

MINUTES OF THE LINCOLN SCHOOL COMMITTEE
Thursday, October 16, 2008
Hartwell Building, Lincoln, MA
OPEN SESSION

Present: Julie Dobrow (Chair), Tom Sander (Vice Chair), Al Schmertzler, Jennifer Glass. Also present: Mickey Brandmeyer (Superintendent), Mary Sterling (Assistant Superintendent), Buckner Creel (Administrator for Business and Finance), Stephanie Powers (Director of Student Services).

Absent: Rob Orgel, Louann Robinson (Hanscom Representative).

I. Greetings and Call to Order

Ms. Dobrow called the meeting to order at 7:05 pm.

II. Chairperson's and Members' Reports

Ms. Dobrow announced that Ms. Robinson's husband was returning home, which was why she was not in attendance.

Mr. Sander said that he attended the math meeting with parents on October 6. He said the meeting was well done and well received. He appreciated the chance to look at the new math curriculum. It is more meaty than many parents originally thought. Ms. Sterling said that they were proud of the math specialists for their work for the meeting. She mentioned that a few parents raised the concern that their children were not challenged enough with the material. Ms. Sterling said that they are making progress monitoring the students and the teachers are collecting the data so that they can challenge the high-achieving students.

III. Public Comments

Linda Hammett-Ory, a parent, asked what the process was to identify the priorities in the budget. Where is the opportunity for parents to have input? Ms. Dobrow responded that the first budget meeting will be on October 30. They are getting the word out through many channels so that parents know this is the time to be heard. She explained that the School Committee sets priorities first by listening to the administration, and then they sift through the different items. They plan to have additional meetings for parents, in the form of coffees during the day also. At these coffees, they cannot make policy, but they can listen to suggestions. Ms. Glass will attend the PTA meetings. Ms. Jillian Darling of the PTA said that any information that the Committee could provide ahead of time helps in the discussion.

IV. Consent Agenda

- A. Authorize Superintendent to Vote on CASE [Concord Area Special Education Collaborative] and EDCO [Educational Collaborative of Greater Boston] Boards

Ms. Dobrow moved, and Mr. Schmertzler seconded, the motion to designate Mr. Brandmeyer as Lincoln's voting representative to the CASE and EDCO boards. The Committee voted unanimously to designate Mr. Brandmeyer as the representative to CASE and EDCO.

V. Time Scheduled Appointments

- A. Report on Student Engagement and Tripod Project

Mr. Brandmeyer explained that the four school principals would discuss what actions they have taken with regard to the data they collected. He said that the Tripod survey has influenced their work. It has been a big project, and there has been lots of interest in what schools have done with the information gathered from the survey. He explained that in the past decade, some of the dialogue around education reform has focused on the thought that if schools operated like businesses, they would get better results. The high-stakes testing has had the result of better performance in some instances, but it is a slow process. The Administrative team talked about the influence of business writers and their application of the business model to schools, and while skeptical, the Superintendent thinks that schools can learn from some of the business thinking. One way is the use of data for decision making in a systematic manner. The Administrative Council read *Good to Great* by Jim Collins. The author suggests that great organizations confront brutal facts but don't lose faith, make more "better decisions" than "bad decisions," but won't be perfect. Lincoln has sufficient resources and is committed to close the achievement gap. In the past few years, they are committed to using data in a systematic way, and the Tripod data is one step along this path. The Tripod Project is a nation-wide research project headed by Ron Ferguson from Harvard's Kennedy School of Government. Mr. Brandmeyer said that there has been a change in the school culture that has made a positive impact because the faculty and administration are beginning to use data to influence decision making.

Tripod examines how the encouragement and expectations of students influences their level of engagement. The survey was given to elementary students in grades 3, 4, and 5 one time. It was given to middle-school students in grades 6, 7, and 8 twice in core subjects. Mr. Brandmeyer said that some of the students' perceptions were higher than other schools, others were similar, and some were lower. They received honest feedback from the students, and it was tough when the student perceptions were lower than the faculty anticipated. It is a risky activity to oversimplify the data and to cherry pick data from certain questions. They must take a global look at the data to make improvements. He said that the greatest risk is to jeopardize the trust

the administration has built with the faculty. We cannot identify only what is wrong, we need to support an environment that uses data for improvement not to place blame.

