

MINUTES OF THE LINCOLN SCHOOL COMMITTEE
Thursday, February 5, 2009
Hartwell Building, Lincoln, MA
OPEN SESSION

Present: Julie Dobrow (Chair), Tom Sander (Vice Chair), Jennifer Glass, Louann Robinson (Hanscom Representative), Cynthia Nunes-Tajeron (Hanscom Representative). Also present: Mickey Brandmeyer (Superintendent), Mary Sterling (Assistant Superintendent), Buckner Creel (Administrator for Business and Finance), Stephanie Powers (Administrator of Student Services).

Absent: Al Schmertzler, Rob Orgel.

I. Greetings and Call to Order

Ms. Dobrow called the meeting to order at 7:07 pm and thanked everyone for attending.

II. Chairperson's and Members' Reports

Ms. Glass reported that she and Mr. Schmertzler attended the Lincoln-Sudbury School Committee meeting. Mr. Sander attended Bingo night and said Principal Steve McKenna has a second career as a Bingo caller.

III. Public Comments

None.

IV. Consent Agenda

None.

V. Time Scheduled Appointments

A. Report on Student Engagement and Tripod Project

Mr. Brandmeyer introduced the four school principals, who presented their reports on student engagement and the Tripod project. Mr. Steve McKenna, Lincoln Principal K-4, said that they have focused on students' enjoyment of school, which means that it is a supportive, safe, and engaging place. They have started an all-school meeting the first Friday of each month and also a morning meeting which includes the Pledge of Allegiance, students sharing learning experiences, and reading. They have also refined the playground experience and taught students how to play safely and fairly. Mr. McKenna noted increases of 3-6 % in favorable student responses in grades 1-4 between September and January on the Tripod responses (with the exception of a decrease in students believing that they learn when they try hard). They will look at ways to increase this understanding. He said he is pleased to report progress, and he will administer the survey again in June to see how they have improved.

Dr. Sharon Hobbs, Lincoln Principal 5-8, said that they have focused on trust, diligence, and relevance for her students. The teachers have been posting why they are teaching topics to students so that they understand its relevance, with students not feeling it has helped. On trust, they have held monthly assemblies and had teachers meeting with small groups of students, and asking students whether they are being heard by an adult they trust? Students have also been speaking up when they need to. She said that the 5th grade is very civic minded. They have made changes in the lunch time schedule, which 5th and 6th graders like, but 7th and 8th graders do not.

Ms. Randy Davis, Hanscom Primary School, said that they are focusing on content, pedagogy, and relationships. She said that 80 percent of the students could now articulate the purpose of lessons. They have refocused intervention efforts on students needing additional assistance with mathematics. The math specialists preview the lessons with these at-risk students which has helped them re-engage in the regular classroom which she expects will lead to impressive growth in January's TEMA test. They will figure out how to expand this strategy to increase student learning, assuming the quantitative results support the anecdotal results.

Ms. Davis reported that for relationships, the increased time for Responsive Classroom and morning meetings is helpful. They are also working on the sleep and schedules initiative, with a strange finding: in 2nd grade, 60 percent of the students get 10 to 11 hours of sleep a night, but the same percentage of students report being tired at school.

Mr. Mark Kaufman, Hanscom Middle School, said they have focused on trust and effort. Informal mentoring exchanges between teachers and students provide a sense of caring for the students. Grades 4 and 5 receive voluntary after-school homework help, with parents encouraged to have their children use it, especially when parents are deployed by the military. New students have student buddies assigned to them who help the student adjust to the new school.

With student engagement school-wide, the theme is "Hanscom Cares," at morning meetings and in student announcements. The student councils held Spirit Days. The councils held a winter coat drive

and a canned food drive. The entire school held an election assembly that included student speeches and an election. The Lincoln School Foundation [LSF] provided funds for a performance artist on “making your dreams come true” and setting goals. In March they will have a motivational speaker. The 6th grade focus is community building. A number of students are taking on leadership roles in different ways, such as helping as librarians, serving on the anti-bullying committee, attending the ELNA conference and working for the food bank.

