

**Sudbury Public Schools
Sudbury, Massachusetts
School Committee Regular Meeting
Wednesday October 13, 2010**

Present: Susan Iuliano, Chairperson; Jeff Beeler, Vice Chairman;
Dr. Rich Robison, Michele MacDonald, Lisa Gutch

Also Present: Dr. John Brackett, Superintendent; Mary Will, Business and Finance Director;
MaryKate Gentile (until 9:50 p.m.), SEA

Open Session

Susan Iuliano called the meeting to order at 7:35 p.m. at the Noyes School. The meeting was taped for public access broadcast.

1. Peter Noyes PTO Welcome (Lisa Potter and Terrie Hallal)

New PTO Co-Chairs Lisa Potter and Terrie Hallal welcomed the School Committee and outlined their programming. As a way of highlighting the special atmosphere at Noyes, they noted that 35 students who are now sixth graders will visit to welcome new Noyes students. The PTO is continuing with some traditional fundraisers, as well as trying some new things. The organization is taking input on teachers' needs in the form of a wish list.

2. The State of the Noyes School (Principal Annette Doyle and Assistant Principal Kristin Moffat)

Principal Annette Doyle welcomed the Committee, She made note of Noyes' recent recognition as one of Governor Patrick's 187 Commendation Schools. Additionally, Principal Doyle noted that Noyes has not met AYP for the special education subgroup in math.

In previous addresses to the Committee, Principal Doyle has emphasized the large size of the Noyes School and the fact that it is limited to the same level of literacy support as the smaller schools. This year, Noyes was given an additional 0.5 FTE in literacy support, which is already making a difference. For example, classrooms have been able to have small group direct instruction. Additionally, the literacy support staff has been able to look at assessment data across grade levels to identify and work with up to 25% of the lowest performing students. Finally, each grade level has a block of time devoted to literacy for small group work.

Principal Doyle noted that the "push-in" model, where support staff work with students in the classroom, is new for Noyes. The grade-wide common literacy block allows for combining students from different classrooms. This approach, combined with the additional support staff, allows progress monitoring of students who fall above the lowest 25%, but who might require some support.

Principal Doyle introduced first-grade teacher, Laura Dayal, and fifth-grade teacher, Michelle Archambault, who are serving as administrative interns. The two spoke about their "Math Rocks" project. Their idea was to have the fifth-grade teachers meet for one hour each week to share strategies related to RTI, create a more collaborative team, and review math data.

The four fifth-grade teachers are paired on two-way teams and all make use of the TERC Investigations curriculum. Curriculum, instruction, and grading have all been aligned. Students are given both pre- and post-assessments for each of the nine units and placed with comparably performing peers in flexible groupings. All teachers are accountable for all students and both skilled and less skilled children are targeted for individualized instruction.

The teachers cited the following features as necessary for replicating such a program in other grades or disciplines: the need for strong leadership and a significant investment in planning; the utility of some professional learning group training; the ability to create a common, hour-long block of time; the ability to include a special educator on the grade-level team.

Committee Members praised the program and the prospective opportunities for sharing the concepts throughout the District. Rich Robison noted that such collaboration aligns expectations, which is particularly critical between special educators and regular educators.

Superintendent Brackett emphasized that the District must keep in mind during its budget discussions the resources necessary to sustain such programming. He recommends keeping the SALT team focused on teaching and learning, rather than on administrative and budgeting challenges. His hope is that SPED will be a part of every SALT meeting, so there will be more conversation about what works and what does not. He also expressed an interest in having Ms. Dayal and Ms. Archambault speak with SALT administrators.

Principal Doyle noted that third- and fourth-grade teachers are using some concepts of the program and will build in a common planning period for next year.

Assistant Principal Kristin Moffat highlighted some of the anti-bullying activities at Noyes. She reported on the results of a student survey that indicated that 60% of Noyes students have three or more adults that they feel connected to in the building. There were nine children in the fifth grade who reported having no connections. Additionally, a poll of the staff identified an additional 49 students with an apparent lack of connection to an adult at the school. Since last February, these 58 students have had silent mentors watching out for them. She tied the efforts at Noyes to anti-bullying expert Stan Davis' recommendation to create a strong school culture to develop connections to students.

School Committee Questions

Rich Robison asked Principal Doyle for her concerns. She responded with concern about Superintendent Brackett's resignation, stating that he has been terrific to work with. Specific to Noyes, she worries that resources will limit successful replication of the fifth-grade program to other grade levels. Furthermore, Principal Doyle believes Noyes would benefit from additional math support and/or more time for teachers to provide additional support for students in need. She noted that teachers' additional responsibilities in such areas as lunch and recess limit the time they have available to work individually with students.

Jeff Beeler also questioned Principal Doyle about the operational impacts caused the failing Noyes roof. Principal Doyle described these challenges. Mr. Beeler commented on the District's submission of a Statement of Interest to the SBA for the replacement of the Noyes roof, windows, and boilers. He stated that the SBA performed a site visit as part of the SOI review. The program could yield up to 35% in state funding for the repairs.

