year. The Math Review Committee convened its first meeting and is designing plans and the process for deciding which material is the most appropriate. They are gathering information on research-based mathematics programs, looking at publishers' criteria for selecting math materials and will select the core materials on the best evidence. The Math Review Committee will conduct parent meetings to solicit input. They will visit other communities to see different math programs in progress. They will conduct short trials of published materials in Lincoln classes. They need teacher input. By the spring of 2008, the Math Review Committee will have recommendations and options with the goal of implementing the materials for the 2008-2009 school year. They will design professional development for teachers to assist them with the new program. Meetings will be posted on this issue.

Ms. Dobrow said that it is a thoughtful undertaking on this issue and she applauded Ms. Sterling for putting it together. The new math program will be expensive. Are there reasonable orders of magnitude to build into the school budget? Is one program more costly than another? Ms. Sterling replied that there are four to five major publishers. She will put together a budget in two weeks that will estimate the implementation for the most expensive program. Mr. Schmertzler suggested that Ms. Sterling consider a range, not just the most costly program. He wants the best program for the district as the priority and agrees that the money is secondary, but suggested that the budget reflect the cost of the full implementation and the cost of a phased implementation. Ms. Antia mentioned that parents should be included. Can parents be considered for the Math Task Force? Ms. Sterling responded, no. Parents can be involved in the meetings instead. The Math Task Force membership was decided last year. The administration and the teachers will decide on the mathematics materials.

Ms. Sterling discussed the Task Force on High Achieving Students. The Task Force will read available research and articles on promising practices and update the School Committee on December 20. They are going to look at other communities and will involve the district faculty on their findings on April 14. The Task Force will report to the Committee on May 1 about the faculty perspectives and what the next steps are for meeting the students' needs. Ms. Sterling asked for guidance from the Committee on how to integrate and structure parent discussion on this topic.

Ms. Dobrow answered that the Task Force should convene parent focus groups. As this project is labor intensive, she suggested that they retain consultants. Much research has been done on this issue. Ms. Dobrow's Tufts colleague, David Henry Feldman, has worked in this area. She also urged Ms. Sterling to consider the resources at the U Conn center that studies this issue. She is concerned that the work burden be lessened on the administration. Mr. Schmertzler asked that the Task Force have a range of people on it. Ms. Sterling responded that they want good quality people with expertise on high achieving students. Mr. Sander mentioned that the Davidson Foundation has resources on this issue. Ms. Yee asked from the audience who should be approached if one was interested in becoming a Task Force member on the high achieving student task force. Ms. Sterling responded that she could talk to her.

Ms. Sterling continued with the World Language expansion new initiative. They are studying possibilities for expanding the number of languages offered at the school and are involving world language teachers in researching models in comparable communities. Other communities have abandoned teaching languages in younger grades, and they want to know why. Some language programs for the younger grades are still in place. She said that they want global awareness for students, and one way they get this is by learning another language. The group will study what works with teaching language to younger students and what does not. On March 13, there will be a report to the Committee with options.

Mr. Sander mentioned that he thought it was helpful to hear from other schools on their issue. Is it a matter of MCAS vs. achievement? Languages are not considered a core item. He mentioned bilingual programs and that there is not a huge amount of research on this issue. In terms of early language abilities, are there studies about the age, number of hours spent teaching the language, and the benefits of language acquisition?

An audience member asked whether they would focus on expanding the number of languages offered or expanding the current languages into the lower grades. Ms. Sterling responded that they would expand French and Spanish into lower

grades and not expand on the number of languages. The Lincoln School's language offerings depend on the high school's offerings, and they offer French and Spanish.

Ms. Sterling's last presentation was about the Department of Education's Coordinated Program Review; the Corrective Action Plan. They are reviewing the DOE's final report and will prepare the response by year's end.

b. Teacher Excellence and Professional Development

Ms. Sterling presented the Teacher Excellence and Professional Development key concept. The district wants to recruit and retain diversity of teachers and staff members. They have redoubled their efforts, but it has not been successful. They are working on a new personnel manual and have been evaluating all staff in the past two years. They plan to redo evaluations and want to see how effective the teacher evaluations are. They will decide how to evaluate the administrators in the spring. There were no school committee or public comments.

Ms. Sterling presented Professional Learning Communities and Paraprofessional Development key concept. They want to strengthen the professional learning communities that focus on student learning, which include administrators as well as teachers. They also want to focus on the quality of tutors and aides, known as paraprofessionals, and support their professional growth. In that vein, they are compiling a survey of qualifications and continuing education needs.

Mr. Schmertzler commented that we want to enlist the Boston community's help in getting out the word that Lincoln is looking for teachers to contribute to a more diverse faculty.

The Committee moved to accept the report and voted unanimously to approve the work plans.

Ms. Dobrow asked the Committee to look at the work plans approved at the last meeting and to see if there was any work the Committee felt could be put on the back burner, given all the pressing demands for this academic year. The Committee discussed the work plan around vision and mission, and decided that while this was important, it could be deferred for the moment. She moved to put that initiative off the plate for this year. The committee voted unanimously to put that work plan on the back burner for this year.

