

2006-04-11 School Committee meeting

All present except for Sean Garbally, who is at a model UN program
Also BJ Cataldo and Hutch

Welcome by new chairperson – Sue Sheffler

Reiteration of 5 district goals

1. Implement Special Ed and ELL reforms
2. Implement Standards and common assessments for core subjects
3. Effective Professional Development
4. Determine Content knowledge for 21st century
5. Create transparent and detailed budget

Final budget has been voted, at a bottom line level, but details will change.

Public Participation

Miriam Stein. Speaking in several capacities. Arlington resident. Parent of 2 children who have graduated. Vision 20/20 Task force. Mother of Hasidic rabbi. Member of Superintendent's Diversity task force. Asking committee to find a time other than Saturday for the high school graduation. Observant Jews are prohibited from many activities on Saturday, which is the Jewish Sabbath. They can not drive, write, take pictures, etc. If we were to make this choice, not only would it inconvenience observant Jews, but it would send a message that it is OK to leave out members of the community.

Sherry Hahn. Resident and parent of 2004 graduate, High School student and 8th grader. Wonder why the prom is scheduled for Good Friday? Concerned that this kind of scheduling is insensitive to many members of the community. Apparently it has been changed, but it still appears on the web site. Also, as a Jew, concerned that we would have a graduation scheduled on Shabbat. Her mother, who attended her son's 2004 graduation would not be able to attend her other children's graduations, nor would she. She is proud of the celebration of diversity that Arlington has, but feels that scheduling the graduation, which is one of the most central events of a high school career, would be a very unfortunate mistake.

Consent agenda

Warrant to approve an authorization of ~\$400K.
New person to sign checks
Sub committee chairs

Jeff asked to speak on sub committee chairs
Suzanne asked to speak on sign checks, as did Marty.

Marty makes a new motion. Would like to amend the motion by adding this verbiage. "The chair is expressly not authorized from signing blank payroll authorizations". He thinks it is poor practice to do this.

Sue Sheffler says that any member is able to review payroll records at any time. Marty says not good enough for him.

Paul asked if we signed a resolution bearing on this last year. Answer was no.

Paul made a motion that we send motions relating to this to the budget subcommittee.

Marty wants to make it clear that he doesn't have a problem with the chairman having this authority – the problem is not with this chair in any way. Just thinks that it is a practice that should be approved.

Marty's motion failed, 5-1 with Marty voting in affirmative.

Original motion passed 5-1.

Paul moved a new motion that unusual payroll expenditures be forwarded to the budget sub committee

Passed unanimously.

Sub committee assignments

Jeff says that there is a list attached to the package which states certain concerns that will come forward during the coming year. He wants to state that the list is likely not all encompassing – other things will arise.

Paul withdrew his name from the Selectman's Liason appointment pending Sean's acceptance of this role.

Marty commented about Budget and Revenue Task Force. This is a combined community organization – including selectmen, school comm., finance committee, etc. Nate is chair. Proposal to have Marty be liason. Marty would be happy to lend some creativity to this process.

Nate has commented that the budget looks bleak. State funding is likely to be down, not up. Task force will have an important role in determining how to deal with it.

Superintendent's report

House Ways and Means budget proposal released, not as good as we had hoped. There is a reduction in chapter 70 funding. If it remains unchanged, could be as much as \$200K reduction. Would be worthwhile to contact our representatives.

Stand Rally – April 26, 12:30-1:30pm

Stand is a national organization with state and local chapters. We have at least 2 chapters in Arlington. Credo is that every child deserves a fair chance in life. Would like to invite everyone to join us for a **Stand for Children School Funding rally, April 26, 12:30-1:30pm** at the State House. Suzanne, Sue, and Susan will be there, as well as many others from Arlington. Funding for schools has been cut over 10% in the last 5 years. Massachusetts led the 50 states in cuts over recent years. It's important to advocate for more funding for our schools.