3. Anti-Bullying Plan, Discussion and Public Comment

Superintendent Brackett indicated that this is the last opportunity for public comment on plan. He characterized the overall message of the plan as pertaining to person-to-person interactions and issues, not just kid-to-kid. The plan emphasizes responsibility and appropriate behavior, not simply anti-bullying. Dr. Brackett reported that the new law prohibits bullying off school grounds if it creates a hostile environment at school. He noted that 61% of SPS elementary- and over 50% of SPS middle-school students reported that situations got better when children reported bullying incidents to school personnel. Anti-bullying expert, Stan Davis, who worked with the District to develop its plan, commented that he had never before seen such high numbers. To that end, the plan stresses reporting requirements for staff, volunteers, parents, and students.

Jeff Beeler commended Dr. Brackett for his comments to staff that they report bullying with the same rigor as they would in 51A instances; however, the reporting would be to the principal, rather than to a state agency. Susan Iuliano noted that the District has a longstanding relationship with the police department, which might become involved in instances of bullying; in fact, the Superintendent, Police Chief, and District Attorney signed a Memorandum of Understanding outlining information sharing, which dates back approximately eight years.

Superintendent Brackett emphasized that bullying is not against the law, although a specific behavior might run afoul of other criminal laws. The Committee commented on the grey area between bullying and harassment and stressed that the staff should report incidents even if in doubt and let the Principal and, if warranted, law enforcement make the determination.

Dr. Brackett reported receiving 10-15 comments on the plan from parents and staff, which will be forwarded to the policy team to consider. He stated that additional comments are welcome, until the scheduled adoption at the next Committee meeting.

Public comments

None.

School Committee Questions

Rich Robison encouraged rethinking the language in a section of the plan that refers to students on IEP's, to account for the challenge in teaching empathy to such students. He indicated that the students might not know their behaviors are within the bullying description. His concern is that special needs children are protected and their behaviors are not misunderstood.

4. School Committee Report

Review and Approve the RFP for a Superintendent Search Consultant

Susan Iuliano circulated an updated draft RFP. She outlined the process, which requires soliciting technical proposals that will be evaluated by an evaluation committee, followed by a separate assessment of pricing. The hope is to have the School Committee evaluate proposals; however, it needs to be determined if this violates the Open Meeting law/Public Bidding law because the assessments would be conducted in Executive Session. Ms. Iuliano suggested that if necessary, two Committee Members and another individual—she recommended Assistant Superintendent Bob Milley, who accepted—evaluate the proposals. The recommendations of this subcommittee would be presented to the entire Committee, which would then interview candidates prior to conducting the pricing assessment. The Committee agreed by consensus to appoint Susan Iuliano, Rich Robison, and Assistant Superintendent Milley to the subcommittee.

The Committee agreed on a modified meeting schedule and a goal to circulate the RFP next week. The modified schedule involves canceling the October 20 and November 3 meetings, scheduling a Regular Session on November 10, including an Executive Session, and conducting interviews on November 17. Focus group input would be sought in December, followed by final interviews in January.

Members recommended minor changes to the RFP, including specifying as many as 10 focus groups and requesting inclusion of a rate schedule with the price proposal.

VOTED: On a motion by Rich Robison, seconded by Jeff Beeler, to approve the RFP with minor modifications to the process and schedule. The vote was 5–0 in favor.

5. Open forum

No comments.

6. Superintendent's Report

(a) Capital Improvement Needs

Business and Finance Director Mary Will obtained input from Maintenance Director, Joe Kupczewski, and Superintendent Brackett to generate an extensive list of capital needs. She explained that items must appear on a needs list in order to be considered for funding and also characterized the list as embodying necessities, rather than needs.

Members expressed some surprise that the Curtis parking lot is in need of repair. Dr. Brackett stated that due to lack of resources it had not been sealed or been subject to any preventative maintenance.

(b) Donations

VOTED: On a motion by Jeff Beeler, seconded by Michele MacDonald, to accept with thanks a gift of 335 children's dictionaries from the Rotary Club of Sudbury for use in the first-grade classrooms at SPS. The vote was 5-0 in favor.

VOTED: On a motion by Michele MacDonald, seconded by Jeff Beeler, to accept with thanks a check for \$547.22 on behalf of the Nixon School from the Target, Take Charge of Education program. The funds will be deposited in a gift account. The vote was 5-0 in favor.

(c) Bill schedule

A Bill Schedule was presented.

7. Minutes, September 29, 2010 Special Session

VOTED: On a motion by Jeff Beeler, seconded by Lisa Gutch, to approve the minutes of the September 29, 2010 Special Session. The vote was 5-0 in favor.

8. Communications

Susan Iuliano reported that the LS School Committee unanimously declined to pursue the option to jointly hire a superintendent with SPS under their separate governances.

The Committee also received a communication from Selectman, Bob Haarde, advocating for a joint hiring. Mr. Haarde believes that SPS is acting "rashly" by moving forward with hiring a consultant for its superintendent search.

