

## **School Committee Meeting 2006-02-28**

*(notes taken by Josh Lobel to the best of my ability. I apologize for any errors or omissions.)*

### **Summary:**

#### **Public Participation**

on ways to increase psychological health and well being at high school, and increase diversity on the school department's staff.

#### **Report of Traffic and Safety Advisory group**

Coalition of professionals and volunteers from throughout the town are working to collect data on safety issues relating to going to and from our 9 schools. Once the data has been collected, it will be used to help determine the most effective way to spend dollars on crossing guards, traffic improvements, increased plowing, etc. The group will make their preliminary information available to the superintendent who will use it to guide his decision making for next year. It is expected that the group will continue to gather information to further help to improve the safety issues concerning traffic around our schools.

#### **Diversity Report**

The Superintendent indicated that the school department will be working hard to try recruit and retain more minority faculty. There are several ways that they will do this:

- 1) increased outreach
- 2) moving process forward in year – trying to do 80% of the hiring in the April-June timeframe. This reduces the pressure on simply making sure there is a teacher in the classroom in the fall
- 3) putting a process in place to help identify minority applicants and be diligent about making sure that they have every opportunity to present themselves to the district

#### **Merit Pay Goal #4 for Superintendent – Core vs. Non-Core instruction**

For this goal, the supt was asked to submit information about the curriculum, and how it relates to needs of a 21<sup>st</sup> century citizen. Nate said that in order to produce a roadmap, it was important to him to gather information about the starting point. The result was a large amount of data presented to the school committee about the present offerings of the

district. I believe it was broken down and analyzed by student minutes – the # of minutes in core academics vs. non core. This was data without a story. It is of a preliminary nature – no analysis has been done yet. The committee appreciated the efforts of the Superintendent, and awarded him full points for his efforts.

## **Superintendents Report**

**Hardy principal search** – Paul Schlichtman is school comm. Rep. Interviews were conducted on Feb 28<sup>th</sup> and March 1<sup>st</sup>. Process is moving forward.

**School calendar changes** –

- a discussion of moving 2007 graduation from Sunday to Saturday. Mr. Skidmore felt that this would make more sense since Last Blast is evening of graduation, and rather than have faculty and students exhausted for Monday, having graduation on Saturday would give them Sunday to recover. Marty Thrope objects to change based on effect on Jewish students who may not be able to participate on a Saturday.
- Next year there will be 5 early-release days for Professional Development

### **Thompson and Stratton**

Will be looking at capital funding for improvements at Stratton and Thompson, since rebuild is likely to be not in near future

### **Mental Health Task Force**

The group has a broad charge, and will not have any immediate suggestions. However, Nate will be making recommendations in the near future

## **Community Relations Sub Committee**

Group has made suggestions about creating a Stadium Naming Committee. It would have representatives from throughout the community and school system. It would not be created until after construction is completed, and all accounting has been completed. Since there could be legal disputes about who is responsible for overruns, this could take a very long time. Because of this, the School Committee agreed to accept report, but basically, this issue is on hold.

## **Secretary's Report**

Suzanne reported on several pieces of interesting correspondence, including highlighting two AHS students who have been recognized in our community, Shalaya West wrote and recited a poem at Mayor Menino's inauguration in January. Erin Campbell was named all-scholastic field hockey player by the Boston Herald - she was also lead the Greater Boston League in scoring.

The Ottoson Select Chorus was selected by a statewide body, based on anonymous audition tapes, to perform at their conference. Kudos to group and Ms. Cristo, their director.

## **New Business**

The School Committed voted to agree to a motion that has been passed in several other communities urging the legislature to increase Chapter 70 aid to local communities. The increases they are proposing could mean 6 to 9 million more dollars per year, which would bring us more on par with where we had been before the budget crunch in 2003.

