

**Sudbury Public Schools
Sudbury, Massachusetts
School Committee Regular Meeting
Wednesday June 6, 2012
Fairbank Senior Center**

Present: Dr. Rich Robison, Lisa Gutch, Ellen Winer Joachim, Bob Armour, Lucie St. George

Also Present: Dr. Anne Wilson, Superintendent; Dr. Judy Malone Neville, Assistant Superintendent;
David Jurewicz, SEA

Open Session

Rich Robison called the Open Session to order at 7:31 p.m. The meeting was taped for public access broadcast.

Rich Robison explained the protocol for commenting in Open Forum. He advised that the Committee generally takes comments, but does not always respond. He also cautioned against others sounding out without being recognized. Dr. Robison explained the boundaries of what the Committee is prevented from discussing. In reference to the personnel matter at the Noyes School, Dr. Robison also emphasized that there is no information supporting the occurrence of a fight between children, nor is there information to indicate that the Principal or reporting teacher acted inappropriately. He ended by assuring the Committee's confidence in the Administration.

VOTED: On a motion by Lisa Gutch, seconded by Bob Armour, to move the Superintendent's Report and the Open Forum, Agenda Items 6 and 5, to the start of the Open Session. The vote was 5-0 in favor.

6. Superintendent's Report

Superintendent Anne Wilson made the following statement:

I would like to take a few minutes this evening to discuss the recent events at the Noyes Elementary School. Recent events have indeed sparked much controversy and emotion. Please know that our focus has been and will continue to be on the education and well-being of our students.

In situations such as this, we are required to comply with strict state and federal laws that protect the confidentiality of personnel matters and student records. In fact, the District and the School Committee are barred by Massachusetts and federal laws from commenting on specifics regarding matters involving individual students, personnel issues, and Department of Children and Families (DCF) investigations. It also is important to note that all educators are required by state law to report to DCF any incident which they suspect may place a child in danger of harm. The penalties for not doing so are serious.

I recognize that there has been much inaccurate information in the media, and while I cannot disclose confidential information, I can tell you that there was no fight between students and that there was no report of a fight between students in the first grade class at the Noyes Elementary School.

Information was reported to a school administrator from a member of the Noyes School staff that warranted an immediate investigation. The well-being and education of students in our schools is our first priority, and based on the report that was received, Noyes school administrators took immediate appropriate action in the best interests of our students. We have taken appropriate steps to support students and families in the following ways:

- Engaged a qualified, certified substitute teacher who is familiar with Sudbury and our curriculum
- Communicated with parents, on several occasions, about changes in their child's classroom
- Provided support from the school counselor in class and offered support from the counselor to parents
- Principal Doyle met with many parents, on an individual basis
- Most recently, Principal Doyle, and I met with room 15 parents in a group setting to provide additional support for students and to respond to questions about their children's education
- Communicated with parents and school staff about procedures and processes related to student behavioral issues

The education of our students was not interrupted and they are continuing to learn and grow in their classroom. I have confidence in the administration, teachers, and staff at Peter Noyes – they are an exceptional group of educators who continue to work together, remaining focused, even in these difficult times, on the best interests of our students.

I want parents to know that we understand your frustration, your concern, your disappointment and even your anger. This has been a very unsettling situation for all involved.

We believe that we have done our best to address your concerns and to share as much information as possible within the constraints of the law. No student or parent should feel any sense of responsibility for the measures which have been taken. As outlined in my letter of June 1st, this incident has no bearing on the procedures and protocols already in place for teachers to intervene appropriately in any student altercation or misbehavior.

We are committed to working with parents of students in room 15 at Noyes to ensure a successful end to the school year and a smooth and successful transition to second grade.

5. Open Forum

Christine Hogan, Blueberry Hill Lane, is speaking on behalf of her two daughters in Mrs. J's classroom. She reported attending a meeting yesterday with parents, Superintendent Wilson and Principal Doyle. In response to a parent query about incomplete math work, Mrs. Doyle responded that she requested, but had not received, lesson plans from Mrs. J. Ms. Hogan asked where the responsibility lies for ensuring continuity in lessons in the case of the sudden removal of a teacher.

Ms. Hogan's second major concern is the manner in which six and seven year-old children were questioned. Dr. Wilson and Mrs. Doyle responded that staff routinely question students about incidents without parental notification or presence. Ms. Hogan asked about the criteria that warrant exception to this procedure and if the events of May 5 constitute an 'incident'. She is also concerned that those who questioned the students had a non-neutral history with Mrs. J and were not the appropriate people to query six- and seven-year-olds. She asked why a neutral party was not called in to question about what has been characterized as abuse.

