

**Sudbury Public Schools
Sudbury, Massachusetts
School Committee Regular Meeting
Wednesday January 5, 2011**

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; Dr. Robert Mealey, SEA

Open Session

Susan Iuliano called the meeting to order at 7:33 p.m. The meeting was taped for public access broadcast.

3. Discussion with Advocate Regarding Food Service Assessment and Consideration of Options for Contracting and Self Operation

Advocate consultant John Ledwick highlighted key findings of an assessment of food service operations that the District commissioned last spring. Mr. Ledwick characterized the program as well above average, noting that the quality was impressive, given operating costs versus revenue. Mr. Ledwick also noted that only 40% of the school population takes advantage of the lunch program, which is lower than it should be. He indicated that employees are working hard and successfully, but lack a mandate that must come from the administration.

Mr. Ledwick stated the need for a change in the business model in order to improve the food service program. He indicated that the biggest challenge is the cost of labor, which is high not because of the number of hours, but because of the cost per hour. Additionally, the \$200K benefit costs are carried on a separate budget line. In his view, the program in its current form cannot offset these benefits costs. Mr. Ledwick noted that a price increase would be of limited utility; although pricing is currently low, too much of an increase would likely result in diminished participation.

Mr. Ledwick provided an overview of two options aimed at increasing participation. The first is to refine the existing program. The second option is to outsource food services. Mr. Ledwick noted that neither option is straightforward. Furthermore, he stated that internal changes cannot make up for the burden of benefits costs. Outsourcing changes the benefits burden and the cost/profit projections because wages and benefits would be comparable to the food service industry rather than the educational standard. Mr. Ledwick estimated the net revenue after benefits at \$40K, which is approximately what the District currently realizes, excluding benefits.

The Committee discussed the fact that the benefits in question have historically been held on the Town side of the ledger, with no mechanism to move the funds from the SPS benefits line to its operations line. According to Superintendent Brackett, the benefits of outsourcing will not be realized unless the District and Town address how the benefits funds are held. Jeff Beeler opined that SPS needs to have control of its budget to properly address the costs. In the absence of that option, he believes the funds must be transferable from the Town-managed SPS benefits line to the SPS operational budget.

Superintendent Brackett asked how attractive SPS will be if it goes out to bid. Mr. Ledwick responded that any synergy with L-S would enhance the District's position. Additionally, the state of the physical plant, the number of sites, and the total number of students combine to make the District attractive.

Director of Business and Finance Mary Will reported that she talked with Judy Belliveau at L-S, who indicated that LSRHS is not in a position to go out to bid this year.

Ms. Will asked Mr. Ledwick to address the suggestion that the food service program increase its catering activity. Mr. Ledwick noted the conflict for non-profits of comingled funds. Additionally, in his view, the skill set for catering is different from that for an educational operation. Moreover, such a program would compete with businesses that specialize in catering. Finally, he indicated that catering could not make up for the \$200K in benefits costs.

Superintendent Brackett asked Mr. Ledwick to comment on the nutritional value of the District's meals. Mr. Ledwick responded that the District is in compliance; however, he recommends that the District engage a registered dietitian to review its menu.

Dr. Brackett also noted that the current food services director also oversees transportation for both SPS and L-S. Mr. Ledwick stated that a dedicated full-time food services director is needed if the District wants to improve its program. At a minimum, he recommends adding some clerical hours to remove this burden from the director. Mr. Ledwick also stated that an outsourcing firm would require the District to utilize a full-time, dedicated director.

Superintendent Brackett asked the Committee to consider the direction of the program. In his view, the concept of self-sustainability is central and immediate actions are necessary to increase operational efficiencies. Dr. Brackett also stated that the benefits conversations with the Town must be formalized very soon. Additional benefits information, as well as details of the L-S program, will be gathered in order to continue this discussion at the next Regular Session.

Stating that the report cites food service workers' connections to the community, Rich Robison noted that a key District goal is to increase each student's sense of connectivity to adults in the school. In his view, the food service workers are an essential component to building this sense of community.

1. Adoption of the FY12 Roll-up Budget

Superintendent Brackett presented the FY12 roll-up budget that will be submitted to the Town by January 14. The budget is based on current staffing and programming levels. Known costs are utilized, as well as assumptions on increases in expenses (3%), special education (10%), and benefits (7%).

The District is in its third and final year of a contract that led to savings that are still being realized, including those from reduced professional development expenditures, as well as healthcare premiums and other benefit costs. Savings continue to be realized in utility costs as well. The special education budget represents a reduction from FY11 of 8.13% due to a drop in out-of district placements that will result in reductions in circuit breaker reimbursements. Overall, a savings of \$300K in special education costs is possible.

Superintendent Brackett articulated the challenges facing the District, including the increased severity of disabilities of students served within the District and the need for data management to support instructional effectiveness. Additionally, both the math and science curricula need to be reviewed and aligned, as must the teacher and principal evaluation process.

Dr. Brackett described projected enrollments as fairly fluid at this point, particularly the kindergarten numbers. He indicated that half-day programs might not be run at each of the four schools, but emphasized that there will always be a need for the half-day option.

Finally, Superintendent Brackett provided an overview of the roll-up budget in the context of either a 5 or 10% cut in state and local aid. The deficits that would result are approximately \$218K and \$400K, respectively, not including the loss of educational jobs funds.

Dr. Brackett requested that the Committee adopt the roll-up budget of \$35,618,265 as the preliminary budget.

VOTED: On a motion by Michele MacDonald, seconded by Jeff Beeler, to accept the FY12 roll-up budget as presented. The vote was 5–0 in favor.

