

MINUTES OF THE LINCOLN SCHOOL COMMITTEE
Tuesday, April 7, 2009
Shelburne Center, 2730 Washington Street, Boston, MA
OPEN SESSION

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

Christina Horner, METCO Director, welcomed parents and the School Committee at 7:00 pm. Ms. Dobrow thanked the parents for hosting the meeting. She said the School Committee has been and remains extremely committed to the METCO program. Lincoln was one of the first three school districts to have a METCO program when it began. She told the parents that the Committee recently wrote a letter in support of METCO to Governor Patrick, and they sent copies to all district participants in the program; they will continue to advocate for the program.

One parent asked how the state budget deficit is going to impact the budget for the program. Ms. Dobrow deferred to Mr. Brandmeyer, who said \$28,000 has been cut in the current fiscal year, and he thanked the parents for willingness to raise money to offset some of the lost revenue. Mr. Brandmeyer indicated that school could absorb additional cuts to the METCO budget without any program cuts in this fiscal year. For 2009-2010, he expects a cut of \$40,000 to \$50,000. Mr. Brandmeyer said Lincoln and other schools are advocating for the same level of METCO funding as they started with in 2008-2009. The federal stimulus money is just coming in, and they will not know how that money will affect the METCO grant from the Commonwealth. They will work with Ms. Horner to mitigate cuts to Lincoln's program, and transportation could be impacted. He suggested that they might share buses with Sudbury, Lincoln-Sudbury, and METCO. Transportation will be determined in a bid process; the contract with Eastern Bus is ending. They have two choices: 1) the school runs their own buses, or 2) the school gets bids for services on buses. The grant Lincoln receives is between \$500,000 to \$600,000 and \$160,000 of it is spent on transportation. He urged parents to continue their advocacy by writing and talking to their representatives and senators.

One parent asked about METCO parents fundraising for METCO. Mr. Brandmeyer said that the School Committee rewrote its policy on gifts to school programs so as not to take gifts for core curriculum, which he considers METCO to be. Parents could fundraise for late buses, extra tutors, and Project Jumpstart. Mr. Sander said they are extremely grateful for the parents who want to raise money for METCO, but they do not want to have to depend on parent fundraising to run the core program in case that funding disappears in future years.

Mr. Brandmeyer said if there were additional cuts to the budget, they do not know how it would impact the program and where they would make cuts. They cannot cut buses and bus monitors. He said they are well staffed, and they are lucky to have a great group of people. He is confident that they can maintain the program with the 91 students they have going forward. He said that he can't see METCO going away; the legislature supports it. METCO is the most successful desegregation program in the United States, he said: 3,100 students from Boston go to suburban districts every day. There is much goodwill to sustain the program, but the question is at what level. Each community creates METCO as they need to, which is good.

One parent asked whether there would be fees for METCO, and Mr. Brandmeyer said no. Another parent asked in a worst-case scenario, would you eliminate elementary, middle, or high school METCO students? Mr. Brandmeyer said they will maintain the students who are already in the program, and they might not admit new students to the program if funds dried up.

Ms. Dobrow and Mr. Brandmeyer encouraged parents with additional questions to ask Ms. Horner, or call/email the office. They need to continue the conversation and keep up the advocacy for the METCO program.

I. Greetings and Call to Order

Ms. Dobrow called the meeting to order at 7:25 pm.

I.A. Board Election and Reorganization

Ms. Dobrow congratulated Mr. Schmertzler on his reelection to the Committee. Mr. Sander nominated Ms. Dobrow to Chairperson of the Committee for the next year, with Mr. Schmertzler seconding the nomination. The Committee voted unanimously for Ms. Dobrow to be Chair.

Ms. Dobrow appointed Mr. Sander as Vice Chairperson. He is willing to serve.

II. Chairperson's and Members' Reports

Mr. Orgel reported the Spelling Bee was a great event that was well done and thanked the LSF for sponsoring it.

Ms. Dobrow reported that the presentation at Town Meeting was successful, and she received great feedback. They highlighted the work going on in the schools and showed videos of the 5th Spanish class and electronics.

III. Public Comments

One parent commended the Committee on the presentation at Town Meeting but asked that other groups, such as the Lincoln School Foundation, receive credit for their events for the school. She asked about Julie Lynch's letter to the *Lincoln Journal* and her Freedom of Information Act request. Mr. Brandmeyer said they sent Ms. Lynch a letter, but they have not yet heard back from Ms. Lynch.

IV. Consent Agenda

A. Accept Gift

Ms. Dobrow moved, and Mr. Sander seconded, the motion to accept a donation of \$50.00 from a Lincoln family for the Grade 8 Washington, D.C. scholarship fund. The Committee unanimously approved.

V. Time Scheduled Appointments

A. Curriculum Update: Civic Engagement and Community Service Learning

Ms. Dobrow introduced Ms. Janice Fairchild, Content Specialist for Social Studies. Ms. Mary Sterling, Assistant Superintendent, said it was good to be at the meeting. On the report, she said it is in our interest to have students know their role as citizens. They want to connect teaching with what is happening in the world. They want to make these connections more front and center in the curriculum.