Paul moved that the school committee endorse the rally and urge citizens to participate. Passed unanimously.

There is also a conference at state house that am.

Superintendent's report continued

Concession stand at Peirce field. Will require private fundraising. There are questions about how this will be used, since it is on public property. Important to set ground rules ahead of time so that all parties understand the ground rules for use, maintenance, revenue stream, etc. so no one is raising funds under misconceptions.

Jeff moved that the budget sub committee take this up and report back by May.

Marty offered amendment that we also send it to policy and procedures subcommittee simultaneously.

Paul agrees that policy and procedures seems to be the best location. Jeff withdrew his motion – just send it to policy and procedures.

Passed unanimously.

Diversity outreach initiative. Did go to Minority recruitment Fair. Hutch, Nate, Steve Perrera, member of diversity task force. They did meet several qualified candidates. Also reaching out to Lesley college and feels like there is a lot of positive activity in this regard. Diversity task force has given them an A- so far – pretty good. We'll know in 8 weeks or so how successful this effort is.

New chief financial officer. Steering committee has suggested two candidates. Has checked references, and would like to bring on Susan Mazeralla on as new CFO. 5 years as CFO in Lynnfield, also years in private sector. Has some specific skills that will help

– she is director of HR. Also has very high technology skills. That will help us become more efficient.

Suzanne moved approval of Susan.

Marty expressed reservations. Noted that Nate had said that the new CFO would have more experience than he has. Not comfortable feeling that given the current state of central office that a recent career switcher is the appropriate choice. He will withhold his approval.

Jeff asking if salary differential is an indication of experience level.

Nate. When Rob was brought in, he did receive more \$, but also had 25 years of municipal experience, but not any school experience. The salary offered represents an average salary for this assignment. He does feel that her experience of 5 years in central office in Lynnfield should be helpful.

If she is approved, she would start May 1.

Committee approved her 5-1. Marty's objection was not specific to the candidate personally, but that he hoped that the chosen person would have more experience.

Report from committee on Mental health

Cindy Bouvier delivered a report. On January 23rd, met with a member of the district atty's office, as well as the Directory of Public Health in Arlington. At the conclusion of the meeting, she heard of death of a student at AHS.

Since that time, there has been an outpouring of support from local and state police, mental health professionals, guidance, parents, etc. Liz Whitco from the Samaritans was incredible in her involvement.

It was important for the staff and students to be affirmed that they would be ok.

When Dr. www returned later, 45 faculty members came and talked with him about how things were going.

There was a parent forum on drugs and alcohol use with a doctor and someone from Concord. It was a good discussion.

School nurses have redone parent and student handbook which will be online this spring.

SADD day (Students Against Destructive Decisions) was different this year. 90 students were trained in facilitation skills. Very productive.

The seniors had an offsite day at Tufts. They talked about their lives and their futures, how to deal with issues. Many focus groups.

Has started the task force, currently composed of Chief of Police, Nate, Charlie Skidmore, AYCC head and several others. Has expanded to 20 members, faith organizations, mental health, local business. Are trying to take a measured approach in coming up with plans.

Researching plans, best practices, etc.

Today Cindy met with Martha Coakley's office, with guidance counselors from ahs and ottoson, helped them think about what they had done well, what could be done better. What professional development is needed, what can do with students. Keynote speaker's formula success is – coming together, staying together and working together. It will be long, well thought out and inclusive.

Jeff asking if Concord will be included in best practices. They are not on list. Liz Silva from Winchester will be very involved. Will look at restorative circle in Concord as well.

Jeff asked who is chair? Nate says that now that it is a group of 20, it has to be a community effort as well as a school effort. In order to involve whole community, Patsy Kraemer and Christine Connolly will chair.

Marty read a couple of things from the report:

Step 1 – determining best practices from similar communities

Step 2 – look at how key elements apply to community

Step 3 – tailor particulars to Arlington

At end of step 3, will have an action plan that will be true to Arlington and have broad based support. Step 4 will be implementation.