5. School Committee Report

(c) Senior Tax Relief Article at Special Town Meeting

Susan Iuliano stated that she served on the Property Tax Equity Review Committee (PTERC) in 2003 and characterized the current proposal as less ambitious and with some additional advantages compared to the PTERC proposal. Ralph Tyler and David Levington were present to respond to the Committee's questions. Mr. Tyler explained the State's provisions under the circuit breaker law, which entitles eligible seniors to receive aid. He described the current proposal as modeled after the State program.

Jeff Beeler stated his opinion that it would be premature to take a position on the Article, which will be amended at Town Meeting. He indicated it would be more appropriate to do so after the presentation at Special Town Meeting.

Susan Iuliano reported that the Town of Hamilton recently passed a senior tax exemption that was approved by the legislature. She noted that the Sudbury proposal makes it clear that the shift in the tax levy will not affect budgets or shift the tax burden.

Mr. Tyler stated that approximately 250 residents would benefit from the tax exemption.

Lisa Gutch agrees in principle with needs-based tax relief; however, she wonders if such a program will make it more difficult to ask for an override.

2. Initial Recommendation Regarding Facility Fees and Utilization Beginning in July, 2011

Business and Finance Director Mary Will reported having discussed facilities fees with L-S. Based on those discussions, she recommends that SPS charge a nominal security deposit of \$50. Ms. Will outlined some changes in the fee policy for different categories of users. She also reported having productive discussions with SED Director Barbara Cole, the result of which is a proposed usage fee of \$35/site/day. Ms. Will characterized the net revenue from fees as modest, amounting to approximately \$60K per year.

Peter Henderson, President of the Sudbury Youth Basketball League, asked if the user fee represents a revenue-raising mechanism or a penalty. He asked if the fee can be phased in over three years, noting that participants will likely view the fee as a form of "triple taxation". Alternatively, Mr. Henderson suggested the District make specific requests to the League, which the League would then fulfill through its own fundraising mechanisms.

The Committee emphasized that the purpose of the user fees is to address ongoing wear and tear and offset related utility expenses but with some balance, as well as to align with other districts in preserving buildings and other assets.

Superintendent Brackett commented that formalizing an agreement with SED would take the arrangement to another level that includes an expectation of facility availability. Jeff Beeler encouraged conferring with counsel to address related issues.

4. Initial Discussion and Review of 2011-12 School Year Calendar

Jeff Beeler noted that, in the context of the school-year start date, the timeline for the Noyes Green Repair Project is already slipping and the additional week afforded by a post-Labor Day start is necessary. The Project is the main driver for a post-Labor Days start. A pre-Labor Days start is preferred by SALT and aligns with the L-S calendar. Lincoln is leaning toward a pre-Labor Day start as well.

The Committee agreed to postpone further review and approval of the calendar until after the Special Town Meeting and Special Election, at which it will be decided if the Green Repair Project will proceed.

5. School Committee Report

(a) Superintendent Search Update

Susan Iuliano distributed copies of the District brochure prepared by NESDEC. The brochure was mailed to 650 prospective candidates and distributed electronically to an additional group of prospects. Rich Robison reported seeing the advertisement on-line in *Education Weekly*. He commented on its prominence and attractiveness.

Susan Iuliano reported that the stakeholder process is concluding. Participant numbers for the focus groups were not high, but were within “typical” range.

(b) Green Repair Project Update

Lisa Gutch reported that the *Town Crier* and Patch.com articles are in the final editorial phase. Jeff Beeler reported that Permanent Building Committee (PBC) Co-Chair Mike Melnick engaged an Owner’s Project Manager (OPM), who suggested that cost adjustments should be prepared for Town Meeting. The consultant recommends a hazardous materials assessment as well. Moreover, the OPM believes there will be many contractors clamoring for the SBA contracts. According to the PBC, the estimate could rise from \$2.4M to \$2.6M. Mr. Beeler commented that the Green Repair Program, which is in its first year, is operating somewhat by “putting the cart before the horse” in requiring funding approvals from towns without benefit of better defined information on costs and full details of scope. Mr. Beeler recommends going before Town Meeting with a figure that is sufficiently high to cover all anticipated costs.

VOTED: On a motion by Michele MacDonald, seconded by Lisa Gutch to approve a letter to the editor drafted by Jeff Beeler and to authorize Mr. Beeler to make suggested changes to the letter. Changes include increasing the Green Repair Project cost estimate to \$2.6M. The vote was 4–0 in favor; Jeff Beeler abstained.

A forum to discuss the Green Repair Project is scheduled for January 11 at 7:30 p.m. at Noyes.

The Committee will meet at 7:00 p.m. on January 18, prior to the Special Town Meeting.

6. Open Forum

No comments.

7. Superintendent’s Report

(a) Donations

VOTED: On a motion by Jeff Beeler, seconded by Lisa Gutch, to accept with thanks a donation of 26 MacBooks, one laptop cart, drying rack, paper cutter, two cameras, two LCD projectors, and an iPad and peripherals from the Haynes Organization of Parents. The vote was 5–in favor.

(b) Recognitions

None.

(c) Bill Schedule

A Bill Schedule was presented.

(d) Personnel Actions

As outlined in the Personnel Packet.

8. Minutes—December 15, 2010 Regular Session

Tabled.

9. Communications

As outlined in the Communications Packet. Additionally, Superintendent Brackett circulated the first edition of the METCO newsletter.

10. Members' Forum

Rich Robison reported work conflicts will prevent him from attending the Special Town Meeting on January 18.

Sheila Cusolito asked for clarification on the school-year calendar discussion.

11. 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 11:06 p.m.

Yes Susan Iuliano

Yes Jeff Beeler

Yes Rich Robison

Yes Michele MacDonald

Yes Lisa Gutch

Submitted by Sheila Cusolito, Recording Secretary