Ms. Fairchild presented the grade 6-8 civic engagement and community service learning initiative. She said that now they teach students how to react to information and what to do. She said it is the teachers' role to give students content and to lead them to make changes in the world. They want to go beyond bake sales and give students more skills to do more. In January, her students looked at the Arctic and Antarctic and how climate change was impacting polar bears and penguins. She asked them what could they do. They wrote letters to the editor for the *Lincoln Journal* and the *Hansconian* and their own newsletter. The students put considerable effort into their letters, and the class selected the best ones. Ms. Fairchild read aloud one student letter, entitled, "Climate Change Impacts Us All." The students have studied coral reefs and wrote to those in power. Another student wrote a screenplay and has sent it to be produced.

For Earth Hour on March 31, the voluntary shut-the-lights off initiative, the students did not want to give up watching the Kids' Choice Awards, so they had parties and watched it in the dark. Ms. Fairchild said Keith Johnson's school newspaper and the student council are other ways where students engage with the outside world. Steve Cullen has students involved with soup kitchens. They are putting together a conference for the three grades in the fall of 2009 to kick off civic engagement. The conference will feature a keynote speaker, and LSF will fund the conference. They are hoping to get a state grants for community service learning and civic engagement.

Mr. Schmertzler asked if they plan to have students learn about town and city government? She said yes. Mr. Brandmeyer said there has been a 6th grade team meeting panel discussion on local government workings. Mr. Sander said that he is extremely grateful for Ms. Fairchild's leadership and appreciates her initiative on this project which has really given this issue traction at the school. He asked whether students could get plugged into Town Meeting, and suggested that Town Clerk Susan Brooks and Administrator Tim Higgins had offered to help. He said that he wanted the priority to be on serving *with* others rather than just raising money for service projects. He wants leadership opportunities to be emphasized. Ms. Fairchild said that two students are coming to the Committee meeting next month.

Ms. Glass and Ms. Dobrow thanked her and said the initiative is fabulous, gratifying, and satisfying. Ms. Glass reported her 7th grader has been inspired. Ms. Dobrow said it's terrific when students see tangible results. There are interesting creative forms of assessment. She wants teachers to receive professional development. Ms. Fairchild said they intend to branch out across the curriculum. Ms. Sterling said the social studies teachers wanted to start this initiative, and she asked that the community send Ms. Fairchild ideas for service opportunities for students. In response to a parent's question about whether 5th graders would be included, Ms. Fairchild noted that it was complicated since at Hanscom, the Middle School includes 4th graders too, but noted that they may include 5th grade in a later year, and also noted that there is a lot of service going on at younger grades. Another parent wanted to make her aware of service learning grants and a federal RFP out for proposals to partner with community based organizations. Another parent suggested having an internship for 8th graders and then having them report on it. Ms. Fairchild said Steve Cullen has had students present journals and pictures. In response to a question as to whether community service projects were graded, Ms. Fairchild noted that since these projects are generally built into the curriculum, for the most part they are graded. Ms. Brown asked whether they could start these initiatives at a younger age because they are important, and Ms. Fairchild agreed.

Ms. Dobrow thanked her for the report.

B. Update on Federal Stimulus Funds for School Districts

Mr. Brandmeyer reported on federal stimulus funding. The Commonwealth will receive \$860 million, and the legislature will weigh in on how it allocates it to cities and towns. Lincoln does not qualify for the state's Chapter 70 funding. Lincoln will receive \$140,000 in FY 10 and FY 11 for special education programs. They cannot use stimulus money to establish new programs. They will use the money to establish rigorous standards and build high quality professional and paraprofessional development. These are targeted grants that do not require extra approval, and there will be high-level reporting on the use of funds. The money will stretch into FY 12. Hanscom Middle School may get Title I funds. They will discuss summer program opportunities. Mr. Brandmeyer will work with the Administrative Team to suggest to the Committee how to use the funds and will have plans and guidance at the next two meetings.

C. Proposed METCO Enrollment for 2009-2010

Mr. Brandmeyer said that there will be four sections of kindergarten next year. Ms. Horner asked that parents let them know of plans for their students for next year as soon as possible. She said that two 6th grade students will be leaving and going to exam schools next year. She is recommending that those two students be replaced. She said one 1st grader might be moving, and may replace a student in 1st grade. Mr. Brandmeyer said that this METCO plan is predicated on having four sections of kindergarten.

Mr. Orgel asked how this plan relates to admitting non-resident students. Mr. Brandmeyer said METCO students were incorporated in their projected numbers, and the resident and METCO students keep them below class size targets. He recommended that they endorse this METCO enrollment plan first.

Ms. Dobrow moved, and Ms. Glass seconded, to accept the METCO enrollment plan to enroll 12 students in the 2009-2010 school year as presented. The Committee voted unanimously to accept the enrollment plan.