## **Detailed Notes**

### ***Public participation***

- Sharon Grossman on dealing with the grief at the high school. Sharon advocated for more trained professional staff at the high school to deal with issues of psychological health and well being.
- Judi Paradis on diversity and minority hiring. She spoke on behalf of a coalition of groups who are advocating for diversity, anti-racism and acceptance in Arlington. Groups include Arlington Human Rights Coalition, Arlington African American Society, SPOT, Vision 20/20 Diversity task force, and Martin Luther King Jr Birthday Observance Committee. Presented a resolution which stated that in order to be successful members of 21<sup>st</sup> century society, our students must accept and embrace diversity. In order to achieve this end, the faculty should reflect the diversity of our society. The school committee and administration should strive to meet this goal through outreach, professional development, mentoring and other programs to support a diverse faculty and student body.
- Nora Mann on helping with high school tragedy. In addition to supporting what Sharon and Judi advocated, Nora added that we must create an ethos of caring. We must look to help those who are struggling with the challenges of life and school. We must look to the sources of what is creating these stresses and try to address them.

### ***Traffic and Safety Advisory group report***

Teresa Benedict  
Fred Ryan  
Steve Smith  
Ed Starr

Presentation about how they did their study. Factors involved:  
Traffic conditions  
Pedestrian counts  
Difficult spots – solar glare, site distance to schools  
Satellite dropoff

Sean wants to be sure that we are looking at all factors, talking with parents and crossing guards before any changes are made.

Sue says that communication is critical. Will be sure to involve affected groups.

Marty appreciates expertise that has assembled for this purpose.

Site lines are important. Critical to look at safety needs rather than just drive it by budget. If we are looking at cost first, then have it backwards – need to look at needs first. Ultimately what affects outcome may be luck. Even with a great staff. We have been lucky.

Marty asked committee to comment on risks

Chief Ryan says that in an ideal world, there would not be budget constraints. Their plan is to put together information that can be presented objectively to implement a deployment strategy. It could be used to reduce positions or to add positions.

Steve Smith commenting that Marty's point on site lines is well taken.

Suzanne. Are there things we can do to educate the public. Where we park our cars when we drop children off. The routes we take, etc. all have an impact on traffic safety. She has children at Ottoson and Stratton. Are there steps that we can take to educate parents on these issues.

Sue. On Ottoson particularly, there is a strong initiative for a proposed drop off up by park circle. There is a good walking route from there back to the school – about ½ mile.

At elementary schools, there is the safe routes to school initiative, which is also has health benefit.

Susan Lovelace has a 4<sup>th</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> grader. She never received guidance on safe route to drop off children. That would be a good education initiative. Often the parents are crossing at the wrong intersections. They are modeling wrong behavior. Specific information provided to parents would be very useful.

Ed Starr. It would be interesting if there were plans for safe walking routes to schools. If those were provided, there could be traffic calming measures, etc. to address those routes. In addition, public works could make sure streets are plowed, etc. That would increase safety.

Nate asks, when you looked at ranking, did we look at proximity. If some kids approach from the east and others from the west, and they cross a block apart, that makes needs for crossing guards more challenging. If we can map out the routes, then we can be more efficient.

Chief Ryan concurs. Dave McKenna is invaluable in this regard for his institutional memory.

Jeff. Thanks to Sue Sheffler for initiating all of this. Appreciates that she brought many professionals throughout town to address the problem. Motion will be to direct Superintendent to deploy guards based on their report. Exactly what are the details for the report. Is it a reduction in guards in the afternoon? Number of hours?

Chief Ryan, not making recommendations. Providing input as to how things are structured now, and how they might be restructured.

Sean, had concerns that task force was set up to reduce # of crossing guards. Glad that that is not their mission.

Paul. Spot check by volunteers was part of the report. Some reports that some guards were not in place at the appropriate time. If we think in terms of a budget, are there any opportunities to combine jobs – e.g. combine parking enforcement with crossing guard duties.

Chief Ryan – that has been done to backfill. We have not done it as replacements. Would present some operational problems. But could explore.

Marty. Has group addressed “compliance” issue, for instance with middle schoolers. They will often cross where there is not adult in sight.

Chief Ryan. We’ve talked about, but not done sophisticated analysis. There have been some issues, that are discipline issues that principal has dealt with.

As re-assess our deployment plan, one issue is that more and more parents are driving, so that problems that used to be further from the schools are now more critical closer to the schools because of dropoff load.

