

MINUTES OF THE LINCOLN SCHOOL COMMITTEE
Thursday, December 6, 2007 – Open Session

Present: Julie Dobrow (Chair), Laurie Manos (Vice-Chair), Al Schmertzler (7:56pm arrival), Sharon Antia, Tom Sander, and Sharon Gillepsy (Hanscom Representative)

Absent: Louann Robinson (Hanscom Representative)

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

Julie Dobrow mentioned that Mickey Brandmeyer and she had attended the dedication of the Bjork Tech Lab. She commented that the principals, staff members, friends, and family all attended, adding it was a nice and meaningful ceremony. Mickey Brandmeyer added that Al Bjork intends to raise funds for professional development for teachers that will complement the District's technology initiative.

Julie Dobrow mentioned there had been a meeting with the Finance Committee the night before (Wednesday, December 5th) to present the budget progress thus far. She noted there were other agencies present and, being it was the first time that the town agencies presented to the Finance Committee; there were not a lot of questions asked. The next meeting with the Finance Committee had been set for January 15th, 2008.

III. Public Comments

None

IV. Consent Agenda

None

V. Time Scheduled Appointments

A. Discussion of the FY'09 Budget

Mickey Brandmeyer began with a recap of the budget discussion at the meeting with the Financial Committee. He noted that proposed increase was 3% and that this percentage looked to be solid. He stated that the challenge for Lincoln was the Sudbury Finance Committee's directive for all their town agencies to prepare a -1% increase, adding for Lincoln-Sudbury Regional High School, which needs a 6% increase to provide level services, this is especially problematic. Mr. Brandmeyer explained that as a regional school district, L-S is subject to the financial agreements between both towns and said that what Sudbury ultimately decides to do about their budget may have an impact on what Lincoln decides to do with regard to an override, but that is not known at this time.

Mr. Brandmeyer noted that the budget gap for Hanscom was down to \$24,000 and Lincoln was down to \$13,000. He added that this was the first time in 5 years that staff positions were being cut. Mr. Brandmeyer stated that he had spoken with Robert Steinbrook of the Finance Committee and mentioned \$200,000 for the preferred budget, just to give them an idea. He commented that right after the first of the year, the School Committee would vote on the budget but for now it was okay to wait until mid-January.

Mickey Brandmeyer reminded the School Committee of questions asked at the previous meeting that needed more research before they could be answered.

- 1.) Were there ways to include some of the achievement gap and high achieving students' initiatives into the budget?
- 2.) Would it be possible to implement the implementation of the new math materials over a two-year period?

Mary Sterling responded that the School Committee had asked her to look over the base budget to put the achievement gap and high-achieving students (\$39,000 for both campuses) into the base budget. She felt that there were two ways to do this:

- 1.) Reduce the amount of summer work projects. This would not remove the ones already in place but it would not allow for any more programs to be placed over the summer to aid with professional development or curriculum.
- 2.) Science Curriculum – defer buying the extensive science materials that were planned for the FY '09 (i.e. – published materials, staff professional development, etc.) The stronger focus on science and science programs would be shifted a year.

Sharon Gillepsy inquired about the budget for Hanscom versus Lincoln. Mickey Brandmeyer stated that the budget for Hanscom is based on enrollment therefore, if Hanscom stays within the enrollment band now (551 to 600 students), that would add an additional \$150,000 to the budget and fund requests in a manner that would be similar to the preferred (override) budget in Lincoln. He added that this is due to the Hanscom portion of the budget not having a mechanism like an override initiative to get more funds. He noted that the School Committee holds the reserve fund for Hanscom while any reserve fund for Lincoln must be requested from the Finance Committee.

Julie Dobrow noted that the number of participating teachers in the summer programs were phenomenal and wanted to know how many of them used the summer professional development programs to meet the continued education requirements. Mary Sterling replied that not a lot of teachers used it for that reason but added that some of the summer programs don't even count towards continuing education. She reiterated that it would not be a loss of all the summer programs but rather just condensing them.

Laurie Manos asked for the summary on the achievement gap and high-achieving students going into the base budget. Mickey Brandmeyer replied that there are some funds for the curriculum development and professional development for the staff that focus on the achievement gap and high-achieving students but that it was all in the preferred budget. He added that to move this to the base budget would cost too much in other cuts.

