

**MINUTES OF THE
LINCOLN SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEETING OF
Thursday, March 1, 2007**

Present: Julie Dobrow (Chair), Laurie Manos, Sharon Antia, Al Schmertzler, Leta Allen (METCO Representative), Deneen Trask (Hanscom Representative) and Mary Goldstein (Hanscom Representative). Also present: Mickey Brandmeyer (Superintendent), Paul Naso (Assistant Superintendent), Buckner Creel (Administrator for Business and Finance), Teresa Watts (Administrator of Student Services), Lynn Fagan, Early Childhood Coordinator.

Absent: Sandy Hessler

I. Greetings and Call to Order

Ms. Dobrow called the meeting to order at 7:10 p.m.

II. Chairperson's and Members' Reports

Ms. Trask observed that she had noticed the current lunch menu at Hanscom included menus planned by the elementary school students. She commended Cathleen Higgins for involving students in this manner.

III. Public Comments

Maureen Cullen, a teacher at the Lincoln Integrated Preschool explained that she and other teachers from the program were present. They are aware that the preschool reorganization proposal was on the agenda and want to offer to answer any questions the School Committee may have.

IV. Consent Agenda

There were no items on the consent agenda.

V. Time Scheduled Appointments

A. Preschool Programming 2007-2008

Mr. Brandmeyer briefly reviewed the context for the proposed reorganization and explained that the packet included answers to some of the frequently questions asked about the proposed reorganization.

Mr. Schmertzler inquired about some terms of the Magic Garden lease, specifically the obligations both the town and Magic Garden have concerning costs. Mr. Creel and Tim Christenfelt of the Magic Garden Board provided details about costs related to staffing, cleaning, utilities, snow removal and other indirect costs such as telecommunications support, water, natural gas, and annual inspections. After learning these details, Mr. Schmertzler observed that a rough comparison between the Magic Garden and LPS costs shows a difference with LPS expending about \$100,000 more.

Ms. Antia observed that from her reading on educational practices the quality of the classroom teachers appears to be the most critical factor. She referred to an email received by the School Committee from Margo Seltzer in which Ms. Seltzer discussed some of the differences between teachers who hold a Special Education degree and an Early Childhood Education degree. Ms. Antia asked for a clarification.

Teresa Watts and Lynn Fagan responded with a brief explanation about teacher licensure. They said that in the Lincoln Integrated Preschool all classrooms have at least one teacher fully credentialed according to DOE regulations and that there are support staff with similar credentials. Ms. Fagan said that teachers in two of the three classrooms are dual certified (Special Education and Early Childhood Education). In the third classroom the teacher also has two certifications (Special Education and Teacher of the Deaf and Hearing Impaired).

Ms. Dobrow asked Mr. Christenfeld to speak to the credentials of Magic Garden teachers. He did not have those details with him but reminded the School Committee that the nine full-time Magic Garden staff are not directly responsible for students' special needs.

Mr. Brandmeyer clarified the requirement that Lincoln Public School teachers have licenses granted by the Massachusetts Department of Education. It is possible that Magic Garden may have teachers with certificates awarded through other state agencies.

In response to a question from Ms. Manos, Mr. Brandmeyer elaborated on how services would be delivered in the new model and explained how the ratios of students with and without special needs may vary during the course of the day. Mr. Brandmeyer also explained the role of Diane Mackenzie, who, although she does not have her own class, is regularly in classes consulting or co-teaching.

The discussion continued with further clarifications about enrollment, schedules and staff roles.

Mr. Schmertzler asked how the Lincoln Integrated Preschool will generate a larger number of Lincoln resident students. Mr. Brandmeyer responded by reminding the School Committee that when the proposal was introduced he said that he did not wish to compete with other preschools. Nevertheless, he does expect some interest from Lincoln families and perhaps others. He also stressed that he needed to keep a balance for sufficient seats for both Lincoln and Hanscom residents. He added that if there was greater demand, he will come back and explain the level of demand and give cause for wanting to expand the program.

There was brief discussion about the tuition differences and time option differences for Magic Garden and the Lincoln Integrated Preschool.

