

2006-03-28 School Committee Meeting

Public Participation

Gene
Emily Allen

Sophomores at High School. Asking to amend phys ed requirement of 4 years of phys ed for graduation, which is in addition to all of the other current requirements, which include academic subjects plus 2 years foreign language. This is a change from current 2 year requirement. Feel that 4 years of phys ed will limit their ability to take other courses at ahs. Particularly in light of academic stress and competition to get into college would like to have the requirement amended.

They have a petition bearing over 300 signatures to support their cause.

In researching this, they found there is no state or federal law which requires this.

There is no evidence that gym helps people be more fit, or have a healthy life style. After sitting through gym, have observed that those who are at most at risk – the people who are in poor shape participate less during gym class.

Barbara Goodman (former School Committee Member). Happier to sit out here during the painful process of crafting a budget. We are always faced with building up programs and then having to cut them when state cuts funding. This is too painful. Even after last override attempt.

Massachusetts ranked 34th out of 50 states in terms of contributions to public education. This is terrible. STAND for Children is working to fix this.

Susan Stewart, parent of two Ottoson students, member of STAND for Children. Thanks for the opportunity to participate in the budget process both last night and tonight. Frustrating to see loss in 20% of our state aid. The cut that was made in 2003 has not yet been restored. Last night, Susan Lovelace asked for priorities of what we would do if we had increased funding, and Nate was very readily able to supply several priorities.

Stand is organizing a state-wide rally on Weds, April 26th, 12:30-1:30 at the state house to ask for increased funding for education. The more people we have at that rally, the more effective we can be in asking for more money from the state for public education.

EJ presented motion to ask for 2-year requirement which Suzanne seconded.

Jeff explained that typically when there is a motion with this much content, it is referred to a sub-committee – in this case curriculum/instruction sub committee. They would discuss it, gather input from students, teachers, regulations, etc.

Believe we put in one FTE for health for next year.

Charlie Skidmore responded. When brought the requirement before Curriculum Instruction and Assessment subcommittee initially, proposed that it would be graduation requirement for 2008. His thought that they would add only 1 year, Kate Cremens advocated for 2 additional years.

Marty. Difficult one, there are strong pros and cons. Tough for us to see this through the eyes of our kids, to feel the pressures that they feel when confronting conflicting sets of requirements. Totally appropriate to send it back to subcommittee to take another look at it.

Charlie: Students would like an answer this year so that they can adjust their schedules for next year.

Marty: Thinks this is possible to meet this schedule.

Paul: How many students does this affect.

Charlie: Particularly difficult for students taking 6-7 courses, or science labs, or those taken musical courses – probably not a huge number.

Suzanne: At one time there was a waiver. Is that still in place.

Charlie: Current waiver is for after school sports participation. In terms of academic conflict, almost everything would be at discretion of Principal.

Marty: Moves to refer motion to subcommittee. Ask for report back by first meeting in May.

Motion passed.

Superintendents Report

On Personnel front, have selected next principal at Hardy. Deb Amico has been a teacher for 30 years, and administrator for 3 years. She has a background in teaching and reading, and are very pleased to have her take on this job and follow up on great work that Mr. Carmody has done.

Making progress on Chief Financial Officer search.

At the Teen Stress and Alcohol forum, talked about selecting a facilitator – are making progress on that. Also making progress on creating the task force -- this will include students, teachers, parents.

Also setting up a Town Wide Forum on how we move forward on two tracks. One will be the task force -- a small group to set direction. Another is to create a much more public forum to include all members of the public. The facilitator will help with this process.

Trying to balance moving forward and taking some action, and not taking the wrong action.

We have had 100's of people offer help. We want to include everyone, but that is a huge task. The facilitator will be an enormous help. The organizational task was harder than Nate had anticipated.

Susan reported that Cindy Bouvier had asked her to participate on the task force, is that something that needs to be voted on? Committee and Nate felt not.

Nate: Marty had asked about state reimbursement status for built schools. They have hired a consultant with experience in this area to bring reports together.

Worked with Jill McCarthy, ELL (English Language Learning) coordinator. They have made tremendous progress on dealing with the issues raised by Dept of Ed. They have assessed every student, increased services to those who need it, and graduated many students out of the program already. In the past, we may have had kids in the program for 1 to 2 years, now with 15 hours of intense instruction, have graduated out of the program in 3 months.

Marty: The initiative for the person to get reimbursement from state school building program came from the Treasurer's office, and was presented as a done deal – is that true?

Nate: yes.

Marty: Just wanted to be sure that that was clear.

