

**Sudbury Public Schools
Sudbury, Massachusetts
School Committee Regular Meeting
Wednesday September 5, 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. Todd Curtis, Assistant Superintendent; Mary Will, Director of Business and Finance; Dr. Robert Mealey, SEA

Open Session

Rich Robison called the Open Session to order at 7:35 p.m. The meeting was taped for public access broadcast.

1. Report on Collective Bargaining with the Sudbury Education Association

Negotiations with the SEA culminated in an agreement for FY13–15 that balances the key objectives of academic excellence and competitive compensation for teaching staff in a fiscally prudent manner. Administrative improvements include notification procedures and timing in filling vacancies. Changes also include implementing the performance-based evaluation system, providing additional support to foster highly educated staff, establishing a professional development (PD) council and reinstating PD funds. Changes to the salary schedule, as well as a lump sum allowance in 2013 and 2014 for members of the GIC, were also incorporated.

SEA President Bob Mealey thanked members of the staff, some of whom were present, who worked over the summer in a long, sometimes tense, process. He believes negotiations are successful if all parties think the outcome is good.

Lisa Gutch considers the compensation adjustments a good step forward. She cited the evolution of health insurance offerings. Sacrifices made in moving to the GIC resulted in savings that can be put into compensation. Ms. Gutch thanked those who were part of the negotiations and believes the agreement reflects how important the staff is to the District.

Bob Armour stated that he learned a lot over last few months of negotiations, particularly with respect to the teachers' perspectives and commitment.

VOTED: On a motion by Ellen Joachim, seconded by Lisa Gutch, to approve the Memorandum of Agreement between the Sudbury Public School Committee and the Sudbury Education Association, dated July 28, 2012. The vote was 5–0 in favor.

2. SPS FY13 Strategic Objectives and Initiative Plans

Superintendent Wilson reviewed the three major initiatives: implementing the new teacher evaluation system, implementing the Common Core, and informing instruction through the use of data. She highlighted the connections between these initiatives. She stated that there will be a focus on obtaining feedback on the usefulness of the new teacher evaluation system with respect to its impact on student learning.

Assistant Superintendent Todd Curtis discussed the alignment between the Common Core, curriculum assessments, and professional development. He also cited goals relating to bringing in new units of instruction and enhancing communication across the District.

With respect to analyzing data to inform instruction, there will be a focus on understanding *why* mastery did or did not occur, which will be facilitated by the use of common assessments. Dr.

Curtis commented that time outside of ILAP, as well as support for teachers, are required in order to learn how to do things differently.

Lisa Gutch asked how much of the curriculum must be changed with respect to implementing the Common Core and if the School District is responsible for building all new lesson plans. Dr. Wilson responded that the Common Core is more rigorous than what has been in place. Dr. Curtis stated that, although the curriculum has been dictated, the District is able to use its own professional judgment in implementing it. Dr. Robison commented that it is characteristic of education reform that standards are established at the state level, but implementation remains under local control. Dr. Curtis added that the standards are about equity: the particular classroom shouldn't matter.

Rich Robison noted that MCAS and other state assessments are undergoing parallel revision. Todd Curtis responded that a lot of alignment already exists between the old and new frameworks and that our students should be well prepared as MCAS changes occur. Ellen Joachim asked about the timing of implementing new assessments relative to that of implementing the Common Core. Some of the new math standards will appear on tests in 2014; whereas, Common Core implementation will not be completed until 2015. Bob Armour commented that it is a good idea not to rush into such an ambitious plan. He asked about near-term priorities and some of the immediate worries. Superintendent Wilson replied that things have been set up to provide as much time as possible to be successful with the three major initiatives. In-process checks are in place so that progress can be monitored ongoing, rather than at the end of the school year. Assistant Superintendent Curtis emphasized the importance of PD and supporting the teachers in learning new ways of doing things. Dr. Wilson noted the challenge of limited time for PD activities.