Ms. Trask commented that in her conversations with Hanscom parents she consistently hears from parents of both special education and non-special education students that they are very pleased with the quality of the program. Mr. Brandmeyer said that he appreciated the comments and is looking forward to validation of that quality from the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). The Lincoln Integrated Preschool is one of the first programs to seek accreditation through the new NAEYC standards.

Ms. Manos shared her thinking on the proposal. She commented that there is a great deal to be said for both sides of the issue. She acknowledged the wonderful relationship with Magic Garden that has existed. Nevertheless, there are several points that make her favorably disposed to the proposal. She cited the following benefits to the proposal: increased flexibility over staffing, the assurance that instruction would be delivered by Massachusetts Department of Education certified teachers, the assurance that preschool students would have teachers who are involved in the LPS training and evaluation processes, and the confidence that pre-school students would be placed in the least restrictive environment. She added that although she is uncomfortable with percentages, she believes the problem with the lower percentage of Lincoln children will resolve itself over time.

After some further discussion about the details of the Magic Garden lease agreement, Ms. Dobrow suggested that the School Committee distinguish between lease details not germane to the question at hand and the ideas about how best to organize the preschool programs.

Mr. Christenfeld and Mr. Brandmeyer briefly discussed the degree of flexibility in the current model for Lincoln staff to be reassigned from Magic Garden as needed.

Mr. Christenfeld suggested that the essential question concerns the model being used for early childhood special needs education. He cited to a Massachusetts Department of Education document explaining three models: 1) Community-based model (using existing settings), 2) combined resource model, and 3) public school based model. He concluded from the information in the document that, although the DOE report does not claim that there is a proven ideal model it does maintain that it tends to be best to mirror to "10% experience" Special Education children encounter elsewhere in their lives. He added that it was also his understanding that when the Magic Garden-Lincoln collaboration was conceived, there was agreement that a community-based model was regarded as the best option.

Teresa Watts clarified the understanding about ratios. She said that with regard to ratios it is important to understand that the seven students that may be in a class would not be children with substantial special needs. Each classroom would most likely have students with a range of disabilities.

Julie Lynch spoke about the appeal of the Magic Garden program to both Lincoln and non-Lincoln residents. In particular she noted that working parents appreciate the Magic Garden option to extend the program to 5:00 p.m. She urged if a change is made to adopt the public school model that enrollment not be open to residents of other towns. She also asked if the School Committee had evaluated the risks involved in making this change.

Ms. Manos, responding to Ms. Lynch's comment about serving children from other towns, asked if it was possible to set enrollment priorities. Mr. Brandmeyer reminded the School Committee that last spring they did authorize enrolling students who reside in other towns.

Sabra Alden remarked that she was having trouble with the ratios not matching the ratios in society. She added that parents of special education students would want a setting that mimics what they have in day to day life and what they anticipate they will have in their Kindergarten classroom. She too observed that Magic Garden is the only option for working parents. Ms. Alden asked how the district will handle children currently in Magic Garden receiving special services. She wanted to know what the transition would be like next year for these children who may be sensitive to change.

Mr. Brandmeyer explained that by law it is the responsibility of the special education team, which includes parents, to make the determination. The team has the responsibility to determine eligibility, determine placement and then write an IEP. Mr. Brandmeyer also began to address some of the other questions from Ms. Alden. Mr. Schmertzler asked if parents need a 5:00 p.m. option whether the Lincoln Integrated Preschool could provide it. Ms. Lynch said that Magic Garden can not offer a 3:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m. program for non-Magic Garden students.

Ms. Dobrow asked for a more detailed response to Ms. Alden's question about families that may be asked to transfer. Ms. Watts said that families would participate in a team process as Mr. Brandmeyer had explained. The team will evaluate the programmatic needs and take under full consideration what is in the best interest for that child. Mr. Brandmeyer added when that process works well agreement is reached, but there is also a mechanism when there is not agreement. The district, he added, is committed to resolving issues at the team level. Ms. Fagan added that at an IEP meeting, after input is given, it is required in the documentation to note whether any options had been discussed and rejected.