Revised Budget

Passing out revised budget based on conversations of last 2 weeks and last night's meeting. It does not address every issue or concern that was raised, but does deal with many.

Changes:

Metco restored from ½ time to full time

Director of Health, Wellness and Counseling

This proposal adds a lead teacher (4 classes, 1 supervision) to supervise Health, Wellness, Phys Ed in addition to the K-12 Counseling Coordinator. No net change on budget.

ACE: Likes ACE. Wants to integrate it more into the school system. Some concerns were if we have the manpower to manage it well. Convinced that with administrative change from maintained solely by ACE to shift to system's PowerSchool, that efficiency will be gained. Added in an administrative stipend. Corrected mistake in salary. Removed the one course taught by Science coordinator which adds to budget. Net change is \$27K additional.

Traffic Supervisors. With concerns of parents, added back 15 minutes of crossing guard time – never our intent to trade off safety for money. Feel this is a fair concern, and added this additional time. This adds \$27K.

These additions left us in the whole \$53K.

Proposes taking this from:

Revised Electricity cost	15K	
Reduce reserve for grants	15K	less conservative but comfortable with this #
Retirement savings	23K	will try to replace departing teachers with new teachers with similar experience. May also try to replace some novice teachers who have departed with more experienced teachers.

Suzanne: Question on Counseling position.

On traffic supervisors, what is current time:

Nate: 1 hour in the am, 1 hour in the pm. New proposal is 45 minutes in the morning and 45 minutes in the afternoon.

Suzanne: How will we continue to monitor this?

Nate: Traffic and Safety advisory committee will continue to meet and evaluate.

Sue: Along with other momentum of moving increased responsibility to principals, any changes in crossing guards should also get more input and coordination with the principals.

Nate: These are not only budget issues. DPW plowing priorities, parking restrictions, enforcement by police, etc. are all coming into play.

Sue Sheffler: Also, there is a schoolwide walk to school day from the Water Tower to Ottoson on April 11th.

Susan Lovelace: Wanted to thank Sue Sheffler for her efforts on coordinating the safety/traffic committee.

Has question on Counseling/Wellness position. Has concern that a person can supervise Phys Ed, FACS, K12 Health with one period/day.

Marty: These changes underscore my concerns from last night. Who knows how many changes would come about if we listed carefully to our constituencies.

Paul: Am comfortable with change. There is plenty of time for fine tuning. We have to always keep things in balance – if we add, we have to subtract. There are outside factors that can change as well – state funding, health costs, etc. may not be as we expect. Ultimately, the town meeting will vote on our final budget.

It is responsible for us to endorse a budget at this time so that we can move forward. There are concerns. We can continue to ask questions, but I am not going to stop the budget process until they are resolved.

We started this process several months ago. We had 2 retreats on the budget. We endorsed the broad frameworks. Based on that, the Superintendent spoke to many people and crafted his budget. If we don't like strategy of moving money from leadership to classrooms, we should have raised that long ago.

Susan: Moves to adopt the amendments to the budget. Suzanne seconded.

Jeff: Discussion should be around these 4 areas that superintendent has proposed.

Marty: We have a bottom line – that is the only thing that town meeting is voting on. There have been years when we delayed a final budget into well into the town meeting. Will vote for the amendments, but still have major concerns. We would well to go back, take a deep breath, and take time to address issues.

Sean: Many of his concerns were addressed last night and in this revised budget. Will support the amendments.

Paul: We owe it to the town and Fin Comm to keep the process moving.

Motion passed 7-0 to accept changes

Susan: Moves that the FY07 budget be adopted as amended

Suzanne: I spent a lot of time with this budget. I've met with Supt Levenson twice, I have talked to people in the schools and members of the community.

There are many good things in the budget:

Presentation is clear and available
We have had much more community input

The process had many positive aspects. Principals were involved. Supt has spent time in classrooms observing. The supt has had numerous meetings for the staff.

The manner in which the communication to the staff was conducted had flaws, which the supt has acknowledged. He will work on these issues going forward.

Our starting point was over 560K over budget. Many communities would simply cut 18-20 teachers. This budget does not do that. It looks at the whole budget and tried to assess where the cuts should be made in order to have least impact on students.

Supt has also integrated many creative solutions, such as the AYCC counseling staff.

Concerned about 9 people directly affected by the changes.

Pleased that the budget includes 163K for stipends, 500 days for teacher leadership.

The new leadership structure addresses many of the issues presented in the NASC review, which asked for a more streamlined administration.

The dept of ed report asked that Special Ed and Regular Ed be better integrated. This budget addresses this issue in several ways.

The budget also addresses our 5 district goals.