Bob Armour asked that the School Committee be kept informed as the year progresses. Lucie St. George concurred that time is a significant challenge. She also would like to be kept updated as the new initiatives are implemented.

3. Introduction of Math Curriculum Coordinator Maggie McGinty and ELA Curriculum Coordinator Jennifer Soalt

Newly hired ELA Curriculum Coordinator Jennifer Soalt was welcomed. She characterized the needed ELA curriculum alignment with the Common Core as a "tweak". The main focus of the adjustments involves non-fiction, text complexity, ensuring that all students are reading at their most advanced level, and writing across a variety of genres. Opportunities for overlap between the major initiatives exist. As an example, Ms. Soalt cited the need for PD around developing a non-fiction unit; unit development also fits with the new educator evaluation requirements.

Maggie McGinty, the newly hired Math Curriculum Coordinator, has been working with Grade 8 teachers on developing a text for the Common Core curriculum based on what staff knows works for our students. She is also piloting a Grade 6 online assessment, with a goal of reducing the lag between assessment and assistance for specific students. Ms. McGinty is also incorporating time for fifth- and sixth-grade teachers to work collaboratively on developing a common language and tools.

Both coordinators have distributed links to resources to all staff. Bob Armour praised the power of cross-curriculum learning that is being developed.

Rich Robison asked about the implications of developing our own curriculum in math and what students will experience at LS. Todd Curtis stated that the staff is looking at the curriculum with the standard as the basis, which is similar to the approach at LS. Dr. Robison opined that direct transfer and ongoing conversation is essential.

Lisa Gutch remarked that the letter to middle school parents (mentioned earlier in the meeting by Dr. Curtis) regarding the math curriculum would be helpful and suggested that more and frequent

communication with parents about the curriculum changes would be beneficial. Ms. McGinty responded that a meeting is already scheduled for October 23.

4. Spirit of America Trip

Music teacher Dr. Robert Mealey outlined the proposed Grade 7 and 8 music trip, which occurs every other year. This year, music students will travel to Washington DC on April 25–28, 2013. Dr. Mealey explained that teachers look for child-centered music festivals with supportive judging, in addition to a tie-in to academics. The Music Department is working directly with festival organizers on travel plans and accommodations, rather than utilizing Colpitts Travel. Dr. Mealey confirmed that financial assistance is available.

VOTED: On a motion by Lisa Gutch, seconded by Lucie St. George to approve the out-of-state music field trip as presented. The vote was 5–0 in favor.

5. Update on Nixon Roof Repair Project

Superintendent Wilson and Vice Chair Lisa Gutch recently viewed the conditions of the Nixon roof. Ms. Gutch reported that Permanent Building Committee Co-Chair Mike Melnick successfully negotiated contracts with the MSBA-assigned owner’s project manager and architectural designer. She and Facilities Manager Jim Kelly are working on a presentation for Special Town Meeting.

Superintendent Wilson stated that Maintenance Director Joe Kupczewski reported doing some repair on the Nixon roof on a monthly basis. Both she and Ms. Gutch were struck by the amount of standing water on the roof, given the relatively dry weather conditions at the time. Lucie St. George noted that buckets are used within the building to capture water from leaks.

6. Final FY12 Budget Report

Director of Business and Finance Mary Will presented the line item transfers necessary to close the FY12 budget. Savings in health insurance, tuition prepayments, and higher than expected circuit breaker revenue offset last year’s significantly higher out-of-district special education tuitions. When the mid-year budget freeze was lifted, savings allowed for the purchase of a laptop cart for Grade 6, two ActivBoards, replacement of the Nixon phones, improved lighting, light bulb changeover, and replacement of old rugs in Fairbank rooms. Curriculum supplies were also purchased.

Ms. Will stated that savings in utilities were once again realized, thanks to the efforts of Joe Kupczewski and the mild winter. She hopes to segregate savings due to the Noyes Green Repair Project and put the funds back into maintenance. Lucie St. George thanked Ms. Will for her many helpful explanations.