Sue Sheffler – motion – that the superintendent will review the data of the task force when creating 2007 budget.

Motion – that the school committee approves the prioritization methodology of the task force. The task force will present their findings by March 3<sup>rd</sup>. The school committee will review the info at a hearing on March 14<sup>th</sup>. Ultimately, it will be part of a vote on the budget at the March 28 meeting.

Marty, what are we asking here?

Sue, asking that the school committee approve the methodology of the task force.

Marty takes issue with verbiage.

Sue. We have data collected by volunteers. It is not perfect, will be approved upon. We are proposing that in order to assist the supt in creating his budget, the task force will present him with a list of crossing guard locations with evaluations based on the data they have collected.

Marty – to apply this methodology to rank order current and proposed crossing guard locations based on the data collected. It is not a complete analysis of all intersections in town. Sue – no, not exhaustive. Some hotspots have been added.

Ed Starr – who is being tasked with this report. March 3<sup>rd</sup> is not a reasonable date to provide this feedback.

Sue acknowledges that the data they have is not be all and end all. She would like to put methodology in place to begin the process. As the budget process unfolds, changes can be made.

This provides a way for us to move forward as we get better data.

Ed – if the budget is created on march 14<sup>th</sup>, is it cast in stone.

Jeff, no – not hardened, but it does become more difficult to change.

Jeff – how much time do you need.

Ed, I'm not on the committee.

Scott, we could come up with a list very quickly, b but it would not be complete. For instance, it would not include sight lines at all of these locations. There a significant amount of field work to be done. Probably a month or so to gather the data.

Nate, rather than working down from a very detailed amount of info, he's working up from a baseline of basically nothing.

He would find it helpful if they did 2 things:

By 9<sup>th</sup> or 10<sup>th</sup> of March, take a first pass just based on data we have. Nate will recognize it is not final.

By next 30 days, supplement report with more data.

Whatever is done is way ahead of where we are today.

Ammend to March 9<sup>th</sup> for a preliminary draft, April 11<sup>th</sup> for a more final version. Group says will accept as a goal which they will try to meet.

Marty, if this is how we're going to do this, it must be crystal clear that the initial report is preliminary. Don't want to short circuit process by making decision based on too limited data.

Motion, as amended, carried.

Ed suggesting that it would be important to continue this process after the data is delivered. Additional work on safe routes, education, etc. could be very valuable.

Might migrate to a pilot such as at the Hardy.

Sue, thanks again to the group for gathering together to work on this issue.

### ***Diversity Task force report***

Nate: we discussed this in the past. What had happened in prior years.

He met with supt's task force on minority hiring. It was an excellent meeting with some things eliminated, some added, a good spirit of collaboration. A good outcome and a great process.

The highlights:

Serious commitment to recruiting and retaining a diverse workforce. This should not be glossed over – there is more commitment to diversity than there may be candidates. Nate and Hutch and principals will be going to minority recruitment job fairs.

Significant outreach to historically black colleges. Advertising in newspapers that serve more diverse readership. Outreach to churches, etc. Will try to go find minority candidates.

Will be starting the process earlier – in March/April/May timeframe. Hopefully this will bring in more candidates who are available – before they've made other commitments.

Historically there have been very few applicants. Outreach should help that.

Once they do apply, within constraints of proper hiring procedures, will try to work to convert applicants to hires.

The minimum bar is that the applicants must either be certified, or may be in a position of certification pending. They treat that pending certification as equivalent to certification, if they complete before starting work.

Make sure that applicants can present themselves in the best possible setting.

Either Hutch or Nate will monitor this process throughout the system. Make sure that the policies and goals for this are followed.

This does represent a significant expansion of their efforts. They have already put it in place for the Hardy principal and CFO job.

Marty. Critical piece is timing – pleased making these efforts in the spring rather than the summer. How will you deal with uncertain openings in the fall in March?

Nate. Certain things we do know – people who are moving, people who are retiring, need for new classrooms because of growth. We will not hire for jobs that we do not have. However, there are many of these positions that we do know.

Hope to have 80% of hiring done during early part of season. Of course, there will be unforeseen departures.