Ms. Sterling talked about the activities and the process they went through after gathering the data, which was a huge initiative. In December 2007, the entire faculty began the process. In March 2008, Ron Ferguson spoke to the faculty at Institute Day and the data analysis continued.

Mr. Schmertzler said that he has read about principals in Chicago and New York City schools who have set high barriers for all students, and they have been successful. He asked whether these principals used the Tripod survey to do it? He asked, can we use what they did? Mr. Brandmeyer responded that Tripod depends on three legs: 1) teachers' content knowledge; 2) teachers' instructional skill; and 3) teachers building relationships with their students. He responded that they have high expectations of all of our students. The best outcomes occur when the expectations are high, and there is high support. Mr. Sander asked what is the right comparison school for Lincoln? Why can't we get the comparison data for our school? What levels of variance are there with other schools? We have different measures. He would like teachers to learn from each other on who is good at engaging students and who is good at supporting them. He does not want to be punitive to teachers. Each teacher can go back and look at the data from their class. Mr. Sander said that they don't know what kinds of communities Lincoln is comparing to, and he said that it is frustrating.

Ms. Dobrow said that it was reassuring that the context of Tripod was presented. It is good to look at ourselves. When you have a conversation with the staff, where did they want to set the bar? The four principals from each of the schools next presented their data.

Steve McKenna, K-4 principal, said that his faculty thought that they would have a 75 to 80 percent favorable rating on the statement, "I like coming to school." When the results came back at 40 percent, they were stunned. They asked each other whether this result was acceptable, and the answer was no. Therefore, enjoyment is their engagement target this year. They are also working on giving more teacher support to students. They are working on building the concept of working hard to achieve things. There are three areas that they are building on: 1) responsive classroom; 2) feelings around recess; and 3) looking at project-based authentic learning opportunities for parents to see. Using strategies for the Responsive Classroom, they have a morning meeting that includes a greeting to each student, a chance for each student to share something, a game or group activity, and news that students need to know. Feelings around recess include helping to teach kids how to interact with each other and treat each other with respect. The physical education teachers also come out to help. The students still have unstructured recess time. The staff agreed to the preassessment of students and they have the results. The results will be presented at Monday's faculty meeting. They will revisit the survey in March and at the end of the year to see what progress has been made. There was one glitch in a question that they will fix. Teachers are looking at the learning experience atmosphere because if students are scared on the playground and in the cafeteria, they can also be afraid to ask questions.

Randy Davis, Hanscom Primary School, said that her teachers were devastated when they saw that their rating for "I like coming to school" was only 56.9 percent. They too are looking at enjoyment for students. With the relationship strand, they are increasing their time for the morning meeting and giving the staff more classroom training. On the support and press goal, teachers are being clear on their objectives with students. When she visits classrooms, she asks students what the goal of their lesson was and notices that when they check in with students, it is helpful. One problem they have is that students are coming to school tired. Ms. Davis noted that many students have televisions in their bedrooms, and while she acknowledged that it was tough to influence home conditions, they need to decide whether to make a fuss about it. She said that some parents have indicated that they need help with evening routines. Sharon Hobbs, Principal of grades 5-8 at Lincoln School, said that her faculty was disappointed with the survey results too. They expected that 80 to 90 percent of the students would say they liked coming to school and that 45 to 60 percent was unacceptable. They are looking at trust and how students perceive their teachers care about them. Mark Kaufman, Hanscom Middle School principal, said that in the secondary group, trust was the target. For grades 4 and 5, enjoyment was the target. His faculty was also concerned with the results of the Tripod survey. They had lower percentages than the other schools. They collected more data, and it was more positive. For 4th and 5th grade, they have implemented the responsive classroom. On the trust and effort part, the students need to feel safe and welcome at school. Three ways the school climate can help with that are: 1) support; 2) engagement; and 3) leadership development. One area where they are paying more attention is in their deployment support. The social workers are paying extra attention to this. With their transitions program, each student has a buddy, and this helps new students transition into the Hanscom school. Kaufman said that as a whole, Hanscom students do well with transitions. They are increasing their engagement activities by building community. They are putting more assemblies into the school day. Recently they have focused on the elections and have had an election rally with speeches and posters. Lynn Fagan, Preschool Coordinator, next presented the DECA program. The preschool is in the fifth year of using the program, and they have 2 and one half years of data from it. The program focuses on social and emotional strengths of students. The data leads them to build action plans for each student. Their focus is to create more resilient students so that they achieve greater success and are more engaged in learning.

