

**Sudbury Public Schools
Sudbury, Massachusetts
School Committee Regular Meeting
Wednesday December 21, 2011
Nixon School**

Present: Jeff Beeler, Chairman
Dr. Rich Robison, Lisa Gutch, Ellen Winer Joachim

Also Present: Dr. Anne Wilson, Superintendent; Dr. Judy Malone Neville, Assistant Superintendent;
Mary Will, Business and Finance Director

Open Session

Jeff Beeler called the Open Session to order at 7:30 p.m. The meeting was taped for public access broadcast.

1. Nixon PTO Welcome (Maria Behrakis and Joyce Minkoff, Co-Chairs)

PTO Co-Chair Maria Behrakis provided an overview of the ongoing and upcoming PTO-sponsored events, including visits by Curtis Principal Stephen Lambert and a Chartwells nutritionist. Among its activities, the PTO is sponsoring efforts in teacher appreciation and community service. Ms. Behrakis reported that Nixon students avidly support the Sudbury Food Pantry with donations of food items and will enjoy a video clip about the Food Pantry at an upcoming school meeting. She noted that most students have not had the opportunity to visit the Food Pantry; the clip, which aired on the program *Chronicle*, will be a way for students to see that their actions make a difference.

The PTO is supplementing its direct appeal with on-line fundraising such as Amazon.com sales and a school-related auction. The Amazon program is ongoing, with proceeds to the school increasing from 6% last year to 7.5% this year. Families enjoyed the school-related on-line auction, which will be repeated in the spring. Ms. Behrakis noted that while volunteerism is down, a high level of enrichment and social programs has been maintained. A parent survey is planned to determine ways in which parents can help through the PTO.

Jeff Beeler commented that his favorite meetings are those held at each of the schools. He is pleased to have the opportunity to thank the PTO for its support and good work. Mr. Beeler expressed appreciation for the richness PTO activities provide to our kids' experience and noted that all of the PTO's are reporting challenges with fundraising and maintaining parent involvement.

2. Nixon State of the School (Joni Jay, Principal; Eula Walsh, Assistant Principal; Joanne Bleiler, Lead Teacher; Bobbi Benson, Lead Teacher)

Principal Joni Jay introduced her administrative team and had members of the school community, including parents and teachers serving on the SAC, introduce themselves.

Principal Jay noted her intention to focus her report on school culture. She provided an overview of the efforts at building student connections, including use of the Open Circle curriculum and a buddy system. Students are surveyed several times each year to identify their playmates, with a small number of students reporting one or no playmates. When asked if kids include each other, students reported that they are improving.

Ms. Jay reported that last year's redistricting did not negatively affect new students' ability to develop connections: 100% of those students reported feeling happy and highly connected to staff. Ms. Jay noted that parents had somewhat more difficulty than their children.

Principal Jay stated the culture of positivity includes both staff and peer recognition of students. Peace Assemblies are utilized as a way to develop empathy: students nominate a fellow student and provide their reasons for doing so. The nominee then provides an explanation for their actions that led to the recognition. Teachers benefit by utilizing this time for planning.

Other ways in which connections are fostered include hallway greetings, a “person of the week” feature, intentional 30-second conversations between staff and students, cross-grade buddies, and a focus on listening, which Ms. Jay emphasizes to younger students, is different from tattling. Silent mentors continue to be utilized for those students who report having one or no adult connections. A survey of students indicates that most feel that going to an adult with a problem almost always makes things better.

Nixon has implemented its behavior rubric, which involves small, but immediate consequences. Principal Jay reported that IPASS disciplinary reports have decreased by 60% since the beginning of the school year. Cameras on each school bus and daily check-ins with drivers have effectively decreased the number of bus incidents, as has invoking seating rotations on the buses. Ms. Jay identified two areas requiring additional focus: competitiveness among students, largely around sports, and name calling.

Staff efforts around a positive culture include developing staff norms. Optional “hot topic” meetings were established to allow for discussion of specialized or controversial topics outside of staff meeting time. A mechanism for staff acknowledgement of colleagues was also established. A school-wide effort to reevaluate core values is in development.