Mr. Sander clarified how the schools other than Lincoln K-5 were tracking progress: Dr. Hobbs was asking students for three pieces of advice in the fall; Ms. Davis asked if he meant that she was tracking the responses to questions asked on the Tripod survey; Mr. Kaufman indicated that this spring they would ask these Tripod questions again. Ms. Davis indicated some concern, shared by Ms. Dobrow, about how students interpret these Tripod questions. Ms. Dobrow asked if they can try to triangulate results by asking the questions in different ways, either by having the teachers talk to students or have parents to ask the questions.

Ms. Dobrow said she’s delighted that the Middle School is taking on the issue of understanding learning objectives and goals. She commends the 7th grade team for it. She liked the assignment they gave students to write the pros and cons of locker searching. Ms. Dobrow thanked the principals for their work with student engagement. Mr. Brandmeyer thanked the principals and said that they are headed in the right direction. The Committee thanked the principals for their efforts.

Ms. Dobrow made a motion to accept the report, seconded by Mr. Sander. The Committee voted unanimously to accept the report.

B. Advanced Learning Opportunities: Progress Report

Ms. Sterling presented the update on advanced learning opportunities. She explained that this report was a follow-up to Mr. Brandmeyer’s September response. She said that ancillary materials for mathematics were introduced in November, and these materials are low-barrier, meaning that any student can try them if they want to. The students do not need to have completed any prerequisites to participate in a low-barrier advanced learning activity, whereas students need to be in a certain place in their learning to participate in a high-barrier activity. She reminded the Committee that she reported last year that none of the math programs they looked at had enough materials for advanced learning, and they knew they would need to purchase more no matter which program they chose. She met with the math specialists, and they looked at more ancillary math materials. They have been trying materials with mixed success. She said they will set aside money to get more. She said that there has been a distinct increase over last year in the number of options and in the number of students participating in advanced learning opportunities. There are after-school math clubs. These opportunities are outside of the classroom, and the offerings will continue through the spring.

Advanced learning opportunities for other subjects include the Science Fair and the Science Share. They need a coordinator for the Science Fair and are looking for an appropriate teacher. ELNA [Education and Leadership for a Nonviolent Age] is an activity that gives students a chance to step outside the class. The school held the conference and there was a positive reaction to it, so they plan to do it again next year. The Virtual High School [VHS] program has been piloted on the Lincoln campus and has been successful. In the spring, the program will grow; at Hanscom five students will be online and 15 Lincoln students will be participating. There has been a lot of professional development for teachers on how to meet the range of students’ needs. The Task Force on High-Achieving Students said that when the district has a culture that says it’s great to learn, there’s evidence that supports school culture about learning is great. She said that the morning meetings help in this effort, which is a daily one.

Mr. Sander said that they have made a great start, and he thanked those who have put in the effort on this goal. He asked on VHS whether the 15 students were the same who used it in the fall? Dr. Hobbs said no, not all of the students who did it in the fall will return in the spring. She said in 7th grade, there are only five courses offered. She indicated that the students are interested in this program. Mr. Brandmeyer said that VHS is a high-barrier activity for students done after the school day. He said it’s a great activity and indicated it is infrequent for students take more than one semester of VHS a year. He said they are thinking of 20 seats for next year as the budget rolls along. He said that if it increases more, they will find a different way to fund it. Ms. Sterling said it is expensive, but it seems to be worth it.

Mr. Sander commented regarding celebrating excellence that it would be great to bring students before the Committee to showcase their achievements if students are doing something great. He also asked about summer professional development and if she had a sense that they would be continuing with it this summer. Ms. Sterling said that they need to have some professional development for elementary teachers on how to teach math differentially to a range of students.

Ms. Glass asked whether the training and ancillary materials were for struggling students too? Ms. Sterling said they talked about the 2nd grade initiative at the Hanscom Primary School and that it's remarkable how the students have come along. They are meeting with the math specialists and will try a group this spring, but it is hard to schedule the time. Ms. Glass said that many students are involved in the after-school math clubs. She asked whether a range of students are choosing to participate in them. Ms. Davis said it is a range of abilities who are participating. Ms. Glass asked whether METCO students can participate in these math clubs. Ms. Sterling said yes.

Ms. Dobrow said that the Science Fair, Science Share, ELNA, and the school newspaper are great initiatives, but how do these activities target advanced learners? Ms. Sterling said they are low-barrier activities, but they give students a chance to stretch their interests. Student choice is key because their interests are highly motivational. How can we move the conversation to how to build stretch in by teachers and staff to support students in these endeavors? Ms. Dobrow said there is another dimension. Parents should be educated on these offerings. Please send sentences about how parents can encourage their children to involve themselves in these activities. Ms. Sterling said that was a good thought. She said there are different ways to tell parents about these activities. Ms. Dobrow suggested that the principals' newsletters were a way. Mr. Sander suggested that teachers send emails to parents to encourage their children to get involved in these activities, and parents can enforce the message at home.