Ms. Glass had one data question about reading at home. It is a low percentage at 29 percent, and she wanted to make sure that she had not misread it. Mr. Brandmeyer responded that they were alarmed with that percentage too. They are not placing blame, but it is a surprising number. Mr. Sander said with reading at home, there needs to be communication with parents. He asked whether the Lincoln School has discussed with their students what they thought would increase their engagement. Mr. McKenna said no. Ms. Sterling suggested they could make the discussion part of their morning meeting.

Mr. Schmertzler wondered whether the administration and teachers were being too hard on themselves. He said that you are fighting against a culture of pleasure, and there aren't many models that show that people have to work, which is not always

fun. Mr. Sander thanked Mr. Brandmeyer for the data and said that it sounds like the Committee would continue to get reports about what is working. Mr. Brandmeyer promised they would hear more.

Ms. Dobrow said she was alarmed at the high percentage of students who do not ask for help if they need it. She wondered whether it was a systemic problem. Ms. Hobbs said that for them it was an issue of trust. Jillian Darling, PTA representative, asked how the information from the survey could best be conveyed to parents, especially the information about reading at home and making sure that students come to school well rested. She asked how the PTA could help in honing these messages to parents. Mr. Brandmeyer said that her observations were good, but he cautioned that it was not helpful to pull out a couple of data points. The survey data must be looked at as a whole and in context. He said they would find ways to share the information, but the PTA minilink was not the vehicle for it. Linda Hammett-Ory said that she was concerned about students getting enough sleep. She said that she knew of a third grader on a sports team who was playing sports at 8 at night. Could sports teams be asked to end their activities earlier so as not to jeopardize students' bedtimes? Mr. Brandmeyer said that they cannot tell parents which decisions to make. She responded that many parents are between a rock and a hard place because they want their children to participate in sports, but they do not control the coaches and the timing of sports. Sharon Antia, a parent, asked whether she could get a copy of the report. Mr. Brandmeyer said that he could not share the data set with parents, and he did not think it was a public record because of student record regulations. He said that the report was public and copies were available that evening or through the Superintendent's Office. Ms. Antia said that she is concerned about the achievement gap and asked what the plan was to address it. Mr. Brandmeyer said that they want all students to achieve. Our goal is to close gaps. Ms. Dobrow thanked the principals, Ms. Sterling, and Mr. Brandmeyer for their work on the Tripod survey. She appreciated the effort, thought, and time they have put into the survey and into working with the data.

Ms. Dobrow moved, and Mr. Sander seconded, a motion to accept the report on student engagement and the Tripod project. The Committee voted unanimously to accept the reports.

B. Discussion on Ballot Initiative: Question 1

Ms. Glass presented the information about Question 1, will the voters eliminate the state income tax, on the November ballot. She said that the state's PTA is against it. Currently with the budget crisis, the state has a \$1.4 billion gap. If Question 1 passes, there will be a \$12.4 billion gap.

Ms. Dobrow said they researched what the School Committee can do legally as elected officials. The Office of Campaign and Political Finance states that the Committee can take a stand but cannot urge people to vote one way or another. Ms. Dobrow wrote a draft of a statement for them to release to the Lincoln Journal and put on the website. It is her view that it would be devastating to the schools to get rid of the income tax.

