

**Sudbury Public Schools
Sudbury, Massachusetts
School Committee Regular Meeting
Wednesday December 15, 2010**

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

Also Present: Dr. John Brackett, Superintendent; Robert Milley, Assistant Superintendent; Mary Will, Director of Business and Finance; Jennifer Faber, SEA

Open Session

Susan Iuliano called the meeting to order at 7:36 p.m. at the Nixon School. The meeting was taped for public access broadcast.

1. PTO Welcome (Maria Behrakis and Gretchen Findlay)

Gretchen Findlay, PTO Co-Chair, welcomed the School Committee. She described the support the PTO offers as a mix of stipends to staff, school gifts, and special projects. Additionally, the PTO will support 23 educational enrichment programs this year, as well sponsor community-building family activities. At the start of this year, the PTO was involved with activities to welcome the significant number of new Nixon families. Ms. Findlay announced that in April, the PTO will sponsor an auction dinner/dance to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the school's opening.

2. The State of the Nixon School with Principal Joni Jay

Principal Jay welcomed the School Committee. She noted that enrollment is down to 435 this year, with one-third of the students new to Nixon. The school paired new students with student buddies and held Principal lunches as part of the welcome process at the start of the school year.

Principal Jay expressed appreciation for the opportunity to open an additional fourth-grade classroom after the start of school. She also highlighted some of the new programming at Nixon, including expanding the Access program to all grades, qualifying for Title I math funds for Grades 2-4, and hiring a METCO academic advisor. A major highlight of a parent survey is the perceived improved consistency between classes within a grade. Principal Jay also reported on the successful use of block scheduling, which allows students to receive differentiated services within the classroom, for both enrichment and intervention. Nixon has newly incorporated professional learning communities, where all staff members are involved with committee work. Additionally, each grade level holds data meetings, where MCAS and other assessment data are evaluated to inform instructional improvements. Ms. Jay noted that Nixon was one of the Governor's commendation schools based on its MCAS performance.

New curriculum activities include the use of Aleks, an on-line math facts program; coordination of the reading and writing units; a renewed focus on vocabulary, including direct instruction; and proofreading for spelling. Ms. Jay made note of two professional learning communities geared toward improving teacher practice. One involves Response to Intervention (RTI) and improving on-task behavior and the other is focused on small actions/big results, which identified specific feedback as a best practice.

In terms of school culture, Nixon is invested in anti-bullying activities, including volunteer training for parents. Based on the District's work with anti-bullying expert Stan Davis, Nixon has incorporated a silent mentoring activity to improve the sense of connection of each student to multiple staff members. Nixon is working with Haynes this year to pilot a discipline rubric

for four risk categories of behavior. Students have been involved with developing the rubric, including being queried to determine which responses by adults were most effective in addressing bullying behavior.

School Committee Questions

Rich Robison expressed interest in the changes in the student population. Principal Jay commented that the influx of new students resulted from the combination of redistricting, move-ins, and new kindergarten families. Assistant Superintendent Bob Milley expressed interest in following up in the spring with the student connectivity survey as a measure of how well the new students have acclimated.

Jeff Beeler asked if the disciplinary rubric is being used at schools other than Haynes and Nixon or how it relates to the District's anti-bullying policy. Dr. Brackett responded that the rubric is being piloted at Nixon and Haynes, but that it falls within the District policy. In his view, a level of consistency exists across the District. He expressed the District's interest in real-time feedback prior to implementing the program District-wide. Dr. Brackett also noted that the middle school is examining the rubric to modify it for age-related behaviors and responses.

Principal Jay had mentioned parent book clubs as one solution to staffing problems. Lisa Gutch asked how book clubs support staff. Ms. Jay stated that parents are trained to lead a book discussion with groups of students, freeing staff to work with other students. At present, this program is run for Grade 5 only.

Susan Iuliano asked about coordinating staff for involvement with the professional learning communities. Principal Jay explained that one staff meeting each month is attached to an ILAP day, providing a three-hour block of time. Access teacher Karlyn Bolduc added that each learning community engages enough people that interest is sustained and individual responsibilities are manageable.

Principal Jay responded to Rich Robison's query about ongoing challenges by noting that Nixon staff is dedicated to addressing the broad range of student needs with the resources that are available.

Jeff Beeler asked Ms. Jay to comment on the dynamics of the fourth grade, before and after the addition of a new classroom teacher. Principal Jay described the original classrooms of up to 30 students as physically crowded and logistically challenging in terms of instruction. She stated that although it was challenging to implement the change after the start of the school year, it has made a big difference to have the smaller class sizes. As part of the preparation for the addition, staff provided opportunities for significant grade-level community building. Fourth-grade parent Richard Tinsley praised the Nixon staff for a phenomenal communication and preparation plan. Jeff Beeler also commended the staff for the smooth transition.