Laurie Manos asked if the proposed budget restructuring meant that there would be a loss in the science curriculum as it was now. Mary Sterling replied that it would not affect how the science curriculum was now but rather just change parts of it. She noted that Lincoln and Hanscom still needed to teach certain units and enhance some programs that were already in place but that it would just have to wait a year based on the cuts she proposed. Mickey Brandmeyer added that there would be a shift in the science work and resources for this year meaning that the initial focus on science would be deferred until next year.

Julie Dobrow asked if those resources and courses could partly focus on closing the achievement gap and help high-achieving students. Mary Sterling replied that it would focus on aligning the science program with the standards by realigning materials and resources, adding that all the schools within the district needed to be on the same page and aligned with the state. Laurie Manos responded that she thought the math and science programs would have been further along and the numbers from the MCAS scores would have been higher. She noted that to a new member, the numbers could look low. Ms. Sterling replied that in some areas the numbers were higher and the students were doing better. She added that numbers are uneven because the students are sufficient or exceeding in some areas of science but lower in others areas due to misalignment with the state. She commented that her predecessor wanted to focus on science for FY'08 and FY'09 which she is trying to carry out. Mickey Brandmeyer stated that some work had been done but added that the differences between the two campuses may have been overlooked.

Laurie Manos questioned if every effort had been made to look through the base budget for cuts that would allow for more items from the preferred budget to be placed into the base budget. Mickey Brandmeyer responded that everyone has voiced an opinion of what was too important to cut and what they felt they could afford to lose. He added that the problem was what was important to one may not seem as important to another and so on, noting that this made it challenging to decide what to remove, add, or keep the same. Ms. Manos asked about the special education area noting that there were fewer students and suggested a cut in staff. Mr. Brandmeyer noted that there is only 60% of a full-time director being used for the amount of students enrolled. He added that the only reason having 60% has worked was due to the skill level and experience of the current staff. He cited that the special education program was already impacted by other reductions.

VI. Superintendent's Report

None

VII. Curriculum

Mary Sterling acknowledged the change in the art display on the second level of the administrative building and wanted everyone to look at the display at some point. She complimented the art teacher, Donna Lubin, and how she used "Artisonia" which is software that allows digital photos to be seen more widely.

Ms. Sterling reported that she goes to one class a week and had most recently visited a 7th grade social studies teacher that works with the music teacher while studying religion to emphasize the importance of music within a culture and among that religion. She observed the class during this lesson.

A. Report on 2007 MCAS Results

Mary Sterling stated that the MCAS exam was designed to determine a student's proficiency and that the year 2014 is the state's goal for all students to be performing at the same level of proficiency. She noted that it was one assessment that could be used for group results by looking at patterns and individual results by looking for red flags. She added that there were teams created to look over the report.

Ms. Sterling highlighted some of the following data found in the **2007 MCAS and AYP Report**:

English/Language Arts

- Growth from grade 3 – grade 8
- 3rd grades demonstrated 68% at advanced or proficient level
- 8th grade demonstrated 92% at advanced or proficient level

Math

- Preliminary results showed students were better at multiple choice questions than open response questions.
- High and low patterns although grade 3 to grade 4 there was a drop but it was still on the same level as the statewide results.
- Ms. Sterling noted that she had already met with math specialists within the district to discuss the results.

Tom Sander asked if the Lincoln Public Schools' MCAS results would be compared with other communities and not just to the state and within the district. Mary Sterling responded that this year there had been a comparison among the campuses, district wide and with the state. She noted that the Department of Education website could provide some information on the statewide results but added she could provide some of this analysis if the School Committee wished to see it.

Science

- 5th grade scores are not strong; even though compared to the state the scores are not bad it raises a level of concern
- 8th grade was worse with a general decline.
- Ms. Sterling noted that she will be meeting with the science specialist to go over results.

Al Schmertzler noted that the state results were significantly worse in science which led him to wonder if it was what was being taught, how it was being taught, or if the questions on the test were too difficult. He felt this should be investigated. Ms. Manos added that this was why she agreed with Tom Sander that the results should be compared with other communities. Mr. Sander concurred but noted that even to look outside the state and into other states would be helpful. Al Schmertzler agreed noting he felt there should be a position to research this. Mickey Brandmeyer noted that it was less valid to look at the test year-to-year since the test design had been changing.

Sharon Antia questioned if the SC could look beyond the 8th grade into the high school years to see how the trend goes. Julie Dobrow answered that it was hard to disaggregate Lincoln and Hanscom results from L-S and Bedford High School results once the students are all in high school.

Al Schmertzler asked if there were some sample questions that could be taken to science specialists to determine the relevance these questions had to the grade level. Mickey Brandmeyer answered that due to the redesign the questions may not be accessible since not all the questions designed went into every test.