VOTED: On a motion by Lisa Gutch, seconded by Ellen Joachim, to approve the line item transfers for the final FY12 budget. The vote was 5–0 in favor.

Ms. Will credited the Capital Committee for the installation of a new HVAC system and fire panel at the Nixon School.

7. Preliminary Enrollment Report

Superintendent Wilson stated that the numbers she is presenting are those that will be reported on October 1. She praised Business and Finance Director Mary Will for her enrollment projections. This year, enrollment was projected to be 2,990; actual enrollment is 3,004. Kindergarten enrollment is over projection by 14, with the 11 additional students spread over Grades 1–8. As previously reported, some grades at the elementary level have classrooms over guideline by one or two students.

Superintendent Wilson reported that non-resident staff requests for placement were honored after all resident children were placed and that children of staff were all placed in classrooms that were under the size guideline: 5 Kindergarten placements were made on June 15 and 7 placements in Grades 1–8 were made on June 26.

Rich Robison noted that providing the opportunity for the staff to have its children attend SPS is in keeping with a desire to recruit and retain highly qualified teachers who will make a long-term commitment to Sudbury. This opportunity, which dates back to 1990, is viewed as a way to enhance the “quality of life” for teachers.

8. School Committee Report

Rich Robison introduced John Foskett, an attorney with Deutsch Williams, the firm the District utilizes in personnel matters. Chairman Robison then read the following statement:

At the outset, let me state that the School Committee understands the public’s interest in knowing all of the facts involving this incident and its frustration that there has not been a full airing of all of those facts. We share that frustration, especially now that specific information about specific students has wrongly and selectively been put into the public domain. As our lawyers have advised us, however, we cannot become involved in a discussion about this matter which injects private student information into this debate. Federal and state laws regarding student records and state privacy laws prevent us from responding in this way. While we deeply regret that others may not feel themselves bound by those laws or those standards, we as a school district are and will comply with the law. We are very disappointed that a former employee would disclose the identity of a student. We cannot by law discuss these materials as such a discussion would violate the privacy of young students. In addition, there has been a selective release of information that is incomplete. Therefore, we ask that you understand when we do not respond to questions about that information or become involved in a discussion about it.

Second, there is a difference between the DCF “51A” process and a school district’s enforcement of its rules against corporal punishment. By law all mandated reporters, which include teachers and administrators in a school district, must report conduct which they reasonably suspect may be abuse to DCF. DCF then reviews the report and may screen it out for any number of reasons. These reasons can include a lack of jurisdiction, a conclusion that the conduct is not likely to be repeated, or a conclusion that the matter is being taken care of.

The Sudbury Schools have a policy that corporal punishment will not be tolerated. This policy complies with state law prohibiting corporal punishment of students. Corporal punishment includes many types of conduct such as pulling, pushing, pinching, squeezing, slapping, hitting, and spanking. Whether DCF screens out a report is, therefore a different issue from whether the school district concludes that its policy has been violated. For the reasons I’ve already stated, we are prevented by law from disclosing any facts about the specific incident here. We are satisfied that no one involved in this matter on the school district side made this decision lightly or without giving it deep consideration. But when an incident occurs which violates an important school district policy, we cannot only enforce it against some and not against others.

Third, School administrators take reports of corporal punishment or other misconduct by employees very seriously and respond by taking appropriate immediate action including investigating the conduct. If a teacher with professional teacher status believes that she is being separated from employment without just cause, she has the right to take the matter to arbitration. Any employee who has professional teacher status will receive Union representation, including representation by a Massachusetts Teachers Association lawyer. An employee may make a choice to have had an impartial arbitrator hear the case and decide it. Or an employee may voluntarily choose not to take that option. While we cannot and will not get into a discussion of the specifics, again for the reasons I’ve stated, rest

assured that the information which has made its way to the public is not all of the information which is used in making a serious decision such as this. The partial information which has been disclosed suggests that a teacher, a principal, the Superintendent, the School Committee and the Union all got this wrong. We will leave it to residents' common sense to decide whether that is plausible.