Ms. Glass explained that it would severely impact school funding via Chapter 70. For example, in FY 09, Lincoln will receive \$775,000 in Chapter 70 funding. If the ballot initiative passed, it would mean they would receive only \$223,000 in Chapter 70 funding. Mr. Brandmeyer said that the kindergarten and METCO grants would be jeopardized. Mr. Schmertzler said he thought the question was disgusting and unfortunate, and he is pleased that our state representatives and senators oppose it. The Massachusetts Taxpayers Foundation and the Chamber of Commerce, groups that usually approve of cutting taxes, oppose eliminating the income tax. He said he thought they should oppose it. The Committee discussed the other states that have eliminated the income tax, and the results have been disastrous.

Mr. Sander asked that the draft be amended to include specific examples of how much money the schools would lose should the initiative pass. Ms. Dobrow made a motion to amend the draft statement about Question 1, and it was seconded by Mr. Schmertzler. The Committee voted unanimously to accept the draft statement about Question 1 with the amendments.

VI. Superintendent's Report

A. October 1st Enrollment Report

Mr. Brandmeyer presented the enrollment report for Preschool, Lincoln School, and Hanscom Primary and Middle Schools. These numbers are the official enrollment figures for 2008-09. He said on all campuses, they are down by 60 students from last year, with a total of 1180 students. The Lincoln campus's highest number of students was 715 five to six years ago. He describes the figures as relatively flat. In some enrollments, they are close to their class size limits. Hanscom is down from 497 students to 472 students. They have dropped one enrollment band from last year, which will result in a reduction in funding in their contract allocation, which is based on the student figures on September 30, 2008. They will monitor it.

Mr. Schmertzler asked whether they expected a significant number of students to come during the year to the Hanscom schools. Mr. Creel said that the Cyber Command initiative was going away from the Air Force and moving to the Navy. The program is slowly fading away. Mr. Brandmeyer said that the Preschool is full. Ms. Glass said that there's a consistent number of Lincoln residents who send their kids to private and charter schools. Mr. Sander asked whether the school asks why students leave the Lincoln schools and that he thought it would be useful to know why the students leave. Mr. Brandmeyer agreed. Ms. Darling of the PTA said she too would like to know why students leave our schools to go to private schools. She said data on it would be good to have.

Mr. Brandmeyer told the Committee that he attended a meeting with the Chair of the State's Ways and Means Committee, Representative Bob DeLeo, other state representatives including Representative Tom Conroy, and other school superintendents. At the meeting there was a healthy exchange of ideas. He indicated that they told the Chairman that schools need money for special education programs, circuit breaker funds, and Chapter 70 funds. Mr. Brandmeyer said that Proposition 2 ½ overrides, when they pass, are used to maintain the programs that the school has, not to fund new programs or to do more.

They have started the beginning of a dialogue. He said that Representative Conroy can attend a meeting and talk about the state budget when the Committee discusses the FY 10 budget. They are expecting state budget problems to continue for another two to three years. As things stand now with the budget cuts Governor Patrick just announced, we have remained relatively ok, but the statewide supplemental grant for METCO has been cut by \$1,300,000. The Circuit Breaker funding is still ok, but the advanced learning grants have been cut (Ms. Sterling just applied for one in September). He said our budget kick off meeting is October 30, the next meeting, and they decided to wait to invite Representative Conroy until after the November 4 election. Mr. Brandmeyer announced that Lincoln is hosting the ELNA [Education and Leadership for a Nonviolent Age] conference on November 19. Mr. Sander is the keynote speaker, and Ms. Dobrow will also participate.

VII. Curriculum

Ms. Sterling reported that she visited the fourth grade this past week and gave an example of the ways in which teachers were working with students to enhance their understanding of place and value, concepts that are tough for students to grasp.

VIII. Policy

A. Discussion of Acceptance and Use of Gifts

Mr. Brandmeyer led the discussion about developing a policy to address the use of money gifts to support school programs. He contacted 31 school districts to see whether they have policies about using money for their school programs. Of the respondents, 75 percent of them do not accept gifts for their core personnel. Many of the districts do not have a policy, either. The benefit of having a policy is that it sets precedent and gives guidance to the administration. The schools polled accept gifts for sports and enhancements programs. They have accepted less than \$50,000. Ms. Glass asked whether Mr. Brandmeyer wanted to know what Weston and Concord-Carlisle's policies were. He said yes. Lincoln-Sudbury has a policy about the acceptance of gifts that was not included in the survey results, but Mr. Brandmeyer has a copy of the policy.

