

**Sudbury Public Schools
Sudbury, Massachusetts
School Committee Regular Meeting
Wednesday, January 21, 2009**

Present: Susan Iuliano, Chairperson,
Rich Robison, Jeff Beeler, Michele MacDonald

Also Present: Dr. John Brackett, Superintendent; Robert Milley, Assistant Superintendent; Mary Will, Director of Business and Finance (until 11:00 p.m.); Mary Mahoney, SEA

1. Open Session

Susan Iuliano called the meeting to order at 7:40 p.m. at the Ephraim Curtis Middle School.

2 Curtis Parent Organization (CPO) Welcome

Co-chair Elizabeth Bradley provided an overview of CPO activities. The primary fundraising event, a direct appeal, raised \$15,000 this year. The funds support grade-level events and cultural enrichment. Any funds remaining after this year's obligations are met will be put toward technology. The CPO wishes to engage all the elementary schools in recruiting a co-chair for the incoming sixth-grade class. Principal Paul Lamoureux commended the CPO for providing parent volunteers.

3. Curtis State of the School Report

Principal Paul Lamoureux expressed his enthusiasm for the Curtis community and provided an overview of the school's programming, culture, and progress, as well as its challenges and goals.

Mr. Lamoureux made note of cost-saving measures in scheduling staff, recycling, and energy use. He also noted enhanced forms of electronic communication, as well as enhancements to traffic control, fire drill, and Code Blue procedures. Additionally he presented an overview of the many clubs and activities that contribute to school spirit.

Principal Lamoureux commented on the increased effort toward differentiated learning. He also detailed renewed efforts to increase time on learning by streamlining nonacademic components of the school day (e.g., car drop-off and pick-up, bus evacuation, vision and hearing screening). Mr. Lamoureux noted that despite the lack of late buses, teachers have been willing and able to provide extra help during TAAB, before school, and after school. The CPO has organized a group of parents who are willing to provide transportation to students who are unable to stay after school in the absence of late buses.

Seventh-grade administrator Kelly Campbell outlined a new program that provides a late bus two days each week for Boston students. This permits the students to confer with teachers and their peers, as well as to participate in clubs and sports. Twenty-two of the 24 Boston students participate. The program is overseen by four teachers. Ms Campbell recognized Teaching Assistant Kate Mullaney for her contributions to the success of the program. The next step will be to evaluate the impact on performance.

The administration is committed to an emphasis on anti-bullying programming. Principal Lamoureux highlighted two recent SERF-funded theatrical performances and the related teacher workshops and teacher-led classroom discussions that followed. The staff and CPO are currently evaluating programming related to cyber-bullying.

The special education subgroup did not meet the target for Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) in math.

Last year's budget cuts to the teaching and office support staff have had an impact, most notably on class size and in the front office operations. Awareness and management of behavioral challenges were noted as the most significant negative outcomes of increased class size, in addition to the reduction in individualized attention each student receives. In some cases, desks or other equipment are not sufficient for the number of students in the class. Eighth-grade beginning French, a course designed for students enrolling from outside the District or new to language study, was discontinued as a result of last year's budget cuts. Grade Administrators emphasized that course offerings continue to diminish as a result of the cumulative effects of budget cuts from prior years. The loss of the late buses has had a negative effect on programming that has not been further quantified.

Rich Robison asked how volunteers are utilized within the school and if there is a mechanism for managing the volunteers. Eighth-grade administrator Angela Menke noted the push to get office help this year. The school makes use of 8–10 volunteers each week.

4. Report on Bullying and Bullying Prevention in SPS

Wellness Coordinator Betsy Grams presented data summaries of student responses to bullying surveys administered over the last three years. She also described the ongoing District-level and school-based initiatives that are part of the District's Anti-Bullying Program. Bob Milley noted that the data analysis uncovered the need to mitigate inconsistencies in classroom delivery of the Open Circle curriculum.

Jeff Beeler declared it unacceptable that the data suggested as many as 350 students reported being bullied daily/1-2 times per week in 2008. He asked for confirmation that the frequency and numbers of students affected by bullying is comparable to national trends and stated that teachers not meeting the District expectation for the Open Circle/anti-bullying curriculum should be brought into line with this important District safety initiative. Mr. Beeler asked if the restructuring of the Wellness Coordinator's responsibilities, due to last year's budget cuts, resulted in problems for overseeing the Anti-Bullying Program. Ms. Grams stated that she is not able to spend as much time this year at the elementary schools or at Curtis in her role as coordinator and that this does affect the quality of the Anti-Bullying Program. Jeff Beeler noted that it was a question for the Committee as part of its budgetary responsibilities whether it was content to undercut this program due to inadequate funding. He voiced his view that full funding should be restored to the Wellness Coordinator's position in order to ensure that this safety program is properly overseen and implemented. Beeler further noted his willingness to continue the discussion at a later time, as well as his plans to review the survey raw data, as he did last year.