3. Budget Report

(a) Discussion of FY12 Budget

Superintendent Brackett reported that the roll-up budget, based only on costs and not revenues, will be submitted in January. The roll-up budget maintains the same staffing, but not necessarily the same level of service. Special education costs are projected at 10% and benefits at 7%. Unemployment is still undefined.

Responses to the Finance Committee's budget questions were drafted and will be presented at the FinCom's December 20 meeting. All cost centers will present their level service or roll-up budgets to the Finance Committee on February 10. The cost centers will present their non-override budgets to the Finance Committee on February 14, based on revenue projections available at that time.

The State budget will continue to be defined until after the May Annual Town Meeting, late June or July. If State aid is flat, growth is projected to be 2.64%. Although there is some anticipation that receipts are growing, a 1.5 billion-dollar state-wide deficit is expected next year. There has been no talk of federal stimulus money. As it stands now, projections are for an estimated 10% cut in State aid.

Given these projections, a non-override budget would be at 1.4–1.7%, including benefit costs. It is unlikely that any scenario will not have a deficit. Director of Business and Finance Mary Will is examining the budget for greater efficiencies in SPED out-of-District costs, but a deficit of some magnitude is still expected.

(b) Food Service Operations

Lisa Gutch and Susan Iuliano met with the Edvocate consultant. The discussion was tabled until more information is obtained.

(c) Facility Fees

Mary Will reported on fee structure information received from both LS and the Park and Recreation Department. Park and Recreation charges a \$20 per child participant fee plus a \$10 per child capital fee. The funds go directly to field upkeep. Recently Park and Recreation voted to combine the two fees and charge \$35 per child for each sport in each season.

At LS, the fees for adult recreation and town sports are based on an hourly rate of at least \$25, plus a custodial fee of \$37/hour from 3–11 p.m., and on weekends, holidays, and non-school days. Mary Will and John Brackett recently met with SED Director Barbara Cole to begin discussions about building use fees.

If the District charged a straight fee, it would be about \$35K per year for basketball, or \$40/participant. Mary Will recommends a participant flat fee. Superintendent Brackett reminded the Committee that the purpose of the fees is to cover utilization costs associated with wear and tear on the buildings. Fees would be retained in a revolving fund and must be used for the general purpose for which the revolving fund is established.

Mary Will plans to meet with facilities personnel to get a better idea of utility costs. In her view, a per-participant fee would be more appropriate than an hourly fee.

4. School Committee Report

(a) Green Repair Program

Jeff Beeler reported that the SBA confirmed a 90-day window for the District to secure its portion of the cost for proposed repairs to the Noyes School. The SBA is considering if bonding costs can be included in the funding total, which is estimated at \$2.4M, not including bonding costs of approximately \$40K. At its meeting on December 7, the Board of Selectmen voted to call a Special Town Meeting for January 18, 2011 and a Special Town Election for January 25, 2011.

The Committee received drafts of wording for the Warrant; a final copy must be submitted by December 17. Additionally, Mr. Beeler is seeking input on a School Committee report relative to the Warrant argument. There was some discussion of the Warrant arguments both for and against the request for funds; however, the Committee agreed to focus on its argument in favor of the funding request. Susan Iuliano will make an inquiry concerning how the Warrant argument against a proposal is generated.

Lisa Gutch agreed to draft a letter for distribution to both the *Town Crier* and Patch.com.

VOTED: On a motion by Rich Robison, seconded by Lisa Gutch to authorize Jeff Beeler to finalize the Warrant argument in support of the Green Repair Program funding request. The vote was 4–0 in favor. Jeff Beeler abstained.

VOTED: On a motion by Rich Robison, seconded by Michele MacDonald to authorize Jeff Beeler to finalize the School Committee report relative to the Green Repair Program funding request. The vote was 5–0 in favor.

VOTED: On a motion by Michele MacDonald, seconded by Rich Robison, to submit the Warrant article, School Committee report, and argument of support for the Special Town Meeting and Special Town Election to the Town. The vote was 5–0 in favor.

VOTED: On a motion by Rich Robison, seconded by Jeff Beeler, to authorize Susan Iuliano to sign the necessary documentation to submit the Warrant article to the Town. The vote was 5–0 in favor.

(b) Superintendent Search

Susan Iuliano reported that focus group interviews began this week and have gone very well. Additionally, the position announcement was posted electronically and will be further circulated when the brochure is completed. Ms. Iuliano requested that the Committee review the brochure so that it can be submitted to NESDEC by Monday. The Committee agreed to highlight the Town’s historic character, coupled with its high-performing schools and proximity to the city. Ms. Iuliano asked for input on selecting a picture for the brochure.