Does have concerns. Concerned about reading supervision by principals. Concerned that part time athletic director will be able to successful do his job.

Our job as a committee is to understand the budget and provide support to the Superintendent. I am ready to support him in his efforts.

Now is not the time to back down and retreat from our support – we will end up back in 2003 with fewer teachers, reduced programs, etc.

Susan: Thanks superintendent for very clear presentation of the budget. Appreciates his efforts to present the financial picture clearly about what we face.

If someone asked me if this budget includes everything we need, I would say no. If asked if it supports our priorities, I would say yes.

As a committee, we have very little responsibility or impact on state funding, but we have complete responsibility to supervise our school budget. I think the budget properly reflects priorities by not cutting teachers and programs.

I believe that the Supt's plan reflects best practices, but it does rely on unproven assumptions, such as whether it is possible for the part time supervisors to successfully do their jobs.

My job is to question. Are the assumptions off base, or are they reasonable. My answer is that yes, they are reasonable. I may disagree with them.

My job in the coming year will be to pay very close attention to the realization of this plan. To get regular updates from Nate, from parents, teachers and administrators. To make motions for change when problems are discovered.

This is not the end of a process.

The plan will change. I want to assure that the community that we are not handing over the keys to the car and leaving the country. We will be sitting right along side Nate and observing, course correcting etc.

I am pleased to vote for a budget that includes increased staff for counseling.

Sean: This is not something that we want to do. We are facing fiscal realities.

Pleased that the Special Ed program does offer better integration with Regular Ed. Have concerns about other cuts. Also concerned about the process. Am concerned that the word "we" should have been used rather than "I". Feel sorrowful that many members of the faculty felt left out of the process. I did meet with Supt twice to discuss my concerns. Many teachers in the district feel that their input was not asked for or accepted. Understand that this is the beginning of a long process. If the staff is unhappy with the process, it will hurt the implementation plan. The committee has heard this discord, and is eager that it be addressed.

Marty: A long term concern about the committee is that we are sitting in passenger seat when we should sit in drivers seat.

Specific concerns about using unlicensed graduate students providing counseling is troubling. It's like the one librarian to say we still have a library program. It's watering down the soup.

Second area of concern. Who will be doing the contract mandated evaluations for the 37 teachers in social studies and languages? Will this be loaded onto the principals.

We heard a lot about the coach + 4 model (supervise 1 period, teach 4), and what a great model that is. Why don't we apply it consistently across all disciplines. Science and Math have full time coordinator, while other areas like Social Studies and Language do not.

Have concerns that tasks asked of the staff may not be humanly possible.

I do love the format of the budget. I have been advocating for this for years with no support from the committee. I am the last person to be against changes to the status quo. I am not necessarily taking issue with the substance. I have concerns about the impact and approach. There is not time to do the collaboration that should have been done up front. I don't like the odds – there is too much risk.

Offering a substitute motion:

That the supt return to us at the next meeting a transitional budget for the 2006-2007 year

Sean seconded.

Paul: It was about this time last year that we approved the Supt's contract. There is no more important task that the committee does than hire the supt. The analogy of the supt driving the car should be extended – we own the car. It is our budget, our policy. We own this. I think supt has come up with a very good set of recommendations. His understanding of teaching and learning is evident. It clarifies the lines of responsibility. It is a very pro teacher budget. It is a very pro principal budget. We have empowered the principals as the academic leaders of the school. Hiring people who view themselves as instructional leaders and not building managers.

There has been a lot of talk about this budget. There has been much more comment on this budget than much worse budgets in the past. In the past we have fired entry level teachers who have no clout.

Must understand that we are still in lean times. We cannot afford to continue with the status quo.

This budget reflects good changes.

In short, this budget is inadequate. I've always voted inadequate budgets. I did expect a thoughtful budget which increases teaching and learning, improves quality of what goes on in the classroom. I can't think of ways to improve this budget which improves on our core commitment to teaching and learning in the classroom.

Sue: This budget demonstrates the commitment of the supt and committee to stick within the confines of the 5-year fiscal stability plan. We've worked very hard to craft this budget. We have set and reset priorities in collaboration with the community. In the past, we could not get a priority list.. Now we have done it.

We have addressed the critical need of retaining our teachers while staying within the budget.

The discussions on the process should be made during the supt's review – they should be separate from discussions of the quality of the budget.

There are many things the budget does allow. It includes money for us to be able to negotiate with the teachers without being embarrassed.

I think Mr. Thrope underestimates the desire for the faculty and principals to take on new responsibilities. To craft the curriculum that they will teach.