VI. Superintendent's Report

None.

VII. Curriculum

Ms. Sterling will have an update on the Middle School mathematics materials at the next meeting.

VIII. Policy

A. First Reading: Revision to Admission of Non-Resident Students Policy

Mr. Sander presented his revision to Policy JFAG, Admission of Non-Resident Students. He noted that allowing employees to send their children to the Lincoln Schools is an important benefit that they provide. The challenge is that the Committee just changed its class size policy and it is now less hard-and-fast when a new section is "mandated" since the policy allows each cohort to exceed target class sizes twice. While he indicated that the Committee would endeavor to provide continuity for students who start at the school, the revised policy he is bringing before the Committee permits enrollment of these students only on a year to year basis; they are not guaranteed a spot in the future if it would require more sections than it would without the children of these employees. Given a large cohort requesting permission to enroll in kindergarten, without this change in the policy, the Committee would be signing a 9-year blank check. The financial situation that the Committee faces may be tough and we can't know what the competing uses will be for these resources. He added a hierarchy to the policy of which students would receive priority if there is not enough space for all children of employees who request it. Lincoln teachers' children would be on top.

Ms. Dobrow thanked Mr. Sander for his work. Ms. Glass asked what they would do with the current students. Mr. Sander offered to change the ranking of students so that it read the first category was for children of employees prior to the adoption of this policy. Mr. Orgel expressed concern about next year's kindergarten class, for which there are many requests, and whether they were setting themselves up for a tough decision that could push students out in later years. He does not want to go above the maximum class size. Mr. Sander said the priority is to be up front with the families that they might have to collapse the number of sections in the future and this could limit slots for the cohort of children of employees entering kindergarten in 2009-2010.

Mr. Brandmeyer said that since there was a delay in approving the non-resident students, two students have withdrawn their requests, one other family would like to enroll their student in kindergarten and then leave Lincoln schools next year, and another family may do the same. Mr. Schmertzler said it was prudent and kind to tell families to make sure they are going to their schools in first grade. Mr. Orgel said that they should be honest about the policy changes. Mr. Brandmeyer said that the number of employees who have asked to have their children enroll in the school shows a real vote of confidence on the teachers' part in our school. The policy is a great benefit for them, but they do need to balance that with money concerns. Mr. Brandmeyer will communicate the intent of the policy and ask the families to let him know if they are still interested. Ms. Glass asked that the definition of cohort be included in the policy as a footnote and thanked Mr. Sander for his help. They will vote on the policy at the next meeting. Mr. Orgel left the meeting at 8:45.

IX. Facilities and Financial

A. Warrant Approval

Mr. Creel presented the payroll warrants totaling \$590,622.18 and the accounts payable warrants totaling \$175,235.68 for a total of \$765,857.86. Mr. Schmertzler reviewed the warrants. Mr. Schmertzler moved to approve the warrants, with Mr. Sander seconding the motion. The Committee voted unanimously to approve the warrants.

B. Discussion of GASB – Statement 45

Mr. Brandmeyer reported on Statement 45 of the Governmental Accounting Standards Board [GASB]. The Statement requires state and local governments to revise the way they report their costs and obligations related to post employment benefits other than pensions, and for the Town of Lincoln, those benefits are health and life insurance. There is a trust fund, the Group Insurance Liability Fund, that the Town has set up for this purpose. If they fund it early, it lowers liability. Mr. Brandmeyer recommended that the School Committee authorize the administration to transfer \$400,000 from the health insurance stabilization account to the Trust Fund.

Mr. Sander moved, and Ms. Dobrow seconded, the authorization to transfer \$400,000 from the health insurance stabilization account to the Trust Fund. The Committee voted unanimously to authorize the transfer.

X. Old Business

None.

XI. New Business

Ms. Dobrow said that in the RFP process for renting the Hartwell space, emails have raised questions about the Lincoln Preschool. She asked Mr. Brandmeyer and Mr. Creel to prepare an update on the Lincoln Preschool that included costs and how they are covered, and where they stand on enrollment for the April 30 meeting.

XII. Approval of Minutes

Ms. Dobrow moved to approve the minutes of February 26, 2009 and March 12, 2009 with the corrections, and Ms. Glass seconded it. The Committee voted unanimously to approve the February 26 and March 12 minutes with the corrections.

XIII. Information Enclosures

None.

XIV. Adjournment

On motion by Ms. Dobrow, seconded by Mr. Sander, the Committee voted unanimously to adjourn (since the Boston space was closing), travel back to Lincoln, and go into Executive Session at the Hartwell Building in Lincoln for the purpose of contract negotiations. Ms. Dobrow, yes; Mr. Sander, yes; Ms. Glass, yes; Mr. Schmertzler, yes; Ms. Robinson, yes; Ms. Nunes-Tajeron, yes; Ms. Brown, yes. The Committee would not be returning to open session. The open session adjourned at 8:55 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Sarah G. Marcotte, Recording Secretary