In terms of academics, Nixon is utilizing data teams and working on importing school data into the District database. Principal Jay commented that under the guidance of data coaches, the data teams are designed to develop and share strategies for improving teaching and learning for all students.

Nixon is working with Teaching and Learning Alliance (TLA) on improving reading and writing workshops for K–2. Among the aspects of the program is teacher coaching through consultation and planning, and co-teaching utilizing focus lessons.

Efforts surrounding the Common Core include increasing the nonfiction reading component and better matching math to curriculum standards, both in terms of content areas and depth of coverage.

Nixon is utilizing block scheduling and differentiated instruction and intervention within the classroom. Ms. Jay believes that all students benefit with less pull-out instruction.

Questions From The Committee

Jeff Beeler remarked that the presentation was among the best he’s seen and that it’s very helpful to hear about school culture in balance with MCAS and academic performance.

Rich Robison asked about areas of focus for improvement. Principal Jay reiterated the challenges in name-calling and competitiveness in sports. In terms of academics, she identified grade-level and special population academic challenges. Ms. Jay also commented on the limited ability of the schools to support kids and families in distress.

Lisa Gutch asked if parent outreach is a part of the school culture efforts. Parents Jamie Vandervelden and Maria Behrakis noted that the children “sell it themselves”: they are engaged on a different level than they were previously, discussing school culture with a real sense of community. Parent Rich Tinsley added that he sees it also in the positive messages displayed throughout the school. Noted also was that school culture will be part of an upcoming parent survey.

3. Preliminary FY13 Enrollment Projections and

4. FY13 Budget Projections

Superintendent Wilson provided an update on both enrollment and the budget.

Although enrollment compared with this time last year is down, kindergarten registrations are following a similar pattern, with a 121/18 split for the full- vs. half-day programs. The large incoming Grade 8 class will require changes to scheduling if the District wants to maintain class sizes and the current breadth of curriculum offerings. Superintendent Wilson stated that the District can expect a slight decrease in staffing based on the net decrease in enrollment District-wide.

Director of Business and Finance Mary Will presented the updated roll-up budget overview. Assumptions include flat state aid and a 2.5% increase in local revenue. Ms. Will noted that the deficit is lower than what was circulated to the Committee. The Town benefit projection—originally set at 8%—was better defined and decreased to 6.35%, resulting in a diminished funding shortfall. Ms. Will also pointed out additional savings on salaries by assigning full-day kindergarten tuitions to the Early Childhood director's salary at 40% of its total. At this time, the projected funding shortfall stands at just under \$390,000, down from the \$538,000 reported at the December 7, 2011 Regular Session.

Jeff Beeler commented that at this time, health insurance projections and state aid remain in flux. He asked when the Committee could expect to see staffing projections, noting that he received an inquiry from a *Town Crier* reporter following the previous update. Mr. Beeler's response was that the numbers are still in flux. Mary Will responded that at the next Regular Session, the Committee will receive firmer enrollment and staffing data. She added that the special education budget represents a significant portion of the budget and that it will not be determined until February. Ms. Will also stated that a Cost of Living Adjustment, COLA, is not included in the budget at this time.

Lisa Gutch asked what options are being considered to address Grade 8 enrollment. Superintendent Wilson replied that the administration is looking at how other districts handle teams and scheduling to increase staff efficiencies.

Dr. Wilson provided data on trends in enrollment of special needs children, noting that the District attempts to identify cohorts and develop programs to accommodate student needs. In Massachusetts, 17% of students have special needs, compared with a national average of 12%. A greater proportion of Massachusetts special needs students attend specialized day programs compared with the national average, adding to increased costs for districts within the state.

Data for SPS from 2008 to the present show a decrease in the number of IEP's, but an increase in out-of-district placements. Dr. Wilson pointed out that in all years, by year's end, the number of both IEP's and out-of-district placements increased, consistent with the differential of 13–15% in-district and 1–1.5% out-of-district placements. Data from FY10 indicate a special education enrollment below the state average: 14.1% compared with 15.8%. In FY10, Lincoln was at 11.8% and L-S at 17.6%. The District's special education enrollment is on the low end of that for peer communities within the state.