EJ: Everytime I walk up the stairs, I'm also confronted by signs that say that this floor is off limits to students. Naturally I expected a certain amount of exclusion from this process, but in my teenage idealism I held out hope that the 6th floor would still have room for collegiaty. The leadership of this district has acted as if they alone should be the crafters of the budget. I submit that they are not the sole masters of the budget.

Additionally there are serious concerns about the impact of the budget and the gap between the numbers and the implementation.

I strongly encourage the committee to adopt the substitute motion and delay adoption of this budget.

Susan: I do not support the substitute motion.

In terms of a process for a local community reviewing a budget, we had at least two open meetings discussing the budget. These were opportunities for input. EJ had input at those and at the regular meetings.

We have to act within the context of the reality. I think postponing the decision does a disservice to the staff who are most affected. I'm not sure that the answers to the questions that we have asked would change my feeling about the budget. I do have concerns, but I don't need a detailed work plan. It is not my job to micromanage the supt. Even if we had a detailed list of every person and their responsibilities, it would not provide enough info to change my decision. The only information that will help me will come from a review of the program to see the impact.

Suzanne: What were faculty meetings

Nate: There were three meetings for faculty – there were between 10-20 people at each of the meetings.

I do not support delaying the budget. We need to vote it and move forward. The process had some flaws and mistakes, but it is not appropriate to have a process redo.

Marty: a quote from a teacher: "When he released his budget, he sent it to us only 2 hours before it was to be presented. We were already at our PDM commitments. He then offered us additional times to meet, but it was after the budget had been presented. Perhaps that had an impact on attendance at meetings.

Jeff: Committee's job is to work to create a budget, to listen to community, and to approve a budget. Feels sure that all members of the committee share a common concern for the children and staff in the system.

For the most part taking this vote does give the superintendent the charter to move forward with his suggested changes, which will have impact on people's jobs.

A teacher told Jeff recently, that one reason that there has been so much discord about the budget is that it is the first time in recent past that there has been such an open process about the budget.

Process is important. But ultimately question is whether the budget does the best to support our kids. I feel that it does. We have added services in several areas. (Jeff listed many). Pleased that ACE will now be under the director of science, which is a cabinet level position. Pleased that Health/Wellness Coordinator is a cabinet level position.

A budget is a projection. It is not a guaranty of success. The success is much more affected by who we hire.

I worry about whether the principals can carry the load we have asked them to do. I have similar concerns about Health and Wellness, and other areas as well. However, if we do not reorganize, we will not be able to hire the additional support staff that we have added for reading, math, special ed, etc.

I am voting for the budget because it is pro teacher and pro child.

Comment on Mr. Levenson's performance. Hired Mr. Levenson because we wanted change, even though we didn't know what the change would be. Nate said at that time that he would advocate restructuring our administration. He has done that. I am excited and optimistic about the quality of education that our kids will receive. This is a new era for the Arlington Schools.

Subst Motion vote. Sean and Marty yes. All others opposed. EJ said he would vote yes.

On entire budget, vote was also 5-2 with Marty and Sean in the negative, and EJ voicing his opposition

Marty proposed motion to gather more specific information from the teachers about how this going. Wants a formal report from the teachers. More than just a survey.

Paul: We have done good work on the budget. A fincomm member told him that we have done much more than a good job on the budget. Done a fantastic job. Our door is open to the faculty to participate at any time.

Sue: Amend motion that as part of the assessment we have a workshop with the faculty. We have done this in the past, for instance in terms of changing graduation requirements. I think it is a valuable vehicle.

Jeff: Since Jeff and Suzanne on are on negotiating committee, concerned about AEA discussions.

Jack Duranceau – Supts advisory committee already meets this need. May not need a new committee.

Nate: I would never propose that you hear how it's going from my lips. We already have several staff surveys on the web.

Marty withdrew his amendment in deference to Sue Sheffler's amendment.

He prefers a more open amendment than that which is presented in original motion.

Proposal is workshops with teachers and anyone who wishes to meet with them. Including the Supt's Advisory Committee

Here are the two amendments

Reports shall include staff surveys and feedback from Supt's advisory committee.

Workshops where the faculty may come and speak directly to the committee shall take place as well.

The amended motion passed.

Marty reviewing Policy and Procedures proposal. Proposal is to review the Policy and Procedures on a shorter cycle – 2 years, so that at least 3 members are familiar with the Policy book.

Regret that Paul was not there at the sub committee meeting when this was discussed.

Paul: You can get from Boston to Portsmouth pretty fast, but you won't know where you have been. The metaphor with the Policy book is similar.