Ms. Dobrow urged that if the proposal were accepted, she would want to see the name changed so that the school did not identify itself as the Hanscom Integrated Preschool. Mr. Brandmeyer concurred.

There was some discussion about whether the Lincoln district would relinquish its six reserved seats at Magic Garden if the proposal is approved. Mr. Brandmeyer said that the district would entertain a request from Magic Garden about adjusting that understanding about reserved seats.

Ms. Manos stressed the need to be sensitive to those students who will transition between programs.

Jennifer Richard commented that her daughter has an IEP and that transitions are difficult for her. She said that both programs are "amazing" and that she wished this change had happened a year or two ago.

Julie Lynch observed that if the system can pay for an investigator to look into a plagiarism charge it should be able to make funds available for these children. Ms. Dobrow responded that when a charge about plagiarism is made, it needs to be taken seriously and investigated, and that this issue was separate from the discussion currently underway about preschool re-organization.

Joseph Blair, father of five students who have been through Magic Garden, said that the success of Magic Garden is due in large part to parent involvement. He wants to discourage adding more bureaucracy to something managed very well. He said he did not understand the reason for taking control of Magic Garden. Mr. Brandmeyer and members of the School Committee explained that the proposed organization has to do with how the district provides services to preschool students with special needs, not whether Magic Garden remains open or independent.

Ms. Manos moved that the School Committee approve the proposal that the Lincoln Public Schools add a classroom section to the preschool program with the intent of enrolling students with and without special needs in the Lincoln Integrated Preschool. Ms. Antia seconded the motion. The motion was approved with the following vote:

Ms. Antia: aye
Ms. Manos: aye
Mr. Schmertzler: aye
Ms. Dobrow: no
Ms. Allen: concur
Ms. Trask: concur
Ms. Goldstein: concur

B. Review and Approve Town Meeting Materials

Mr. Brandmeyer explained the task of building a basic set of messages about the budget for presentation at the town meeting. It is his understanding that the School Committee wishes to follow a format similar to the one used last year. He introduced first drafts of slides pertaining to Mission and Goals, Year in Review, FY08 program (base and preferred), FY08 budget details, Budget drivers, Looking Ahead, Back-up slides. He said he would need guidance from the School Committee about how specific these slides will need to be.

There was discussion about charts that may be needed as back-up information and key concepts to be built into the presentation. Ms. Antia urged that he include information about the class size decision. Ms. Manos suggested a backup chart illustrating changes in staffing patterns. She also proposed including back-up information about cost savings for special education gained with early interventions in reading and math and possible future savings due to preschool changes. Mr.

Schmertzler also suggested stressing the district's need to attract teachers with salaries that are competitive with other districts. Ms. Manos and Ms. Dobrow suggested the need to add details about upcoming teacher negotiations and results of the class size policy review for the "Looking Ahead" slide.

The School Committee agreed that conceptually the presentation makes sense. Mr. Brandmeyer will work on the next version and bring it back to the School Committee. There was also discussion about upcoming presentations to a PTA meeting, and additional budget presentations at which Ms. Dobrow will represent the School Committee. These presentations will be made at a Board of Selectmen and Council on Aging meeting, and there will be a special multi-board roundtable budget discussion that will be taped for television..

C. Transportation Update

Ms. Dobrow explained that the School Committee had requested a report in response to a community member's concern about his children's school transportation safety. She stressed that both the School Committee and the administration have as their number one concern a commitment to students' safety. In her introduction she also stressed that School Committee and administration are obligated to follow state parameters regarding transportation and policy set by the School Committee regarding school transportation. Specifically, Ms. Dobrow mentioned the concern raised by Mr. Shaikh at the February 1st meeting. She had asked Mr. Creel to notify Mr. Shaikh that this issue would be discussed at tonight's meeting, and Mr. Creel had done this.