Rich Robison called for order following a brief disruption.

Rick Johnson, Bent Road, asked for an explanation about the process that occurs in filing a 51a. Superintendent Wilson responded that any educator can file a 51a if abuse, neglect, or harm to a child is suspected. Mr. Johnson asked if parents are notified in cases where children are questioned as part of the filing. Dr. Wilson responded that there is no requirement to notify parents. Chairman Robison closed the question.

Diane Metzger, Whispering Pine Road, was accompanied by her son Jake, who was a student of Mrs. J 17 years ago. She asked that the Committee question the filing of the 51a, given its

basis on one person's opinion. She wonders what happened to 'innocent until proven guilty', opining that a wonderful teacher is being crucified.

Rich Robison called for order following a brief disruption.

Mary Mahoney, Grindstone Lane and a Grade 8 teacher, indicated she is speaking on behalf of teachers. She produced copies of Mrs. J's lesson plans, stating that they had been sent to Superintendent Wilson, Principal Doyle, and SEA President Robert Mealey. Ms. Mahoney commented that in 28 years, she hasn't seen this school system in such crisis and it is breaking her heart. She has an investment in the system, both as an employee and as a parent and grandparent of children enrolled in the district. She finds it egregious that this has occurred. She related a story of how easy it might be for a teacher's comments or manner to be misconstrued. Ms. Mahoney opined that we will not get beyond this if we don't get beyond it.

Bob Stein, Thompson Drive, disclosed that he is a member of Finance Committee but is not commenting in that capacity. He reported that he watched the tape of last week's meeting and confirmed that one Member did not pay attention for the first 45 minutes of the Open Forum; rather, she was sending emails and texting, including sending a text to his boss, Myron Fox, at 9:17 p.m. He identified the Member as Vice Chairwoman Lisa Gutch and noted that the copy of the communication to Mr. Fox is posted online. Rich Robison clarified that Ms. Gutch utilized her phone for time-keeping during the Open Forum. He requested Mr. Stein limit his comments to the Noyes incident.

Mr. Stein stated that there is little consistency in the application of SPS policy. He related his son's experience at Nixon, where he was bullied by a student three times without consequence to the offending child. He contrasted that experience with a recent instance of horseplay that resulted in a call to police, commenting on his concern that teachers will now be inclined to do nothing on behalf of bullied children.

Cynthia Denessen, Tanbark Road, is a 35-year resident and was a teacher for 26 years at Curtis and Noyes. She is a mandated reporter and understands that anything at all questionable must be reported. She also understands that reporting must occur within 48 hours; whereas, in the current case, the report was made 17 days later. She questions how egregious the incident was that it was not reported for so long, remarking that Administrators should follow the same protocol as teachers.

Ms. Denessen characterized Janice Donahue as a 'teacher of teachers'. She is concerned for her, but it also frightens her to know that this could have happened to her. She remarked on the loss of a comfortable learning environment and the lack of respect for veteran teachers and their judgment. She also noted that only in her final two years of teaching were letters of warning or reprimand and administrative leaves invoked.

Paul Hogan, Blueberry Hill Lane, has two Room 15 children. He understands the 51a process and the timeframe within which the accused and parents of children must be contacted. He stated that when a report is received, DCF either screens it in or out. Given the lack of response from DCF, he has concluded that this matter was screened out. Mr. Hogan has heard that there's a back story. He asked if the School Committee has talked with Janice Donahue directly and if the Superintendent was present at the hearing. He asked if the Committee is giving equal air time to the other side of the story.

Mike Bower, Great Lake Drive, commented that the Committee owes this much to the teachers, not the Superintendent.

Chairman Robison emphasized that the Committee is barred from speaking about a DCF investigation.

Christine Hogan, Blueberry Hill Lane, commented that the School Committee is only aware of circumstances from the Administration's side and should get Janice Donahue's side of the story to have as many facts as possible.

Mary Lou Thompson, Demarco Drive, taught for a long time and knows Janice Donahue and her love of literature. She related a story of a little boy who impressed his visiting grandmother with his knowledge of Beatrix Potter, a passion she attributed to Janice Donahue. Now a middle school student, the boy sent her a beautiful poem, which in Ms. Thompson's opinion, showed a 'little bit of Janice'.

Bobby Beagan, Pine Street, asked what the plan is for the Committee to address this. He wrote to the Committee, but did not receive a response and is disappointed that this is not an agenda item. He appreciates the Open Forum, but he wants to know the Committee's response, not the Superintendent's. Rich Robison reiterated the Committee's inability to discuss any item under potential litigation.