Sean. Appreciates work of committee and leadership by Nate to make this commitment.

Nate. Doesn't believe that the culture doesn't support the initiatives. Thinks it's the structure of how it has been done in the past. Starting early should contribute to more success. There is not a lot of resistance to this approach. If we wait until August, then the priority is getting a qualified person in the classroom. If we have the structure that supports this effort, there will be open arms.

Suzanne. Does the additional advertising cost more. Nate says not significant.

Nate. When people apply, minorities can self identify. Majority probably do not. They can try to make some assessments if they are potentially minority candidates. They will help put into place a process for resume gathering and analysis to try to identify candidates.

Suzanne. If we are hiring in a school, principal's make the decision.

Nate. True. However all resumes come through central office and will be processed first there.

Susan. The diversity is racial and ethnic, primarily? As opposed to gender or sexual preference?

Nate. Harder to identify.

Suzanne. Do we interview all candidates based on same criteria? E.g. certification pending.

Nate. Yes, if we like other things about them, yes.

EJ How much weight are we giving minority applicants.

Nate. Unlike crossing guards, there is not a mathematical formula here. The requirements to teach in the Arlington schools are high, and will remain high.

Marty. Intent of this effort is to enrich the pool, not to water down the pool. We are trying to bring people into this process that wouldn't have been here otherwise.

Motion to support superintendent in his efforts.

Marty requests that SPOT resolution be put on future agenda. It will be on March 14<sup>th</sup> agenda.

## ***Merit Pay Review – Goal 4 measure 2***

Nate. Goal number 4 is what do kids need to do to be successful in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Equally important to know we are today as well as where we want to go. When looked for this starting point information, couldn't find it. So tried to gather information, without judgment, about what is going on in district now. In terms of time and money, which may represent de facto priorities. It has been a massive amount of data collection.

For instance, student minutes. If a course is a full year course vs. half/year course, does the full year course represent a bigger commitment. What about if 10 kids take full year course, but 100 take ½ year course. Tried to reduce this to student minutes to keep things on same terms.

Susan how much of our struggle with determining what we teach based on limits of time available?

Nate. In discussions with elementary principals, they feel that they can address 95% of requirements based on different approaches to scheduling. Need to schedule based on priorities. Need to also review what we do. Some programs have grown up over time without coordination. In some cases, new programs came in with grants. Some have been added, over time, like great body shop, open circle, phys ed and health. Maybe don't need all of these programs. Perhaps they can be combined for greater efficiency.

One of the places that many things will come together is around social studies. It is one area that may get pulled when there are time constraints. Some activity in social studies may be reading books about colonialists. Perhaps from 9-10 non-social studies class might have been reading a book about friends. Maybe from 10-11 they were supposed to be reading about colonial life. Run out of time, and that gets skipped. Maybe combine two subjects by reading books about colonial friends. There are ways to combine things to make learning more integrated and more efficient.

Marty. One idea to group performing arts and visual arts. Perhaps this will combine to create efficiency.

Also, question about data. Seems to be more remedial studies in samples of 9<sup>th</sup> grade schedules.

Nate, this is probably because there is more effort at remediation in 9<sup>th</sup> grade when jumping up from 8<sup>th</sup> grade to high school.

Marty. The elementary scheduling grids show how difficult it is to fit everything in. Appreciates that we are looking at this in new ways.

Hopes that when we get to defining what it is that we need for the 21<sup>st</sup> century, that we need broad, well-rounded individuals, not just technocrats.

EJ. Questions what we consider core? It would appear that Nate's understanding of core is that which is taught by a teacher in key academic subjects taught by a teacher would be considered core. EJ would argue that things like psychology or Vietnam would not be core.

EJ's understanding of core would be that which is required.

Nate differs – core is core academic study – English, math, science, social studies, and foreign language.

EJ – if there isn't analysis here of data, doesn't understand why we are looking at this yet.

Nate. Not sure, but I am most comfortable with gathering info that relates to starting point. Then I can formulate a plan to move to end point.

Jeff. Will this analysis impact budget?