Mr. Creel began by thanking Angela Seaborg, the GIS specialist from the Conservation Commission, for the maps that he used for this report. Mr. Creel explained that Mr Shaikh had raised two issues regarding his children's school transportation: safety and equity. The area in question concerned neighborhoods the vicinity of 30-33 Cambridge Turnpike, on both sides of the highway. The concerns have to do with the safety of the bus stop to which Mr. Shaikh's children were assigned and Mr. Shaikh's observation that more accessible transportation service has been provided to neighbors on the other side of the highway.

Mr. Creel showed maps of the area as he explained the history of service to these neighborhoods and the history of Mr. Shaikh's concern, including previous efforts to confirm and improve the safety. Both State and Lincoln Police maintain that a bus stop directly in front of these homes is unsafe given the traffic flow on the highway.

Mr. Creel explained the reasoning used to determine current practices and recommended the continuation of practices that have been in place for the last few years, which involve a walk of less than 3/10 of a mile for Mr. Shaikh's children from their home to a safe bus stop.

After questions and discussion Ms. Dobrow said that the School Committee is well satisfied that the district has done due diligence in investigating this concern and has proceeded fairly and honestly in its determinations about bus stops and access to transportation. She said that on behalf of the School Committee she will write a letter to Mr. Shaikh to respond to his concerns.

VI. Superintendent's Report

Mr. Brandmeyer provided an update on the Assistant Superintendent Search Process. Because of the snow day on February 14th the interview process was delayed. The interviews have now been completed and there are four semi-finalists.

Mr. Brandmeyer reported that these semi-finalists came from a pool of strong candidates. He expressed appreciation to the Search Committee members. He said that the candidates will spend a day in Lincoln on either Friday, March 2nd or Monday, March 5th. He intended to have finalist interviews by the School Committee at their meeting on March 15th. He then intends to make his recommendation to the School Committee on March 22nd.

VII. Curriculum

There was no curriculum report.

VIII. Policy

Ms. Manos introduced and explained new documents that introduce sections of the updated policy manual. Mr. Schmertzler moved that the School Committee vote in favor of adding the new material to the policy manual. Ms. Antia seconded the motion. All elected members voted in favor with Ms. Trask, Ms. Allen and Ms. Goldstein concurring.

IX. Facilities and Financial

A. Warrant Approval

Ms. Manos reported that she has reviewed the warrants and they appear to be in order. She moved that the School Committee vote warrants in the amount of \$740,735.27. Mr. Schmertzler seconded the motion. All elected members voted in favor with Ms. Trask, Ms. Allen and Ms. Goldstein concurring.

B. Proposed Kitchen Remediation Plan for Smith Gym

Mr. Creel reminded the School Committee of concerns from the Board of Health regarding kitchen facilities near the Smith gym of the Lincoln School. He reported on the variances that have been requested, to be decided by the Board of Health at their March 7th meeting. Mr. Creel also explained the proposals to install new equipment and make other updates for short term, intermediate/interim and long-term solutions. Provided variances are approved, this summer a hand sink and some electrical upgrades will be added to the proposed kitchen location.

X. Old Business

None

XI. New Business

Ms. Dobrow reported that the School Committee received correspondence from the PTA and the METCO Coordinating Committee requesting a joint meeting in Boston. There was agreement to consider April 10th as a possible joint meeting for these three groups and Ms. Dobrow reported that she would get back in touch with Kathy Clark, Chris Horner and Gina Halsted.

A. Review and Approve School Committee Submission for the Lincoln Review

The School Committee reviewed and proposed edits to a draft of the Lincoln School Committee contribution to the Lincoln Review that Ms. Dobrow had drafted.

XII. Approval of Minutes

Ms. Dobrow moved that the School Committee vote to approve the minutes of the January 18th meeting as amended. Ms. Manos seconded the motion. All elected members voted in favor with Ms. Trask, Ms. Allen and Ms. Goldstein concurring.

XIII. Information Enclosures

XIV. Adjournment

Mr. Schmertzler moved that the meeting be adjourned. Ms. Manos seconded the motion. The meeting was adjourned at 10:05 p.m.

XV. Executive Session

There was no Executive Session.

Respectfully submitted,
Paul Naso