Mr. Beagan asked how the Committee is addressing the situation to boost the public's confidence. Rich Robison referred to Superintendent Wilson's opening comments and outlined the communications describing the Administration's actions. He stated that the Committee has not been involved in meetings with parents and is not in a position to do so. He stated that if a staff member has a grievance with a decision of the Administration, they can bring it to the School Committee.

Julie Clements, Fox Run Road, is angry that parents are being told different things in different meetings. She noted that the Administration has said that it cannot comment on this case; however, she heard today that the Superintendent asked Noyes staff for a round of applause for the reporting teacher. She does not understand why parents must abide by a standard different from that for the Administration. She is appalled and asked what choice the staff had. She thought yesterday's meeting with parents was productive, but is in conflict with the staff being given flowers and applause.

Rich Robison called for order following a brief disruption.

Superintendent Wilson responded that the referenced meeting with Noyes staff was not her meeting and that she did not request applause or congratulations for anyone. She did thank staff for doing the job that they do and emphasized that she and Principal Doyle want to make sure that staff is supported moving forward. Dr. Wilson explained that Mrs. Doyle had roses for the staff. Staff complimented each other for many things that occurred during the school year and the Administration similarly complimented staff. Ms. Clements acknowledged her mistake, stating that it was Mrs. Doyle who asked for applause.

Leah Ciappenelli, Old Sudbury Road, noted that she moved to Sudbury with measured intent to have her son educated here. She knew she'd made the right choice when she saw how Mrs. Donahue embraced her son. She stated that her son is resilient and will get through this, but she has high expectations for the work that must be done by the Town, the Committee, and the Administration to repair the situation. Ms. Ciappenelli also noted that her son was questioned by staff. Although both parents were at the school at the time, neither was notified. She requested the Committee respond about when the threshold is reached that parents must be informed.

Abigail Zocher, Brimstone Lane, highlighted portions of a statement by a Cambridge School Committee candidate. The candidate proposed three priorities: achievement, responsibility, and transparency to all stakeholders. Ms. Zocher asked what laws govern what parents can be told. She suggested that it would be better than not to involve this body of 'reasonable people'.

Chairman Robison cited governing laws surrounding rights to privacy and personnel records and also noted that no gag order was imposed. He stated that an employee can voluntarily enter such an arrangement with an employer.

Mary-Michael Merhige, Pheasant Avenue, moved to Sudbury five years ago, specifically to become a Peter Noyes family. Her oldest child is in Mrs. J's class. She noted that parents have been diligent in focusing on issues around children and communications. She commented that it was bittersweet to hear the Administration's reports of assistance, given the delays and lack of responsiveness to parents' initial requests. She stated that parents were not informed for seven days after Mrs. J's removal. She stated that the guidance counselor only got involved 19 days later, after parent complaints. Furthermore, parents asked for a meeting, but got no response until after last week's School Committee meeting. She thought yesterday's meeting was good, but is now disheartened to learn that lesson plans were provided, when parents were told they were not. She asked if this is really in the best interest of the children, opining that actions speak louder than words.

Gloria Goldman, a Framingham resident, taught at Haynes, Loring, and Noyes. At Noyes, her classroom was next to that of Janice Donahue. They often kept the door between them ajar. Ms. Goldman remarked that Mrs. Donahue is an outstanding first-grade teacher. She insisted that there is no way Mrs. Donahue would have physically abused a child.

Scott Nassa, Clark Lane, stated that his oldest child will enter Loring next year. He called the current situation a 'mess', noting that it is featured in the news statewide. He is hoping by September that answers to questions about protocol will be available so that teachers don't have to be afraid to do their job. Mr. Nassa commented that his philosophy in business is 'don't ask for permission, ask for forgiveness'. He remarked that the community has an opportunity to show its children how conflict is resolved by working together.

Chairman Robison again referred to the Superintendent's statement, reiterating that there was no report of a fight in this instance.

9. Executive Session

VOTED: On a motion by Rich Robison, seconded by Ellen Joachim, to move to Executive Session for the purpose of discussing strategy with respect to collective bargaining with Union personnel and for the purpose of discussing litigation strategy, as discussion in Open Meeting may have a detrimental effect on the bargaining or litigating position of the School Committee, to return to Open Session. The vote was 4-0 in favor. Bob Armour abstained. The time was 8:30 p.m.

Bob Armour then proposed to delay the Executive Session for 15 minutes in order to allow the public additional time to comment in Open Forum.

VOTED: On a motion by Bob Armour, seconded by Lucie St. George, to delay Executive Session for 15 minutes. The vote was 2-3 in favor. Those in favor: Bob Armour and Lucie St. George; those opposed: Rich Robison, Lisa Gutch, and Ellen Joachim.