Finally, I would ask the public to consider what it would be like if the Administration did not promptly respond to reports of misconduct, or perhaps that a child was seriously injured by a staff member and it later came to light that concerns had been previously reported and ignored. I can only ask you to believe that when a responsible staff member reports something that rises to the level of being reportable to the authorities, it must be responded to immediately and with all due course. That is what our Administration has done and we support these actions. We are committed first and foremost to protecting our students, and our valuable employees who are working hard to teach them.

9. Open Forum

Robert Stein, Thompson Drive, is speaking as a resident, not as a member of the Finance Committee. Mr. Stein congratulated the Committee and staff on finalizing the teacher contract. He asked about the March 1 deadline for out-of-district students to be considered for enrollment, absent extenuating circumstances. Mr. Stein asked if there were extenuating circumstances or favoritism in approving a request made in June, or if any requests received after March 1 were denied. Mr. Stein cited the \$15K per pupil expenditure. Superintendent Wilson reiterated her earlier comments regarding enrollment, emphasizing that all requests were honored without compromising class size.

Bob Mealey asked to speak about his out-of-district enrollment request. He asked all those parents present to think about having to make a decision to remove their child from the only school environment, including friendships, the child has known. Dr. Mealey stated that he has put the children of Sudbury first for 31 years; as a parent he did what was best for his own child. He asked parents to consider if they would want the extenuating circumstances of such a request to be publicized.

Lisa Gutch noted that the per pupil expenditure is \$11K, not \$15K. Rich Robison noted that there is no incremental cost for such enrollments, as the children are placed in existing classrooms.

Rob Freundlich, Saxony Drive, asked what law prevents the School Committee from responding about personnel matters. He commented that published documents indicate that a teacher broke up a fight and that lesson plans had been provided to Principal Doyle; although, the Administration had reported that there was no fight and that lesson plans were not provided. Mr. Freundlich asked how such public falsehoods would be addressed. Mr. Freundlich also stated that a SMART goal for the District would be transparency and propriety.

Attorney Foskett provided several references, including those to FERPA, student records, personnel issues, and general statutes regarding public records and open meetings.

Paul Hogan, Blueberry Hill Lane, understands we are not going to undo what happened to Mrs. Donahue, but is concerned for other teachers and the haste of this decision. He reiterated the facts of the case, emphasizing that a decision was made within 48 hours to dismiss a teacher who worked within the district for more than 30 years. He wonders when Mrs. Donahue was able to make her statement on what happened on May 4. Mr. Hogan assumes Mrs. Donahue understood the formal process, but asked the Administration and Committee to consider what it must be like to receive a letter of intent to dismiss.

Rich Robison finds it disturbing that the focus has shifted from the students and their wellbeing. Mr. Hogan countered that with five children, his focus *is* on the wellbeing of the students. He remarked that the statement of the reporting teacher was rebutted and that the six students interviewed made statements that were ambiguous.

Lisa Gutch recognized the frustration and expressed that it is frustrating for the Committee to not be in a position to convince anyone of the truth.

Jeff Phillips, Hudson Road, remarked that it is clear that the wagons have circled with a plausible story on why the Committee can't talk. He asked about the future in light of having removed a teacher in a two-day decision, which looks like cowardice to him. He mentioned the pending lawsuit of former Executive Assistant Diane Lachapelle, the traumatized students at Noyes beyond Room 15, and the embarrassment to the Town. Mr. Phillips said he's heard rumors and that over the years, things will go downhill and teachers will leave. Mr. Phillips was asked to refrain from further comment after making disparaging remarks about the Administration. Chairman Robison then closed the Open Forum.

10. Superintendent's Report

(a) Opening Day Report

Superintendent Wilson remarked that the first day of school didn't seem like a first day. She observed engaged and comfortable students, asking and responding to questions. She and Assistant Superintendent Curtis attended the Boo-Hoo Breakfast at Noyes, where parents of kindergarteners discuss how it feels to let their children go. Dr. Wilson noted that there were no tears in the kindergarten classrooms. Dr. Curtis added that all buses ran on time and there was no apparent anxiety.