Ms. Glass said time is a limited quantity, and she agrees that it's great to have activities after school, but she wants her children to have unstructured time too. How can we make sure that students can be involved in activities if they do not have the time to do so after school? She'd like more activities baked into the school day. Mr. Brandmeyer said that he likes the example of the newspaper story getting published in the school newspaper if the student was writing it for a class at school anyway. Ms. Sterling thanked the Committee for their suggestions on partnering. Ms. Dobrow thanked her for her leadership on the issue.

Mr. Sander made a motion to accept the report, and it was seconded by Ms. Glass. The Committee voted unanimously to accept the report.

C. 2009-2010 School Year Calendar: Second Reading and Vote

Mr. Brandmeyer explained that the Lincoln Teachers Association [LTA] voted to return to school before Labor Day. He proposed beginning school on Wednesday, September 2 and teachers returning to school on August 31. He proposed to give students Friday, September 4 off, to align with Sudbury, Lincoln-Sudbury, and Bedford which have the day off. In this proposal, June 18 would be the 180th day of school if there were no snow days.

Ms. Glass has talked to parents, and most have supported a pre-Labor Day start, but they do not want it to be a precedent. The only reason they want to start early is because Labor Day is so late this year.

Ms. Dobrow moved to accept Calendar B with the proviso that Friday, September 4 is not a school day. Ms. Glass seconded the motion. Ms. Dobrow and Ms. Glass voted to accept the motion. Mr. Sander voted against the motion, noting that he was concerned that families might not return in August if the first week was only a day and a half of school.

VI. Superintendent's Report

Mr. Brandmeyer thanked the screening committee for the search for a principal for the Hanscom Middle School for all their hard work. They have completed 10 interviews, and today they identified three finalists. He is very pleased with the pool of finalists, they are either assistant principals or principals now, and all of them have good experience. He will be speaking with them this weekend and would not release their names until he had talked to them. There will be a parent forum that the finalists will attend, and they will also visit the schools. Mr. Brandmeyer will visit their current schools of employment, check their references, and is optimistic that they will make an offer by mid-March. The parent forum will probably be the first week of March, which will also be a chance for the Committee to meet the finalists. They will send notices to parents. He asked that the Committee get parents to attend.

Ms. Dobrow suggested that the Base leadership be invited to attend. Ms. Robinson asked whether the candidates were local or from out of state. Mr. Brandmeyer said they are local. She asked whether they have been in the military or if they have experience in military schools. Mr. Brandmeyer said no. Ms. Dobrow thanked him for the update.

VII. Curriculum

None.

VIII. Policy

A. Adjustments to the Following Policies

AC Non-Discrimination

ACA Policy Against Harassment

JK Discipline Code

JKF Physical Restraint

Proposed Policy: Accessibility of Extracurricular Activities

Ms. Powers provided updates to the four policies to reflect federal and state regulations. The State's Department of Elementary and Secondary Education has approved the changes. One effort was to make sure that the contact information for those responsible for making sure that the policies are being enforced is available to the public.

The Committee agreed that Mr. Sander would provide Ms. Powers with suggested wording changes in the JKF Physical Restraint Policy and the JK Discipline Code. He got Mr. Brandmeyer's approval that the policies need not list the names of personnel so that the policies would not have to be approved every time there are personnel changes. Mr. Brandmeyer said that names and numbers could be provided in the Student Handbook.

Ms. Powers included a proposed policy on Accessibility of Extracurricular Activities. Ms. Dobrow suggested that the language be changed from "handicapped" to "students with disabilities." She said that she understands and supports the intent of the proposed accessibility.

Mr. Brandmeyer thanked Ms. Powers for her work. He said they will clean up the policies with tonight's suggestions and Mr. Sander's edits and will bring them back to the next meeting for a vote.

IX. Facilities and Financial

A. Warrant Approval

Mr. Creel presented the payroll warrants totaling \$575,461.45 and the accounts payable warrants totaling \$166,345.83 for a total of \$741,807.28. Mr. Schmertzler reviewed the warrants. Ms. Dobrow moved to approve the warrants, with Mr. Sander seconding the motion. The Committee voted unanimously to approve the warrants.