Rich Robison reopened the Open Session at 10:13 p.m.

5. Open Forum

VOTED: On a motion by Bob Armour, seconded by Lisa Gutch, to extend the Open Forum by 15 minutes. The vote was 5-0 in favor.

Mary Mahoney, Grindstone Lane and a Grade 8 teacher, commented that the Superintendent and Committee claim that they can't use peoples' names and can't say what happened, yet their written communications name the teacher and imply she did something wrong.

Moreover, the communications imply that the Principal and reporting teacher did everything right. She asked how this turmoil is good for the kids.

Maura Mitchell, Spruce Lane, commented that Mrs. J has lived up to the superlatives used to describe her. She stated that her son has done well. She expressed an interest in looking at the situation from all sides in a fair, neutral setting, noting how upsetting this is for the Town and the children. She characterized Mrs. J's departure as the 'first and worst' loss in her son's life.

Diane Metzger, Whispering Pine Road, feels strongly that the music teacher's word should not be taken as gospel. She believes Mrs. J should have an opportunity to tell her side of the story.

Jane Stevenson, Peakham Road, gave kudos to those parents who waited through the Executive Session. She queried Chairman Robison on potential litigation, retention of legal counsel, and the burden for associated costs. Dr. Robison confirmed that there is potential litigation and that independent legal counsel has been retained. He did not specify the nature of the litigation or the identity of the counsel, but did confirm that attorney fees and any settlement would be paid from taxpayer/District funds. Ms. Stevenson opined that the Committee is gravely underestimating how upset people are.

Christine Hogan, Blueberry Hill Lane, noted that Dr. Wilson responded earlier about the flower/applause incident and asked why she would not respond about the lesson plans that she received May 17, when Principal Doyle claimed two times that she hadn't received them. She asked how this puts the children first. Ms. Hogan was asked to direct her query to Chairman Robison, who offered to look into it.

Mary-Michael Merhige, Pheasant Lane, expressed appreciation for the letter sent last weekend to Room 15 parents. She commented that although the damage is done, she hopes the Committee will convene a special meeting to work with parents to prevent this from happening again. Rich Robison responded that generally, the Superintendent would represent the School Committee in such a meeting. Dr. Wilson indicated a willingness to follow up.

Paul Hogan, Blueberry Hill Lane, commented on Superintendent Wilson's opening statement regarding communications, which he characterized as reactive, rather than proactive. Moreover, he noted that the Administration only offered to meet with parents after the School Committee meeting last week.

Rich Robison disagreed with the notion that the School Committee and Administration do not care about students. Mr. Hogan replied that concern for students is not universally held by the School Committee or Administration.

Susan Richman, Kendra Lane and a teacher at Curtis, commented that she knows this is tearing up the Town, including lots of people in the audience and the teachers, as well as those around the table. She emphasized that everyone needs to feel supported. She wants us to work together to make things right.

1. SPS FY13 Draft Goals and Strategies

Superintendent Wilson presented a draft of the FY13 goals and strategies. The Committee has the opportunity to provide input prior to circulation to SPS staff for comment. Following the comment period, the School Committee will be asked to adopt the goals and strategies. This year's focus will be on the instructional core, that is, the interaction between the teacher, student, and the curriculum. The emphasis will be on data-informed differentiated instruction designed to meet the needs of all students and continued implementation of the Common Core Curriculum. The roll-out of the new educator evaluation standards is one of the supporting initiatives. Alignment of curriculum, assessments and professional development with the Common Core standards will be supported utilizing a K-8 Professional Development Council and curriculum coordinators in ELA and math.

Rich Robison commented that the process of implementing the Common Core has been more complex than originally anticipated. Assistant Superintendent Judy Malone Neville spearheaded the effort to implement the Common Core utilizing a pre-K–8 planning committee and a summer working group in what will amount to a two-year process. Among the features of the plan are to incorporate ELA across all curriculum areas and align the math curriculum with the Common Core. A considerable professional development effort surrounding the ELA component will culminate in a June workshop. Assistant Superintendent Malone Neville expressed confidence that the District will be well positioned to implement the program in the coming year. Dr. Malone Neville added that promised model units from the State were not received, but that SPS is proceeding as planned. Dr. Robison characterized communication with the community about changes in sequence and assessments as most critical throughout these initial years of roll-out. Dr. Malone Neville stated that updates of the roll-out will be provided on the District website.

Superintendent Wilson noted that new standards for algebra will be in place, which makes coordination with LS very critical in light of the differing time-frame for the LS roll-out.