Michele MacDonald asked if Ms. Grams' new-this-year classroom teaching obligations resulted from last year's budget cuts. When this was confirmed, she asked for a comment on the impact on other Wellness programming. In addition to compromises to the Anti-Bullying Program, Ms. Grams enumerated other activities that have been suspended or modified, including her involvement in advisory committee meetings, staff wellness, analysis of BMI/fitness data, and disease prevention programming for kindergarten and first grade.

Superintendent Brackett further noted the less-than-ideal timing of the anti-bullying survey data review, also the result of the shift in demand for the Wellness Coordinator's time. In his view, more effective and timely responses require that data review and reporting be completed in early Fall, as opposed to a January/February timeframe.

5. State of the Loring School Update

Loring Principal Jeffery Dees restated his commitment to improving the K-2 literacy program. The DIBELS literacy assessment, administered last Fall, uncovered a relative weakness in sight word recognition among first graders. Working with Literacy Specialist Susan Laufer, Principal Dees has implemented a leveled reading program that emphasizes sight word recognition for use in kindergarten. Mr. Dees reported that a literacy night was held recently for kindergarten parents. Strategies for home skill development were provided. In the future, the staff intends to provide such a literacy night for incoming kindergarten parents. Principal Dees reported that kindergarten assessments are being conducted for those children who scored in the "at risk" category on the DIBELS assessment, as well as those scoring 20% above and below this range. He also noted that the kindergarten teaching team is adopting a reading group model.

Mr. Dees reported that first-grade teacher Paul Orr is developing in-house math assessments for grades K-2. He noted that the upper grades are closely following the Investigations curriculum under the direction of Curriculum Specialist Joy Cook. Loring is conducting after-school MCAS prep sessions for students who scored in the "needs improvement" category or lower on last Spring's MCAS exam. Fifty-one of the 61 students scoring at those levels are participating, 33 in ELA and 18 in math. Four teachers are implementing the program, which has since been opened to any interested student.

Other initiatives include developing skills sets at each grade level, restructuring morning routines to increase learning time, establishing early intervention strategies to catch students with learning challenges before they reach the higher grades, and in-class SPED service delivery. Principal Dees noted that SPED Team Chair Jennifer Linera is addressing AYP for the SPED cohort.

The Committee was interested in knowing about ideas that cannot be explored because of a lack of resources. Mr. Dees characterized the strategies that have been implemented as "band-aids", emphasizing that Loring needs to develop a (3-5)-year plan and that such a plan will require additional resources. As an example, he described the value two additional full-time staff members would provide to a K-2 literacy block. Principal Dees emphasized that any reductions in current staff would be extremely detrimental. The absence of classroom aides for kindergarten and first grade already makes administering assessments and providing one-on-one attention impossible.

Mr. Dees concluded by expressing what a privilege it is to be working with the Loring teachers and parents.

6. School Committee Report

- (a) **Budget Review Task Force Update and Discussion**
Susan Iuliano reported that Selectman Larry O'Brien and Finance Committee (FinCom) Chairman Chuck Woodard released a joint memo with their Lincoln counterparts concerning the possible consolidation of the school administrations of SPS and L-S. A meeting to form a working group with broad representation is scheduled for February 2 at 7:30 in the Flynn Building. Members of the FinCom, Board of Selectmen, and the SPS and L-S School Committees, as well as their Lincoln counterparts, will attend.

Susan Iuliano, Michele MacDonald, John Brackett, and Mary Will met with Christine Lynch for the Department of Education seeking clarity on regionalizations, sharing superintendents, and Superintendency Unions.

- (b) **Budget Working Group (BWG) Update and Discussion**
Susan Iuliano reported that the BWG is scheduled to meet on January 30 and February 3. The BWG prefers to meet after obtaining information about the effects of 9C cuts on the FY09 budget and following publication of the Governor's recommended FY10 budget. Ms. Iuliano outlined possible scenarios for extending the timeframe for presentation of an override as both a ballot question and at Town Meeting. Rich Robison noted that President Obama's plan earmarks several billion dollars for education that should be better defined in early February. He is in favor of extending timeframes.

7. Open Forum

No comments.

8. Superintendent's Report

- (a) **Update on Middle School Principal Search**
The District received 65 responses to this position announcement. Assistant Superintendent Bob Milley will do screening interviews of six of these candidates to determine which will be invited to interview with the interview committee. Eight candidates will be invited on site. Most candidates were at the principal or assistant principal level; Dr. Brackett characterized this as a "good" pool.
- (b) **Bill Schedule**
A bill schedule was presented.
- (c) **Personnel Actions**
As presented in the Personnel Packet.

9. Minutes

VOTED: On a motion by Jeff Beeler, seconded by Rich Robison, to approve the minutes of the December 3, 2008 Regular Session. The vote was 4-0 in favor.

VOTED: On a motion by Jeff Beeler, seconded by Rich Robison, to approve the minutes of the December 10, 2008 Regular Session. The vote was 4-0 in favor.

10. Communications

As presented in the Communications Packet. Additionally, Susan Iuliano received a public records request addressed to the School Committee. She will follow up with the requestor, who asked for copies of employment contracts for those school leaders with contracts signed/negotiated by the Sudbury School Committee.