Nate. Probably not yet. This is a conscious decision that this is a multiyear goal. There will be a lot of discussion and debate about this. It must be a process that is very inclusive. This is first group that has seen this data. We are not revamping program for next fall.

However, in elementary level, there are no financial implications as to when you have math. But there are other educational and professional development impacts, and we would expect changes for the fall.

### **Superintendent Merit Goal 4, measure 1. total points available is 4 points**

Produce a list of core offerings and time commitments.

Motion made to allocate 4 points.

Marty. Supports motion, but agrees with EJ that more focus needs to be made as to what is “core”?

Susan. Isn't that the intent of this process? To talk about these issues?

Marty. Yes, but this data presents things like Psychology as core, because it is taught by a history teacher. Is that truly core? Doesn't want to make judgment, but wants to be sure that question is asked.

Susan. Wants to make sure that the discussion focuses what we feel for Arlington is “core”.

Sue. Goal was to provide a list of core/non-core activity in the school. Feels that data was provided, as well as backup information which was more than was asked. This is an excellent start to have the overall picture. I appreciate it.

Susan. The DOE web site does define terms as “core”. That is accepted terminology, and assume that is what Supt was using for his analysis.

Sean. I have taken many of these courses. This is a starting point.

Paul. In terms of methodology, what I would like to see is this. In terms of core/non-core grades 9-12, I would like to see it as a % of school day as opposed to student minutes. For instance, to see what % of school day is directed study. Take number of students, multiply by number of minutes in school day, than can allocate what % of school day students spend doing each thing.

Nate. I think we did that more or less. Could easily add numbers based on Paul's suggestion.

Motion. Award 4 points for creating a listing of all non-core time the students spend, and time impact on core curriculum.

Passed unanimously.

Superintendent now has 11 points out of 100 possible for merit bonus.

## **Superintendent's report**

### ***Search for Hardy School principal.***

Paul has agreed to volunteer for the Hardy Principal Search Task force.  
Motion has approved his membership.

They looked at 3 candidates today, then will be interviewing candidates from 4-10 tomorrow.

### ***Nate asked Charlie to come to explain calendar change for Graduation***

The proposal is to move graduation to Saturday for class of 2007 – not this year – next year.

Charlie Skidmore

Reasons. 1) last blast follows graduation, so if it is Sunday, then many teachers ask for Monday off to recover from last blast. Hard to give 10-12 teachers the day off.

2) Same issue applies to students. Many of them are very fatigued the day after, and doesn't make sense to have them in school or visiting colleges the next day.

3) informal survey of people showed support for a change like this.

Sean. How has the reaction been from the AHS staff who organize the graduation or last blast.

Charlie. Most feedback has been positive.

Marty. Won't repeat all of his comments from last meeting, but has strong reservations about this based on conflict with Sabbath celebrations for Jewish students.

Suzanne. How many days in between this and last day of class. Could we have community members chaperone instead of staff?

Charlie. We do have parents. But they are not parents of the graduating seniors. They don't know the kids. The staff does. My issue is school the next day, jobs the next day. That is main consideration, for all of the 9-11 grade students.

### ***Calendar for early releases for next year***

Nate suggests incorporating up to 5 early release days for next year.

It is very helpful to have this extra time – especially as we try to do cross-district meetings which involve some travel.

Sue. Thinks this is very important. We are trying to put a strong priority on professional development.

Sean. Wants to make sure we're not over stretching staff.

Nate. Will do.

Paul. As we progress through early release days, please try to inform the parents about what we are doing and why. Communication is very important. Also, try to do as much as possible early in the school year.

### ***Supplemental Capital Expense expenditure for Thompson and Stratton***

There are additional funds being allocated since these schools will not be rebuilt in the near future.

### ***Task force on Mental Health and student well being***

This group will not have recommendations in time for the budget. It is a group with a very broad focus, who needs to spend time to gather their information. Nate cannot speak for them. He will be making his own recommendation on mental health suggestions for the short term.

Marty. The SADD presentation this morning was very powerful.

Thompson and Stratton are running on fumes – we have gotten our money out of them. I think we need to make sure we strategize about ways that we can get them rebuilt.

