

Sudbury Public Schools
Sudbury, Massachusetts
School Committee Regular Meeting
Wednesday, September 17, 2008

Present: Susan Iuliano, Chairperson; Jane Santinelli, Vice Chairperson;
Rich Robison, Jeff Beeler, Michele MacDonald

Also Present: Dr. John Brackett, Superintendent; Robert Milley, Assistant
Superintendent; Mary Will, Director of Business and Finance (until 11:10 p.m.); Mary
Mahoney, SEA

1. Open Session

Susan Iuliano called the meeting to order at 7:40 p.m. at the Nixon School.

5. Overnight Trip to New Jersey/New York by Curtis music groups

Orchestra Director Nat Erde outlined the value of the biennial trip and explained the fee waiver and scholarship opportunities, as well as the role of chaperones. He will provide the Committee with more detailed information regarding chaperone training.

VOTED: On a motion by Jane Santinelli, seconded by Jeff Beeler, to approve the biennial Curtis Middle School Music Department trip to New Jersey/New York. The vote was 5-0.

2. Nixon PTO Welcome by Co-chairs Michelle Babikian and Ellen Joachim

The PTO co-chairs gave an overview of their fundraising and service efforts. Participation in both sets of initiatives experienced substantial increases. Additionally, the co-chairs highlighted some of the creative enrichment programs sponsored by the PTO, as well as the investment in eight ActivBoards, which completes Grades 3-5. A primary initiative this year is rejuvenation of the school courtyard.

3. The State of the Nixon School with Principal Joni Jay

Principal Joni Jay noted that the School Improvement Plan is not yet complete. Nixon continues to make progress in curriculum improvements (e.g., writing, math differentiation, guided reading) as well as school culture (e.g., anti-bullying, open circle, recess and bus procedures). The school met the criteria for AYP; however, attention will be given to improving performance of the special education population by way of cross training SPED and classroom teachers and “double-dosing” subject matter with attendance in both SPED and regular education classrooms.

The addition of Eula Walsh as assistant principal, paid on a per-diem basis for approximately 90 days each year, was well received by the school community. Budget constraints that resulted in layoffs and reassignments have had a significant impact; space and funds for classroom supplies continue to be challenges. She noted that student assessments are often done in the hallways and that families are asked to contribute items from a list of classroom supplies. The Committee asked that administrators, perhaps with the help of the PTO, enumerate the space and resource challenges that the school faces and asked for copies of the supply lists sent to families.

4. Bill Schedule

A bill schedule was presented.

6. FY10 Budget Discussion

6.1 Report and follow-up from the BWG and September 15 FinCom meeting

6.2 Questions of FinCom authority for multi-year budget recommendation

6.3 Possible request for joint meeting with the Board of Selectmen

6.4 Other communications with FinCom

Susan Iuliano reported that on September 15, the Finance Committee (FinCom) unanimously voted to recommend to the Selectmen a 4.5% three-year spending cap on the entire budget, including benefits, but furthermore noted that the percentage could change. Jeff Beeler characterized this as a moving, ill-advised target, with insufficient data to support it. He recommended that the School Committee respond in writing to the Selectmen to express its opposition to the FinCom proposal. The Committee is furthermore concerned that the budget-setting process, in particular, the role of the Budget Working Group, is undermined by the FinCom's decision. There was some discussion of partnering with the L-S School Committee on a response, and the Committee agreed to approach the L-S School Committee about submitting a joint letter to the Selectmen..

Susan Iuliano and Jeff Beeler will draft a guest column to submit to the Town Crier that the Committee will review on September 20 at the School Committee/SALT retreat. The Committee also discussed the possibility of televising those meetings where budget discussions will occur.

VOTED: On a motion by Rich Robison, seconded by Michele MacDonald, that the SPS School Committee record its opposition to the Finance Committee's recommendation of a 4.5% cap for the next three years and urge the Board of Selectmen to reject this recommendation. The vote was 5-0.

7. FY09 Enrollment Update and Projection

Superintendent Brackett provided updated FY09 enrollment and class size data, as well as projections and supporting data for FY10-12.

6. Budget Assumptions

Dr. Brackett asked the Committee to advise on which assumptions to include in preparing the SPS FY10 budget. The Committee outlined several budget scenarios, including those that maintain level services with the FY09 cuts, adjusted for enrollment, and those that would restore what was cut in FY09. Generally, the Committee recommended a budget proposal that would allow class sizes be kept at or under the class size guideline numbers.