Lisa Gutch asked what is involved with rolling out the curriculum. The process involves examining the standards and current curriculum and those units and activities required under the Common Core, and determining both strategies and types of assessments. Superintendent Wilson emphasized that our goal is to make content accessible to all students.

Rich Robison indicated that the progress of the roll-out will be the subject of a future agenda item. He noted that MCAS will eventually be replaced by a test of the Common Core that will be administered on-line. This speaks to the need to maintain and build technology infrastructure.

Bob Armour asked for clarification around differentiated instruction. Superintendent Wilson described the process of achieving the maximum effect for each child, differentiating both for needs and for learning.

Mr. Armour also asked about the role of parents in analyzing student data to inform instruction. Dr. Wilson explained that this refers more to teachers and their collective efforts to inform and improve instruction and student achievement.

Mr. Armour commented that the summary strategy was helpful and well articulated. He is interested in discussing the metrics that will be used to measure progress toward our goals. He also opined that we must keep all stakeholders fully informed to maximize our chances of success.

2. New Educator Evaluation Standards

Superintendent Wilson followed her presentation from the May 30, 2012 Regular Session with additional details on model rubrics for the new educator evaluation process.

Bob Armour asked for the meaning of reflective practices, to which Dr. Wilson responded that the process has a self-assessment component built in. She indicated that this also bears on the ways teachers collaborate and the quality of the collaboration.

VOTED: On a motion by Bob Armour, seconded by Ellen Joachim, to approve the new standards for educator evaluation as presented. The vote was 5–0 in favor.

VOTED: On a motion by Lisa Gutch, seconded by Lucie St. George, to approve the recommendations of the Joint Labor Management Committee regarding collective bargaining language, as presented at the May 30, 2012 Regular Session. The vote was 5–0 in favor.

3. School Committee Retreat/Team-Building

The Committee agreed by consensus to meet on Saturday, June 23 from approximately 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. for its retreat.

4. School Committee Report

(a) Communications/Public Relations
No report.

6. Superintendent's Report

(a) Communications
A mailing related to the annual MASC conference was received.

(a) Bill Schedule
A Bill Schedule was presented.

7. Minutes

Tabled.

8. Members' Forum

Assistant Superintendent Judy Malone Neville commented on the great teaching and learning occurring within SPS. She highlighted the efforts of Literacy Specialist Susan Lauffer, who trained Grade 5 reading coaches to work with kindergarteners at Loring.

Dr. Malone Neville also reported attending Colonial Days with Noyes students at Heritage Park, as well as ChickFest at Haynes. Next week, she will attend Odyssey with Nixon and Noyes fourth graders.

Ellen Winer Joachim reported that she and Dr. Malone Neville are working on a head injury policy to cover Curtis students who participate in after-school sports, as well as the education of parents, students, and coaches. The policy will include information about academic issues that might arise from head injuries.

Lisa Gutch asked Members to return their comments on the summary of the May 30, 2012 Regular Session.

Rich Robison reported that the State budget is in conference committee. A report is expected by June 20 so that the budget can be in place by July 1. He indicated that the focus of late has moved to other matters.

Superintendent Anne Wilson echoed Judy Malone Neville's comments regarding learning. She also attended Noyes' Colonial Days and commented that children were very animated about the activities, which included tin art, weaving, and candle dipping. Dr. Wilson also attended administrative team meetings at Haynes and will attend Odyssey this week with Loring and Haynes students.

Bob Armour commented that he almost broke with protocol to applaud Susan Richman for her comments. He also commented that it is important to keep perspective, highlighted in a recent email communication by Annette Doyle in which many positive activities were detailed. In his view, it would be helpful to establish an approach to communications that prevents misunderstandings, for instance, around the role of the School Committee.

Lucie St. George attended a field trip at Curtis that joined sixth- and first-graders for an experience comparable to Weir Hill, which can no longer accommodate groups. Sixth-graders acted as field guides in what she called a rich, sensory experience and a good use of resources. Judy Malone Neville credited first- and sixth-grade teachers, as well as Science Curriculum Specialist Holly Estes, for coordinating.

Sheila Cusolito expressed interest in the training and roll-out of the new educator evaluation process.

10. Adjourn

VOTED: On a motion by Bob Armour, seconded by Lisa Gutch, to adjourn the June 6, 2012 Regular Session. The vote was 5–0 in favor. The time was 11:39 p.m.

Yes Rich Robison
Yes Lisa Gutch
Yes Ellen Winer Joachim
Yes Bob Armour
Yes Lucie St. George

Submitted by Sheila Cusolito, Recording Secretary