(b) Recognitions

The District welcomed 27 new teachers and 3,004 students. Dr. Wilson recognized a number of staff who reached milestones with the District:

49 years: Florence Aldrich-Bennett (Noyes); 40 years: Ronald Fullen (Curtis); 30 years: Steven Donaldson (Noyes); 20 years: Joanne Bennett (Curtis), Marilyn Holmes (Central), Jan Love (Haynes), Shawn Maguire (Loring); 10 years: Richard Gross (crossing guard), Joe Kupczewski (Facilities); PTS: Nicolai Adamsky, Erin Bearfield, Carrie Kenney, Dianne McCarthy (Curtis); Michelle Breitenback, Suzanne Friedman, Jeffrey Ilg, Marissa Wyler (Haynes); Anne O'Keefe (Nixon); Lynn Connor, Allison Logue (Noyes); Abigail Pepin, Amy Vera (Loring); Elizabeth Clark (Noyes/Haynes); Jennifer Vlacovsky (District).

Rich Robison asked about the lunch program. Mary Will expressed optimism, noting that the food is excellent and looks great, but that participation is down. She reported that the program is fully staffed as of this week and will prepare an update for the Committee.

(c) Bill Schedule

A Bill Schedule was presented. Lucie St. George explained that the Committee must review and sign off on all payments.

(d) Personnel Actions

As outlined in the Personnel Packet. Superintendent Wilson stated that the search for a second math coach is ongoing. The District seeks a professional who is a good relationship builder with deep content knowledge.

The Committee discussed the usual turnover, which is generally 10%. Bob Mealey indicated that it seems more pronounced this year because the turnover is largely at one school (Curtis) instead of over several. Assistant Superintendent Curtis noted how excited the new teachers are. He said that the orientation day was altered to give a half day with mentors in the classrooms. The mentor program will be the subject of a future agenda.

11. Minutes

VOTED: On a motion by Bob Armour, seconded by Lucie St. George, to approve the minutes of the June 6, 2012 Regular Session. The vote was 5-0 in favor.

12. Members' Forum

Bob Mealey is looking forward to finalizing the ESPA and custodian contracts next week. Rich Robison asked him to convey the Committee's appreciation.

Todd Curtis reported that the first full PD day is one month away.

Bob Mealey expressed appreciation that the PD agenda is being communicated to the staff, stating that it makes for a better day, with enhanced buy-in from the staff.

Ellen Joachim is distressed that kids' names or details that identify them have appeared online. She is disappointed to see people acting as they are and reiterated the School Committee's commitment to its focus on children. She hopes that the tenor of debate will change and that kids will never be brought into such debate.

Lisa Gutch opined that it is important for the School Committee to support the Superintendent when she makes important decisions that support the safety and education of the District's children. She remarked that it takes a lot of courage to do what the Superintendent and Principal did. She suggested that in the absence of the Committee's support, it would be a very long time before prospective qualified Superintendent candidates would look at the District. That, she argued, will affect our kids, the staff, the Town, and ultimately our property values. Ms. Gutch hopes that less time in Open Forum will be spent on this personnel matter .

Anne Wilson recognized the great things happening in the District and expressed pride in serving it.

Bob Armour expressed appreciation for the way people are standing up for the schools and what's right for the kids. He thought the dynamics were quite good and that we should build on that. Mr. Armour also reported that Gerald Quirk will be the LS liaison to the Committee.

Lucie St. George commented that there has to be some trust that the Committee is doing the best it can for the children, always trying hard to be fair and do the right thing. Disparaging remarks make it difficult, but she has faith that the community will move forward. She hopes for the sake of the children that we'll focus on the positive.

13. 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 negotiations with non-Union personnel, as discussion in Open Meeting may have a detrimental effect on the bargaining position of the School Committee, not to return to Open Session. The vote was 5-0 in favor. The time was 10:15 p.m.

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

Submitted by Sheila Cusolito