Jeff Beeler took issue with the characterization of the Committee's decision as rash. He reiterated comments made by the Committee as early as a January 2009 meeting, which Mr. Haarde attended, that a joint hire does not take into account the value added to SPS students because of the undivided attention of a Superintendent and an Assistant Superintendent. Mr. Beeler noted that since that time the joint hire model had been further and extensively considered and had been found to be educationally deficient and devoid of material cost savings. Reference was made to the Committee's written response to this particular BRTF recommendation.

Mr. Beeler also stated that he would be very supportive of full regionalization, or other consolidation proposals, if the Selectmen-to-Selectmen talks demonstrate feasibility. He indicated that he would likely support any option, except the simple joint hire model that had been rejected by both School Committees, if Lincoln is on board with the proposed change. He noted, however, that Lincoln's willingness to go forward with any such proposals would be a first step, or necessary predicate, to any such changes. These discussions, he noted, must happen at the Selectmen level. To assist these efforts, he recommended that the Committee communicate its receptivity to working with Lincoln on a K-12 model.

As these efforts by the Selectmen are ongoing, Mr. Beeler noted that the Committee's responsibility to the more than 3,000 students that it serves required the Committee to forge ahead with the Superintendent hiring process. It was noted that the process is time-consuming, that the pool of qualified candidates would be limited and, therefore, time was of the essence.

It was also discussed that the Committee's search would proceed in parallel with the Selectmen's efforts and, to the extent that the Selectmen are successful in interesting Lincoln in a change to the LS Regional Agreement that would permit pursuit of a K-12 model, that the Committee would be able to shift courses if warranted.

Mr. Beeler also took issue with the suggestion in the communication by the Selectman that residents were not getting a return on their investment in the schools. Mr. Beeler noted that Sudbury is in the top ten of per capita income in the state. In contrast, he noted that SPS teachers were paid on average in the bottom third of districts in the state under their previous contract. He noted that this position was likely to go down further given the most recent contract that saved as much as \$4.1 Million. Mr. Beeler also noted that the SPS spends less per pupil than the state average and less per pupil than its peer communities. As far as performance, Mr. Beeler noted that SPS schools are frequently in the top ten schools in the state on certain MCAS tests. Indeed, he noted that is not uncommon for SPS schools to be the top school in the state in certain MCAS test areas. Mr. Beeler noted that these facts all point to a high return on investment. He voiced concern, however, over the sustainability of this considerable return on investment given the inverse relationship between the relatively low resources expended per pupil and the top ten performance of SPS schools. In his view, changing this "tried and true" formula—before Lincoln is on board with other appropriate models—would be a rash decision.

Susan Iuliano summarized that the Committee's position is unchanged concerning a joint hire, as it is not in the best interest of either the students or the District. She also reiterated that the Committee has taken no position on any other model and supports exploration of other models if Lincoln is interested in doing so. In the meantime, the Committee is committed to pursuing its superintendent search on a parallel track, recognizing that other models could affect the type of candidates the District wants to recruit or will attract. Ms. Iuliano reiterated that the Committee needs information on the timeline and plans from the Board of Selectmen in order to pursue an optimal search.

The Committee agreed that it should continue to report on its meetings with a brief summary, in this instance, emphasizing its interest in considering other scenarios if it has a willing partner in Lincoln. Additionally, the Committee will communicate directly with the Board of Selectmen. Additional communication to the public at-large will be made via the *Town Crier* and Patch.com.

VOTED: On a motion by Rich Robison, seconded by Jeff Beeler to designate Susan Iuliano to represent the School Committee in its communications to the Board of Selectmen, as well as Sudbury resident Rick Johnson, regarding its rationale for pursuing the superintendent search. The vote was 5–0 in favor.

9. Members' Forum

Lisa Gutch, spoke again with acting Senior Center Director Deborah Galloway regarding the "Soups on Thursday" program. This is a monthly program that attracts 15-30 people. Ms. Gutch will follow up with LS regarding joint attendance on December 9.

Superintendent Brackett reported struggling with whether to proceed with RTTT. He stated that a plan must be submitted by October 22 in order to be eligible for \$26K over 4 years only for use on the State's particular projects. He reminded the Committee that the District wanted

to support the State in getting the grant and to have the chance to “be at the table” for opportunities and decisions; however, in his view, it is clear that Sudbury won’t “be at the table”. He noted that a team of 40 will be submitting revised teacher and principal evaluation processes to be negotiated by each district by way of example. Dr. Brackett commented that the downside of not going forward is the concern that if we fail to participate there will be some opportunity we might miss.

Superintendent Brackett proposed that the District plan to spend no money in the first year in order to have time to think more about participating. In the Spring, a more detailed proposal for years two through four can be developed. He noted that SEA President Bob Mealey is on board with not going forward.

10. Adjourn

VOTED: On a motion by Michele MacDonald, seconded by Rich Robison, to adjourn the Regular Session. The vote was 5–0 in favor. The time was 11:20 p.m.

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

Submitted by Sheila Cusolito, Recording Secretary