Rich Robison pointed out that the percentages are calculated on different populations: the national average is based on children ages 6–18; whereas, Massachusetts calculates the percentage based on children ages 3–22.

In addition to the uncertainties in the special education budget, Dr. Wilson pointed out the challenge of maintaining excellence in service with the loss of federal stimulus funds, which totaled about \$1.75 Million in the last 3 fiscal years. These funds supported, among other things, professional and curriculum development (\$232.5K), technology (\$246.5K), and data analysis and assessment (\$83.3K).

Superintendent Wilson identified the following among the elements essential to improving on excellence: two elementary math coaches/specialists (\$111.7K); adjustments in Curtis staffing totaling two teachers (\$111.7K); addition of a board-certified behavior analyst (\$55.9K). Superintendent Wilson clarified that the ELA and Math curriculum specialists are already included in the budget.

5. School Committee Report

Communications/Public Relations

Lisa Gutch reiterated the need to develop a news article on the budget. She also noted that she will work on scheduling parent coffees for later in the school year.

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 \$50,000 from the Jack and Mae Rosenberg Charitable Trust to be applied for the ongoing benefit of the Aspirations Program. The vote was 4–0 in favor.

Rich Robison requested some discussion about integrating this program, which is operated outside of the District, in order to sustain it should funding from donations no longer be available. Superintendent Wilson acknowledged this need for discussion, noting that the District highly values the Aspirations program and the opportunities it provides.

VOTED: On a motion by Jeff Beeler, seconded by Rich Robison, to accept with thanks an annual donation of \$50 from Lueders Environmental, Inc. The vote was 4–0 in favor.

(b) Recognitions

Superintendent Wilson acknowledged the staff at every school. During her recent visits, she was pleased to observe engaged students and learning environments that account for the range of learners. Dr. Wilson expressed appreciation for being able to work within such a rich, challenging environment for students. She thanked the School Committee for its support of District education goals.

(c) Bill Schedule

A Bill Schedule was presented.

(e) Personnel Actions

As outlined in the Personnel Packet.

8. Minutes

VOTED: On a motion by Lisa Gutch, seconded by Ellen Joachim, to approve the minutes of the December 7, 2011 Regular Session. The vote was 3–0 in favor. Rich Robison abstained.

9. Members' Forum

Sheila Cusolito asked what accounts for the decreased percentage of special education students at L-S compared with those for Lincoln and Sudbury combined. Superintendent Wilson responded that the factors affecting the numbers are similar for all the districts and that she is not aware of any trends that account for the drop. Rich Robison added that numbers for freshman often increase.

Rich Robison commented that the Massachusetts Taxpayer's Foundation has found that the state budget formula significantly underfunds special education and that Foundation president Michael Widmer is interested in pursuing a formula change. Dr. Robison noted that the issue

of allocation was not addressed; however, much media attention is expected as the Governor's and House budgets are prepared. Dr. Robison also reported that there's a chance that the Circuit Breaker will be fully funded at the 75% level, although the recent issues with the Collaboratives make this a "harder sell". Finally, Dr. Robison reported that the School Committee Negotiations Subcommittee met with the SEA recently and will begin negotiations in January.

Jeff Beeler stated his intention to invite Permanent Building Committee Chairman, Mike Melnick, to give a wrap-up presentation on the Noyes Green Repair project. He noted that with Mr. Melnick's leadership, the project came in on time and under budget. Moreover, Mr. Melnick pursued an additional credit of \$48K. Mr. Beeler noted that he thought it appropriate that the Committee acknowledge Mr. Melnick for his tireless and effective efforts.

10. Executive Session

VOTED: On a motion by Jeff Beeler, seconded by Lisa Gutch, to adjourn to Executive Session for the purpose of discussing strategy with respect to potential litigation, as discussion in an open meeting may have a detrimental effect on the position of the School Committee, not to return to Open Session. The vote was 4-0 in favor. The time was 9:05 p.m.

Yes Jeff Beeler
Yes Rich Robison
Yes Lisa Gutch
Yes Ellen Winer Joachim

Submitted by Sheila Cusolito, Recording Secretary