10. Open Forum

Jamie Vandervelden, Camperdown Lane, advised the Committee to make it clear that their objection to the FinCom's budget cap recommendation is as much to the process as to the percentage cap recommended. She also asked about the budget distribution across the cost centers. Rich Robison and Jane Santinelli provided some history of establishing the distribution.

Lauren Hochberg, Pratts Mill Road, recommended the Committee ask for additional space in the Town Crier if it partners with the L-S School Committee in its response to the FinCom's budget recommendation. She also recommended the phrase "previous level of quality" in place of the term "level services".

Michelle Babikian, Ward Road, noted that the Nixon assistant principal's office is in a closet. Jane Santinelli recommended further discussion of such shortcomings and challenges at an upcoming meeting of the PTO co-chairs and Dr. Brackett.

Asha May, Amanda Road, suggested that in addition to the Committee's efforts, families could also play a role in communicating information about conditions at the individual schools (e.g., space constraints, classroom supply needs). The Committee concurred that both approaches to communication are appropriate. Additionally, Ms. May asked if Town officials communicate with the School Committee regarding prospective real estate developments that might affect the school population. The Committee confirmed that it is kept apprised of real estate activities, but that private transactions are beyond its purview. Jamie Vandervelden, Camperdown Lane, asked if it would be appropriate to comment at curriculum nights on the impact of budget cuts on school function. She also asked if preschool enrollment corresponds to kindergarten enrollment numbers. Superintendent Brackett noted that curriculum nights are designed to welcome and set the tone for the school year and recommended against commenting on the impact of the budget cuts. He also noted that the preschool numbers are not necessarily helpful in predicting kindergarten enrollment.

9. School Committee Report

9.1 Report on the goals and agenda for the September 20th School Committee and SALT retreat

The retreat will be held at the Grange starting at 8:00 a.m. An outline of goals was provided.

11. Superintendent's Report

11.1 Personnel Actions

As described in the Personnel Packet.

12. Minutes – Regular Session September 3, 2008

VOTED: On a motion by Rich Robison, seconded by Jane Santinelli, to approve the minutes of the September 3, 2008 Regular Session as amended. The vote was 5–0 in favor.

13. Communications

As described in the Communications Packet.

14. Members' Forum

Mary Mahoney remarked on the high level of success of the PTO's fundraising initiatives.

Rich Robison asked about the anticipated schedule for a pre-negotiation meeting. Dr. Brackett plans to schedule this in late November/early December at his home.

Susan Iuliano noted the need to plan for televising upcoming meetings and asked if anyone else would like to help draft the open letter. She also noted that L-S students must now pass the science MCAS, but that the 9th-grade technology exam may be substituted. At a recent L-S School Committee meeting, the technology curriculum of the Sudbury and Lincoln K-8 districts was cited as one of the factors supporting the high passing rate on the technology exam, even though many students were not enrolled in the technology program at L-S.

Jeff Beeler suggested that the District consider changing various job titles to make them more accurately descriptive of the actual responsibilities and functions of certain positions. In particular, he suggested that the word "assistant" be removed from any title within the District, as it does not fairly describe the importance of the jobs performed and improperly suggests a budget cutting target for those who are unfamiliar with the system or the importance of these positions. He asked that Members inform him if they take issue with anything he communicates in his role on the PR subcommittee. Additionally, he stated his view that if the public communicates with the Board of Selectmen regarding budget considerations, the BOS will follow the public's lead. Finally, he commented on the September 10 meeting at the Loring School, where Principal Jeff Dees addressed concerns about the school's AYP status. Jeff Beeler characterized the event as "extraordinary" due to the level of parent interest and Mr. Dees' excellent handling of the many difficult questions and issues. Moreover, he reported that it was related at the meeting that many faculty were unaware of the school's AYP status in the previous year and that the parents were similarly unaware of the status before this year. He suggested that going forward the Committee and administration take all reasonable steps to ensure that such information is provided to all stakeholders.

15. Executive Session

None.

Adjourn

On a motion by Jane Santinelli, seconded by Rich Robison, to adjourn the Regular Session. The vote was 5–0.

Yes Susan Iuliano
Yes Jane Santinelli
Yes Rich Robison
Yes Jeff Beeler
Yes Michele MacDonald

Submitted by Sheila Cusolito, Recording Secretary