

Sudbury Public Schools
Sudbury, Massachusetts
School Committee Regular Meeting
Wednesday, January 23, 2008

Present: Susan Iuliano, Chairperson, Jane Santinelli, Vice Chairperson
Members: Rich Robison, Jeff Beeler, Bill Braun
Also Present: Dr. John Brackett, Superintendent, Robert Milley, Assistant Superintendent, Debbie Dixson, SPED Administrator, Mary Will, Director of Business & Finance, David Jurewicz, SEA
Susan Iuliano called the meeting to order at 7:35 p.m. in the cafeteria at Nixon Elementary School.

1. Open Forum I
No comments.

SCHOOL COMMITTEE REPORT

2. Bill Schedule
A bill schedule was presented.

SUPERINTENDENT'S REPORT

3. Nixon PTO Welcome
Laura Semple Walsh, PTO Co-president welcomed the Committee and provided an overview of PTO initiatives. Goals for this year were based in part on parent input and feature fewer fundraisers (direct appeal and a dinner auction), a school-wide commitment to a single community service project (Sudbury Food Pantry), and a commitment to paperless communications. Accomplishments to date this year include the purchase of four ActivBoards for use in Grade 5, hand sanitizers for all classrooms, a new dining room PA system, and DVD players and digital cameras for each grade level. Michelle Babikian, PTO Co-president, was introduced.

4. Nixon - State of the School Report
Nixon Principal, Joni Jay, introduced members of the School Advisory Council: Amy Batts (Grade 1 teacher), Beth Shilalie (Grade 4 teacher), Jamie Vandervelden (Parent). She provided an overview of the School Improvement Plan and feedback on ILAP. A primary goal is enhanced instructional consistency and equity in time across each grade level. The school has continued its focus on differentiated math instruction and guided reading, is implementing the new TERC Investigations Program, and is piloting the Lucy Calkins Writing Program. Beth Shilalie provided specific examples related to the math curriculum, including a new pilot project, M3 Math, funded by SERF and the PTO.

A significant area of concern is the absence of a math specialist at Nixon similar to the Title One specialist at district's Title One schools. Increased assistance from the district

Language Arts coordinator for training and for developing comprehensive skills/strategy lists for each grade level was also noted as a need.

The principal called ILAP a wonderful concept that has increased cross-sharing and diminished duplication of effort. The combination of 'big picture' and follow-up training sessions was also noted as positive. Of some concern is the number of district initiatives, which sometimes create logistical challenges for simultaneous work on school goals, and the need for more guidance from district coordinators.

The principal reported fewer injuries and behavioral issues coincident with increasing staff recess monitors. She also reported enhanced communication efforts with families and that her entry study indicates that the staff is more comfortable now than initially with district curriculum expectations.

VOTED: On a motion by Rich Robison and seconded by Jeff Beeler, to approve the Nixon School Improvement Plan. The vote was 5-0 in favor.

5. SPED Scheduling

Deborah Dixson, SPED Administrator, described the process of transitioning fifth-grade students to appropriate placements at Curtis. Kathryn Codianne, Curtis Principal, outlined the range of program categories represented at the middle school. She noted that student need is the primary driver for Team placements. All Teams accommodate either SPED, ELL, or 504 students in some combination, depending on grade. Some time ago, there was a perception by both students and the community-at-large of Team inequity, despite the reality of SPED student placement across all teams. That concern was expressed again this year by the parent of a current sixth-grader: the assignment of an additional SPED teacher to a particular Team left the impression of a significant imbalance in the number of SPED students assigned to that Team, which is not supported by the data presented.

Jeff Beeler asked who would make a decision to run a duplicative program if necessary to better balance the student distribution. Deborah Dixson responded that it would be a collaborative decision. The principal noted that in hiring, they look for cross-skilled special educators, who can change focus to meet fluctuating needs. Superintendent Brackett added that district-level considerations would also play a role.

Rich Robison inquired about team teaching, which was used successfully, but on a limited basis, a few years ago. The principal stated that personnel changes disrupted the particular Team involved and revealed a lack of an adequate model for such an approach. That said, in math, all but three students receive regular ed. classroom instruction with support.

6. FY08 Budget Report and Projection Not discussed. Report and Projection enclosed.

7. FY09 Budget Update

Superintendent John Brackett outlined the Governor's proposed budget and its impact on Chapter 70. Both the K-8 and LS numbers exceed projections; however, funding through established lottery practices is down and offset by revenue from not-yet-

approved casino initiatives. He stated that the Governor's budget probably would not change any of the Town's budget projections.

Jane Santinelli and Bill Braun reported from the Budget Working Group the need to discuss healthcare benefits in Executive Session. A meeting is scheduled for February 13 at 7:30.

They asked the Committee to advise them on two issues proposed by the Finance Committee designed to control salary and benefit costs:

1. Adjust downward the override figure or present a two-tiered override.
2. Impose an agreed-upon cap on the rate of rise of expenses. The Committee believes the proposed budget override number, derived in keeping with its mission, is already the minimum that is acceptable that will not lead to a loss of services. The Committee furthermore considers a two-tiered approach to be ill-advised; historically the lower number is approved, leading to a negative impact on programming. It was also noted that establishing an arbitrary cap, on the rate of rise of expenses, would bind future committees and is too intimately tied to contract negotiations to make it a legitimate option.

Susan Iuliano asked Rich Robison if he would join Jeff Beeler on the Budget Review Task Force when Bill Braun steps down. Rich Robison agreed.

Jeff Beeler reported on the extremely negative content on the Town-Online forum and wondered if this might serve as a starting point for a FAQ section to the district website. All agreed that any mechanism for disseminating information is good. The Committee did not create an action plan to establish the FAQ.

8. Open Forum II

Jamie Vandervelden, Camperdown Lane, inquired about limits on individual and PTO contributions in the event of budget cuts. Susan Iuliano responded that the policy is not well defined and is under revision. Bill Braun cautioned that sustainability, equity, and the appearance of privatization must be kept in mind.

Beth Winograd, Phillips Road, commented that in her experience in discussing overrides in previous years, her sense from the general public was that there was trust in the School Committee to set an appropriate number and that individuals were less concerned with specific dollar differences.

Jamie Vandervelden, Camperdown Lane, asked why the revenue shortfall is greater than expected. Bill Braun summarized that last year's budget utilized free cash. For this year, the estimate of free cash was higher than is typical and the actual free cash lower than is typical. Additionally, local revenue is down this year.

9. Communications

As outlined in the Communications Packet and additionally by a letter from Governor Deval Patrick acknowledging receipt of a letter from Susan Iuliano seeking his support for the METCO program.

10. Minutes Regular Session, January 9, 2008

VOTED: On a motion by Jeff Beeler, seconded by Rich Robison, to accept the minutes of the January 9, 2008 Regular Session as amended. The vote was 5-0 in favor.

11. Members Forum

No comments.

12. Executive Session

On a motion by Jeff Beeler, seconded by Rich Robison, to adjourn to Executive Session, for purposes of discussing negotiations with non-union personnel, not to return to open session. The vote was 5-0 in favor. The time was 10:40 p.m.

Yes Rich Robison

Yes Bill Braun

Yes Susan Iuliano

Yes Jane Santinelli

Yes Jeff Beeler

Submitted by Sheila Cusolito, Recording Secretary