Lisa Gutch suggested sending email reminders with the focus group meeting schedule.

Susan Iuliano briefly outlined some of the calendar items for the search. Consultant Art Bettencourt suggested that first-round interviews occur before February vacation, during the week of February 11. Prior to the interviews, the screening committee will meet at least two times, starting on or just after January 31. The first meeting will involve outlining the screening process and distributing the applications. Allowing one week for application review, a second meeting will occur at which first-round interview candidates will be selected.

After some discussion, the Committee agreed that the initial screening committee meeting dates should be identified as soon as possible and that the meetings should occur on weekday afternoons.

Susan Iuliano distributed a proposed makeup of the screening committee. She indicated that NESDEC advised balancing the number of parent representatives (up to four) with the number of teachers, as well as including a building-level support staff member.

In terms of selecting screening committee candidates, the Committee agreed to circulate a request for candidates before December vacation and to send a reminder after vacation. The Committee further agreed to delegate responsibility for screening committee candidate selection to Susan Iuliano, who asked for the Committee’s continued input on both the screening committee and stakeholder interviews.

Susan Iuliano noted that the focus groups end on Jan 6. Information will be compiled by NESDEC over the following ten days and be summarized for the Committee. The Committee might have to schedule an additional meeting in January.

5. Open Forum

No Comments.

6. Superintendent's Report

(a) Donations

VOTED: On a motion by Jeff Beeler, seconded by Rich Robison to accept with thanks a donation of \$50,000 from the Jack and Mae Rosenberg Charitable Trust to be applied for the ongoing benefit of the Aspirations Program and to accept with thanks a donation of \$5,000 from Paul and Marcela Noonan in appreciation for the kindergarten, preschool, and Foundations programs. The vote was 5–0 in favor.

(b) Recognitions

None.

(c) Bill schedule

A Bill Schedule was presented.

(d) Personnel Actions

As outlined in the Personnel Packet.

7. Minutes—November 10, 2010 and December 1, 2010 Regular Sessions; November 30 Special Session

VOTED: On a motion by Jeff Beeler, seconded by Michele MacDonald, to approve the minutes of the November 10, 2010 Regular Session. The vote was 5–0 in favor.

VOTED: On a motion by Lisa Gutch, seconded by Rich Robison, to approve the minutes of the November 30, 2010 Special Session. The vote was 5–0 in favor.

VOTED: On a motion by Jeff Beeler, seconded by Lisa Gutch, to approve the minutes of the December 1, 2010 Regular Session as amended. The vote was 5–0 in favor.

8. Communications

None.

9. Members' Forum

Lisa Gutch reported that six individuals attended the Senior Center's luncheon last Thursday, at which both LS and SPS Committee Members were guests. She noted that there were some questions about the budget and the relationship between Lincoln and Sudbury. The seniors also expressed surprise at the level of difficulty of some third-grade MCAS questions.

Rich Robison asked if the Senior Center will publicize the event or if there is another way to draw attention to having participated in the luncheon. Lisa Gutch stated that she made an inquiry about returning in the spring. Michele MacDonald suggested sending a thank-you note to the *Senior Scene* publication.

Rich Robison reported having had an opportunity to meet with the Secretary of Education on Monday. Based on budget discussions, a \$1.6B State deficit is projected. Although revenues are above projections, the end of stimulus funds and the growth of mandatory programs will outstrip growth in revenues. Dr. Robison also reported on some concern around tax caps and restrictions to accessing funds that might result.

Dr. Robison commented on the difficult decision-making that must occur in such areas as human services as a result of budget constraints. He stated that localities will have to assume greater responsibility for such costs. Moreover, if circuit breaker is not funded, it will have a very broad effect on general education.

Superintendent Brackett reported that he will be presenting the calendar for the Committee's consideration, including setting the start date. He also asked the Committee for input on the

District's new website and to have posted as much information as possible for potential candidates.

Michele MacDonald thanked Laurence Baize, with whom she worked on designing the new website.

Bob Milley stated that the Grade 4 Bridges program lacks a coordinator, but finished a successful season. He, Andrea Weaver—who developed the program—and the part-time social studies coordinator oversaw the program this year.

10. Adjourn

VOTED: On a motion by Jeff Beeler, seconded by Michele MacDonald to adjourn the Regular Session. The vote was 5–0 in favor. The time was 10:31 p.m.

Yes Susan Iuliano

Yes Jeff Beeler

Yes Rich Robison

Yes Michele MacDonald

Yes Lisa Gutch

Submitted by Sheila Cusolito, Recording Secretary