11. Members' Forum

Jeff Beeler made the following statement in response to the *Town Crier's* recent report about anonymous allegations made by bloggers suggesting that he had a conflict of interest arising from his marriage of about 16 years to Karen Darmer, who formed the Support Sudbury Political Action Committee (PAC):

Statement of Jeffrey S. Beeler to the SPS Committee, January 21, 2009

As my fellow committee members have known for years, I am married to Karen Darmer. As they also know, in the wake of last year's override failure, my wife formed a Political Action Committee called Support Sudbury. I am not an officer of this organization nor do I control its activities.

Recently, this grass roots organization sponsored a successful Petition drive with the goal of asking the Selectmen to put a reasonable override request to voters. Last night, the Petition was presented to the Selectmen. As you know, every member of this Committee, members of the LS Committee and members of other Town Committees and Boards signed this Petition. As we all know, it is members of Committees and Boards who have the best insight into the impact of inadequate funding on our schools and Town services and the obligation to convey this information to the public. Support Sudbury is similar, in this regard, to previous ballot question committees which have been routinely supported by School Committee members. Indeed, in past years, Selectmen have supported ballot question committees.

Despite this, last week the Town Crier ran an article about anonymous blog allegations that I had a conflict of interest due to the fact that I was married to the Chair of Support Sudbury. The Crier reported that according to the State Ethics Commission, there was no conflict, a fact that I had confirmed months earlier and reconfirmed with the Ethics Commission on January 20, 2009. Indeed, at last night's Board of Selectmen's meeting, the Chair of the Board of Selectmen related that Town Counsel had opined that there was no conflict of interest.

The purpose of this statement is to bring you up to date on this matter and to ask this Committee two (2) questions. First, do any of you see any other potential conflict issues that need to be addressed. Second, do any of you believe that this matter, in any way, impacts my ability to serve on the negotiating team. As to the latter issue, I will note that the role of the negotiating team is to attempt to negotiate a contract settlement in accord with the dictates of the entire Committee. As we all know, it is not up to me, or fellow negotiating team member, Rich Robison, to formulate the Committee's position. Rather, our job is to negotiate a settlement in line with the position of the entire Committee.

Lastly, if there is, in the Committee's view, no conflict, and no impediment to my continued service on the negotiating team, I would ask the Committee to confirm its continued confidence in my ability to effectively serve as a negotiating team member.

Attached is a copy of a letter Beeler sent to Sudbury Town Clerk Rosemary Harvell, at the suggestion of counsel at the State Ethics Commission, in an effort to forestall further politically-motivated attacks.

Research and conversations with state attorneys confirmed that there is no legal basis for a conflict of interest claim. The consensus of the Committee is that there is no issue with Jeff Beeler's ability to represent the Committee in contract negotiations.

Rich Robison commented that his signature on the Support Sudbury PAC petition was not intended as an explicit show of support for an override, but rather, to indicate his support of allowing the community to decide on an override.

Susan Iuliano invited Selectman Larry O'Brien to comment on the conflict of interest matter. Mr. O'Brien stated that his remarks are on record from last night's Selectmen's meeting.

Susan Iuliano stated that the Committee must initiate the Superintendent evaluation process. She will distribute the form so that Members can get started. She also noted that the next School Committee meeting is scheduled on February 4, as is a joint meeting of the FinCom and Selectmen to discuss the budget process. School Committee members agreed that it is unnecessary to reschedule their meeting.

Sheila Cusolito proposed a modification of the minutes review process, with a goal of narrowing the timeframe to approval.

Mary Mahoney thanked Karen Darmer for her work on the Support Sudbury PAC. She asked why residents and teachers are not invited to participate when special committees are formed. She redirected her inquiry to Selectman Larry O'Brien.

Michele MacDonald expressed interest in visiting the Loring School to observe first-hand the atmosphere of enthusiasm she sensed during Principal Dees' presentation.

Rich Robison reported that the Collective Bargaining Subcommittee met recently. The subcommittee includes Jeff Beeler, John Brackett, Mary Will, and Rich Robison.

John Brackett announced a bargaining process training session, which will be held on February 7. Representatives of the MTA will attend. Other invited attendees will include the Board of Selectmen, the School Committee, and some teachers and administrators.

Rich Robison expressed a desire to understand the impact of budget cuts on school culture, particularly as it relates to the use of volunteers. He suggested giving some consideration to creating a position for a coordinator of volunteers.

12. Executive Session

On a motion by Jeff Beeler, seconded by Susan Iuliano, to adjourn to Executive Session to discuss strategy with respect to collective bargaining, not to return to Open Session. The vote was 4–0 in favor. The time was 11:25 p.m.

Yes	Susan Iuliano
Yes	Rich Robison
Yes	Jeff Beeler
Yes	Michele MacDonald

Attachment: Memo from Jeff Beeler to Sudbury Town Clerk

Submitted by Sheila Cusolito, Recording Secretary