VI. Superintendent's Report

None.

VII. Curriculum

A. Update on Wednesdays' Curriculum and Professional Development Schedule and Priorities

Ms. Sterling presented the Wednesday afternoon calendar to show how teacher time is used to work together on the above initiatives and priorities. She explained that the principals have goals and they use the time with the teachers too. Three days this year are devoted to technology issues and training. Using new hardware and how to integrate the new technology into instruction are two items they will focus on. She called attention to the district wide meeting on December 12 about the achievement gap and student engagement, the May 14 faculty discussion on high-achieving students, and the May 28 discussion about the new mathematics curriculum. She stated that Lincoln was good at helping teachers improve.

Ms. Antia asked about the Tripod project and the achievement gap. She wondered whether there could be sessions for parents and teachers to collaborate on a Wednesday afternoon. She urged the administrators not to lose the year by waiting until spring to involve parents. Ms. Sterling replied that they need to use the data first on December 12 and then they will decide how to involve parents and will get back to her. Mr. Brandmeyer responded that there are no good data yet; Tripod is only started, and it is hard work to be done with it. Ms. Antia said that there is already lots of research, such as the MCAS data, and she expressed her frustration that they are waiting too long to act on it. The Superintendent said that they need to find which problems exist in Lincoln and stressed that it's important to focus on that here.

B. Status of Technology Implementation Project

Mr. Brandmeyer reported that 500 computers were purchased for the Lincoln and Hanscom campuses, and all of them are working. 50 of those are into new computer labs and are wired to the world. Six computer labs have interactive whiteboards and some of those whiteboards are portable. We have wireless campuses with new routers that are working well. They installed 10 laser printers in place of the ink jet printers because the ink jet printers are expensive to maintain. They sold \$4,000 worth of old computer equipment to people, with the money going into the general fund.

VIII. Policy

None.

IX. Facilities and Financial

A. Warrant Approval

Mr. Creel presented five warrants, totaling \$936,887.88, to be approved. The two payroll warrants totaled \$552,405.38, and the three accounts payable warrants totaled \$384,482.50. Mr. Schmertzler reported that he had reviewed all five warrants, and he suggested that the committee approve them. The committee moved to approve the warrants and voted unanimously to approve them.

B. Approve Capital Projects Submission for FY '09

Mr. Creel asked that everyone look at page 69 to see the Department's Capital Project Five-Year Plan. We are in the second year of a three-year plan. The plan shows 10 projects: instructional technology equipment, the campus emergency access design and project, classroom rehabilitation and preventative maintenance, exterior painting for schools and pods, cover rakes and trim with metal, Hartwell door project, Reed Field House roof replacement, and gender-equal shower rooms in the Field House. On the gender-equal shower rooms, they are waiting to hear from the Department of Education on their request to defer those until the larger building project is underway. They will have to put in a place holder for the showers in the budget.

Mr. Schmertzler asked why they are asking for \$75,000 for classroom rehabilitation instead of the \$50,000 asked for last year. He warned that last year they did the same thing but only received \$50,000. Mr. Brandmeyer responded that over the three years, they budgeted \$150,000, but it is not enough. They want to build a preventative maintenance budget, and the extra \$25,000 helps to do that.

Mr. Creel said that the univent project was finishing up soon. Carpet, tile, and leaking faucets have been replaced. Mr. Schmertzler asked if the field house roof needs replacing, can green energy be used? Could solar panels be installed on the new roof? Could they spray a new roof on the building? Mr. Creel will explore the options for the roof. His priorities are to stop leaks, and increase the R-value of the insulation to R-20. Mr. Creel explained that they can't consider installation of solar panels until the roof is replaced. Mr. Schmertzler asked when the photovoltaic project could happen, and Mr. Creel responded that it could be a capital improvement project if the building is retained. Mr. Schmertzler will be the School Committee's representative to the Capital Planning Committee.

Mr. Creel asked whether what he presented were the priorities that the School Committee wants? Ms. Dobrow responded that he did a great job putting in their comments from the last meeting. Ms. Dobrow moved to accept the FY '09 Capital Projects Submission and School Committee voted unanimously to approve it. Mr. Creel will transmit the Submission to Assistant Town Administrator Anita Scheipers for the CPC.

X. Old Business

None.

XI. New Business

Ms. Dobrow reported that the School Committee needed to write a report for the November 3 State of the Town Meeting. Ms. Dobrow and Mr. Brandmeyer will write the report. It was moved that they would write the report and the Committee voted unanimously.

XII. Approval of Minutes

Ms. Dobrow indicated that they would not approve the minutes from the September 5 meeting at this time because there are too many corrections to make.

XIV. Adjournment

There being no further business, the Committee moved to adjourn at 9:20 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Sarah G. Marcotte, Temporary Recording Secretary