Glad that supt had meeting with English teachers about exactly what the proposal is. Better to work on an actual understanding of what is being suggested rather than imaginings of the teachers of what might be. That was important that that took place.

Sue. Important to think about the buildings at Thompson and Stratton. However, also important to look at the many excellent things that are happening there.

Sean. I have attended Stratton and Thompson pto meetings, and appreciate the commitment of the parents there. But we do need to find a way to build these schools.

Did we get a list of technology deployment across the district to look at equity.

Nate. Steve Mazzola is working on this. However, question is not exact equity. Question is what we would want to provide to create a level of educational equity. We put projectors in all of the classrooms at Dallin, but we wouldn't necessarily do exactly the same at the other schools. We want to spend the \$ on things that will be used effectively.

## ***Consent Agenda (10pm)***

Moved consent agenda

### ***Community Relations Report***

They were charged with creating a Stadium Naming committee. The community relations subcommittee recommends that their process be adopted when the stadium is completed, and all cost overruns resolved.

Summary of process for stadium dedication committee

14 members

Reps from athletic groups

Athletes

Town memorial committee

Coaches

School committee member

They have created an application process for members. Guidelines for choosing members. Rules for posting meetings, minutes, etc. Not done until stadium is completed.

Marty. Good process. Don't leave out option of No Name. That was what was done for many years, and should be duly considered.

Paul. When will everything be complete?

Jeff. Nate?

Nate. 3 months to 10 years. Based on if any litigation for cost overruns.

Paul. That said, any action on this could be put in the class of binding a future school committee. I would suggest we simply accept the report.

Suzanne. Looking at wording. The committee shall seek input from those in town who have used fields in the past as athletes and coaches. There are other things on that field as well, e.g. graduation. I think academics should be included as well. I think it is too strongly tilted towards athletes.

Susan. How about, the committee shall seek input from all parties in the community who have used the field.

Motion is to receive report. Unanimously accepted.

## ***Curriculum Assessment and Curriculum***

Nothing at this time – post budget.

## ***Policies and procedures***

Marty – 4 items for first reading.

Some issues regarding school nursing conversations. Public right to know regarding posting minutes on the web. Another on dealing with superintendent contract. Without seeing paper, don't know what they are discussing.

## ***Secretary's Report***

Suzanne. AHS yearbook is solely funded by sales and ads. Anyone in the community can help fund by placing an ad. Contact Nancy Ortwein at AHS. School Committee agreed to buy an ad.

AHS Gilbert and Sullivan club performance 2<sup>nd</sup> week in April. Ad opportunities for program as well.

Newsletter from elementary ACE was received, and very interesting.

Note from Pat Tassone that Ottoson select chorus, under direction of Cheryl Cristo, has been selected to make a presentation before the statewide school group – a great honor.

Brainbee coming up.

23<sup>rd</sup> anniversary today of SADD chapter at high school

AHS Ponders report. The AHS newspaper. Some interesting things in recent issues – Shalaya West wrote and recited a poem at Mayor Menino's inauguration in January. She also has a radio program on GRLZ radio 540 am, on Tuesday nights from 4 - 6:30 pm. GRLZ was founded by teenagers who wanted a change in the use of degrading song lyrics and in the rise of violence in Boston

Erin Campbell was named all-scholastic field hockey player by the Boston Herald - she was also lead the Greater Boston League in scoring.

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## ***New business***

Petition by many different school committees around state to request more state aid chapter 70 contribution 2,000/pupil. This came out of Acton, and have requested to have Arlington sign on.

Paul has circulated information about current and past chapter 70 contributions. The impact of this change might be an additional 6 million next year – 9 million when fully ramped up (this is based on loose calculations by Paul). This would obviously be extremely helpful, and perhaps bring us up to where we had been in the past.

Marty. Try as we might, until public education is fully funded, we can't succeed the way we want, regardless of what we do. Fully support it.

Accepted unanimously.

Paul. Lexington passed 3 motions. We may want to think about additional future votes.

All day kindergarten may work against us in long term. If we have to charge a fee for it, it may count against us with new formula. Need to keep this in mind.

## ***Moved to Executive Session***