X. Old Business

A. Update Long-term Agenda

Mr. Brandmeyer presented the changes to the Committee's 2008-09 long-range planning agenda that goes to the end of the school year. Mr. Sander requested that the May 28 meeting include the advanced learning opportunities report. Mr. Brandmeyer said that item was tucked inside a work plan instead of being its own item. Ms. Dobrow asked that they include a discussion about the Lincoln-Sudbury consolidation on February 26.

Ms. Darling said that Mr. Sander raised the issue of the achievement gap at the last meeting, but she did not see it on the agenda. Mr. Sander asked them to pencil in something on the agenda, pending Ms. Sterling's discussion with the Administrative Team on the issue.

Ms. Sterling noted that on March 12, she will add an update on grades 6-8 mathematics review. The trial-use period for the new mathematics materials ends the first week of March. Ms. Dobrow suggested that they add a discussion about Town Meeting on March 12 and 26.

Mr. Sander made a motion to accept the report, and it was seconded by Ms. Glass. The Committee voted unanimously to accept the report.

XI. New Business

Ms. Dobrow said that she, Mr. Brandmeyer, and Mr. Sander attended the Monday meeting in Sudbury on the school consolidation plan. She reported that two ideas for administrative restructuring being considered in Sudbury are jointly hiring a superintendent and central administration for the Lincoln-Sudbury High School and for Sudbury K-8, or they will form one Lincoln-Sudbury K-12 school system. Mr. Sander said it is possible that rather than formally have a superintendency union, the L-S School Committee and the Sudbury K-8 School Committee could decide to hire the same administrators and jointly share the expenses. It appears that option would not require Town Meeting approval from Lincoln or Sudbury. Ms. Dobrow said that many Lincoln residents and representatives from the Board of Selectmen and the Finance Committee attended. She said that Sudbury's Board of Selectmen Chairman Larry O'Brien included them. The suggestion was that a committee be formed to look at the different options that Lincoln and Sudbury have. She said that the School Committee needs a representative on this new committee, and she indicated her willingness to serve in this role as she is vested in the process. She felt strongly about initiating the public conversation around the issue. Ms. Dobrow asked that they put this issue on the agenda for the next meeting as there will be more information to discuss.

Mr. Sander reported that the new committee to study the towns' options will operationally have the two chairmen of the Boards of Selectmen, School Committee representatives, and Finance Committee representatives from each town. There will also be a citizen or teacher nominated to the committee. One question the committee will investigate is whether there are short-term or long-term cost savings to the towns by consolidating in some way.

Ms. Dobrow said that part of the study will look at the educational and financial benefits and the functionality of combining the schools. They will look at what the administrators do. She said they were vocal that Lincoln is regionalized with Hanscom and it is important to Lincoln not to jeopardize that relationship. She said there's a legal question on the superintendency union that would probably require a vote at Town Meeting. It is a very complicated and political issue. She reported that tempers had cooled from the last meeting. Ms. Dobrow met with the Chair of the Sudbury K-8 School Committee, Susan Iuliano, and she will invite the Sudbury School Committee to one of our meetings. The administrative structure of the Lincoln-Sudbury High School is a concern, and she noted that the fact that Sudbury came up with ideas about Lincoln without consulting anyone in Lincoln was a problem.

Ms. Sterling said she is glad that it is a public discussion and she suggested that teachers be invited. Mr. Sander said that the new committee will look into the issue with all parties, including teachers.

XII. Approval of Minutes

Ms. Dobrow moved to approve the minutes of December 18, 2008 with the corrections. Mr. Sander seconded it. The Committee voted unanimously to approve the December 18 minutes with the corrections.

XIII. Information Enclosures

None.

XIV. Adjournment

On motion by Ms. Dobrow, seconded by Mr. Sander, the Committee voted unanimously to go into Executive Session for the purpose of contract negotiations. Ms. Dobrow, yes; Mr. Sander, yes; Ms. Glass, yes; Ms. Robinson, yes; Ms. Nunes-Tajeron, yes. The Committee would not be returning to open session. The open session adjourned at 9:15 pm.

Respectfully submitted,
Sarah G. Marcotte, Recording Secretary