Ms. Dobrow said that Mr. Orgel, who was absent, was willing to help draft a policy. She moved that they establish a subcommittee to draft a policy on the acceptance and use of gifts. Mr. Schmertzler seconded the motion. The committee voted unanimously to establish a subcommittee to draft a policy regarding gifts and how to use money raised by parents. They will present a first draft of a policy at one of the next meetings.

IX. Facilities and Financial

A. Warrant Approval

Mr. Creel presented the payroll warrants totaling \$585,012.19 and the accounts payable warrants totaling \$227,270.45 for a total of \$812,282.64. 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.

B. Vote to Approve District's Statement of Interest for School Building Project

Mr. Creel said that the multi-board meeting the Committee held about the potential school building project went well. Mr. Brandmeyer and Ms. Dobrow presented the Statement of Interest [SOI] to the Boards. He thought the discussion was one of the best he's heard in a long time. There were concerns about the school building project downstream, but as submitting the SOI is not a commitment to a project and is the first step in a 31 step process, the Selectmen support it. Mr. Creel told the Committee that if they approve, they need to go before the Selectmen at their November 3 meeting. He reiterated that the Selectmen are disposed to approve it. Mr. Schmertzler moved that the School Committee vote to approve the submission of a Statement of Interest (in the format shown on the attached sheet) to the Massachusetts School Building Authority, and to direct the Administration to carry this approval to the Board of Selectmen for their consideration and vote on November 3rd. Mr. Sander seconded the motion. The Committee voted unanimously to approve the Statement of Interest.

C. FY 09 Quarterly Budget Report

Mr. Creel presented the FY 09 quarterly budget report for the first quarter. He said that the utility billing at Hanscom has been improved. The school's insurance covered the damage from the fires. For the utility costs, he noted that they locked in gas prices in the spring. He said that the report he will present in January will be more informative because there will be more development on the financial situation in general. Ms. Glass, looking at the Hanscom budget sheet, noticed that in the Expended column, it should read zero for heat and zero for electricity. In the Expended and Encumbered column under utilities, for electricity the column should read \$100,000, and for water, sewer, telecommunications the column should read \$46,000. The expended/encumbered percentage for water, sewer, and telecommunications should be 75. Mr. Creel made the changes. He said that there will be new utility rates at Hanscom in January 2009.

Ms. Dobrow made a motion to accept the budget report with the changes in the Hanscom budget. Mr. Schmertzler seconded it. The Committee voted unanimously to accept the budget report with the changes.

X. Old Business

A. Approve State of the Town Message

Mr. Sander suggested that they include in the message that the school day has expanded by 15 minutes; that most of the half days of school have been eliminated; and that the kindergarten program has been expanded to full-day. He mentioned that the Tripod survey should be included, but Mr. Brandmeyer suggested that it be included in the annual Town report instead. Mr.

Sander made a motion to accept the State of the Town message with the changes suggested. Mr. Schmertzler seconded it. The Committee voted unanimously to approve the State of the Town message with the changes.

XI. New Business

A. Lincoln Finance Committee's FY 2010 Budget Guidelines

The Finance Committee is permitting the Town's departments to submit base budgets for FY 10 that show 2.5 percent growth over their FY 09 budgets. Ms. Dobrow and Mr. Brandmeyer met with Robert Steinbrook, Chairman of the Finance Committee, who said that it will be a tough year. There are other unknown fiscal demands on the Town, for example, the federal requirement GASB, which requires municipalities to hold more money in reserves. The Finance Committee is asking Town departments not to prepare for a Proposition 2 ½ override for 2010. The administration will present a preliminary budget at the next meeting. Mr. Creel and Mr. Schmertzler will take the capital projects to the Capital Planning Committee at its meeting on November 19.

XII. Approval of Minutes

Ms. Dobrow moved to approve the minutes of September 25, 2008 with the corrections. Mr. Sander seconded it. The Committee voted unanimously to approve the 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 the meeting. The open session adjourned at 10:15 pm.

Respectfully submitted,
Sarah G. Marcotte, Recording Secretary