Al Schmertzler noted the drop upon the same cohort in science from grade 5 (28% advanced) to grade 8 (3% advanced), adding that there needed to be some professional development in science.

Mary Sterling noted that to "not pass" could mean that the student only missed by one point. She added that a student with a lower reading level or on an IEP could do poorly due to not being able to comprehend the questions.

Al Schmertzler commented that it is difficult to determine the reason for the low scores on certain areas of the test. He added that the teachers do not like to teach to the MCAS and felt there were enough examples to feel that the test needed help. He questioned if there was too much relying on the results of the MCAS.

Julie Dobrow asked how “dogmatic” the state was being with regard to the AYP. She said that in a district as small as Lincoln, one or two students could throw a cohort percentage off due to it being a smaller cohort and asked if the state or Department of Education would take that into consideration when assessing whether a district had met its AYP? Mickey Brandmeyer replied that the DOE was dogmatic in its interpretation of AYP due to the mandate of the “No Child Left Behind”. He added that the MCAS is the most challenging state test.

VIII. Policy

A. Class Size Policy: Final Recommendation and Vote

Laurie Manos credited Jennifer Glass for bridging the Subcommittee’s original proposal and Tom Sander’s proposal for the “Class Size Policy”. She noted that the Subcommittee voted unanimously for this proposal and that everyone felt the parents and teachers would approve.

Here is how it works:

- Eliminate the “target” number for the average students in a class among the grade to a “recommended” number.
- “Recommended” numbers are: K-18; 1st-20; 2nd-21; 3rd-21; 4th-22; 5th-22
- Rule is that cohort, or child, can only go over the “recommended” number by 2 students and no more than 2 times from K-5th grade.
- There will never be a time that a child will be in a classroom where there are more than the maximum numbers allowed. They only have a chance of being between the “recommended” and “maximum” number but no more than two times yet most likely not at all.
- The class size can be at the “recommended” number it would only be counted if it went above the “recommended” number and it can not go over by more than two students.

Buck Creel asked if they had mapped the history. Tom Sander replied that there was not any time over the past ten years that a new section was not added when it was needed. He gave the example that if the Kindergarten outlook was that the classes would be over the “recommended” number but not by more than two and it was the same for that cohort in 1st grade, then grades 2nd – 5th for that cohort would have to be below the “recommended” number. He added that even if the class average for the Kindergarten was “18.2” then that would still be considered over the “recommended” number.

*There was one minor wording change made to the proposed “Class Size Policy” but it did not change the mechanics of the policy; just better clarified them.

On a motion by Al Schmertzler, seconded by Julie Dobrow, the School Committee voted unanimously to accept and approve the revised “Class Size Policy”.

IX. Facilities and Financial

A. Warrant Approval

None

X. Old Business

Mickey Brandmeyer presented a letter from William J. Rizzo, Jr. concerning the outlines for the portion of the Rizzo’s property to be used as an emergency access road from the Lincoln campus to Sandy Pond Road. He commented that this was a wonderful example of public spirit. He noted that this letter was being sent to the town attorney. Laurie Manos requested a letter of appreciation be sent to the Rizzo’s on behalf of the School Committee. Julie Dobrow offered to do that.

Sharon Antia asked what the expectations were for being able to use it. Mickey Brandmeyer responded that the Rizzos, understandably, had requested a legal document that allowed for this emergency access to be revoked at anytime given it didn’t work out and as a way to protect their property rights. Mr. Brandmeyer reiterated that the concern was that parents would use this road as a way to drop off their children to avoid having to go all the way around. Tom Sander asked if the emergency access road would be used to get the children to school given there was a reason for the main entrance to not be accessible (i.e. – wreck, down power lines, etc.). Mr. Brandmeyer responded that it would only be used to get the students off campus and away from the school, noting that scenarios such as those would mean a delay in school.

XI. New Business

Julie Dobrow mentioned that she had received notification of the Annual Town Report. Mickey Brandmeyer felt that the reading and approval could be done at one time so he suggested covering it at the January 3rd meeting instead of splitting it between two meetings.

XII. Approval of Minutes

None

XIII. Information Enclosures

All were disbursed at the beginning and throughout the course of the meeting.

XIV. Adjournment –

On motion by Julie Dobrow, seconded by Al Schmertzler, the School Committee voted unanimously to adjourn the meeting at 9:12 pm.

Respectfully submitted,
Christy Waters, School Committee Recording Secretary