Marty likes the plan. It's a good approach.

EJ asking at what point students will be involved in the process.

Nate says 2 of 20 will be students – at least 2.

Susan Lovelace (school comm. rep to task force) said that at meeting yesterday spoke about things that are directly applicable to Arlington. One source of info is at risk survey, but a critical piece is focus groups with students.

Cindy also mentioned that there will be a town meeting in June which will be another opportunity for students to participate.

All day kindergarten

About 343 students enrolled (roughly 99% of eligible students), have collected about 90% of fees. That's good, but not great. Thinks there is room for improvement. We probably don't want to go to payment in advance, however there can be a cleanup of activity. Hoping that new CFO will centralize the collection. This has not been done in the past. There is also a philosophical question about payment in advance. And perhaps about whether we want to be at 99% participation (some districts it's closer to 50%).

Jeff. There's \$33K that we should be collecting that we have not collected. Central office will contact each of families. It is likely that some will qualify for reduced rates. This is made of 12 families that haven't paid at all. Others are partial payers. District has created payment plans for some families. A pretty big portion of the 33K may be people who have fallen behind on the payment plans. This probably involves about 25 families altogether.

Also asking about budget for next year – we have budgeted \$350K for next year for collection of all day kindergarten fees. It would seem that \$440K would be a more realistic projection. (I get 525K – 350 students times \$1,500). Nate says that the gap is partially due to when the payments come in – we may already be getting payments for next year.

Marty suggested that perhaps use of revolving fund might help get accounting straightened out.

Jeff pointing out that differential could be payment for a couple of teachers, etc. – important not to lose track of that.

Marty suggesting that principal's role not be eliminated when we move it to centralization. They should not be collectors, only facilitators.

Approval of the Job Descriptions

Nate – what's different about job descriptions. The process that he went through is a difficult and stressful process with the leadership changes. After the vote was taken, have proceeded forward – had a lot of review of the descriptions. For all descriptions, either Kevin Hutchinson or Charlie Skidmore met with affected parties, in addition to Nate. Feels that significant improvements were made.

Two special ed positions have been added.

Doesn't want to rush these through – needs a balance of moving forward and careful study. Not all of them are there yet, e.g. the social studies position. He has presented a batch that he thinks are ready.

Marty has 4 questions:

For reading coach, which of qualifications imply an ability to coach – particularly in comparison to reading teachers. Nate says “ability to work with classroom teachers”. Traditionally, most reading instruction takes place by classroom teachers. One of the difference between reading coach and reading teacher is scale. The coach will spend 50-90% working with teachers, compared to 5-10% for other teachers. Nate is going to add “experience or demonstrated ability in coaching or mentoring”. Feels many of these people will come from within district.

Foreign Language Lead teacher. Who supervises and evaluates language teachers? Nate: For many years, it has been the principals or his/her designee. There is also peer-to-peer involvement. Marty – coaching does not imply supervision – Nate – that is right.

Lead guidance. How will this work? Nate: we currently have 5. One has a substantially reduced case load, and another that is about 50%. Next year we will increase number by 50%. Will review if the person who has the substantially reduced case load will have an increased load. Have not finalized what the mix will be. One thing that Nate understands is that numbers of case load don't indicate work load. It depends on types of counseling. At risk students will need a reduced case load. There will be a summer study group to work out some of these implementation details. Marty asks for more information when it is available. Nate says OK.

Marty. What isn't going to fit – what won't be done, what is left out?

Nate. Feels that for batch presenting today, thinks they will be doing a good job covering what they do now. In foreign language, there are nice to haves that are not being done today, won't be done now either. In Athletic program, will likely be speed of response – it will take longer to resolve some issues. As part of discussions, it was felt that for instance, the list of things that wouldn't get done in social studies is too big, so that plan needs more attention. Tried to look at what district could or should do. Tried to move clerical/administrative work out of academic roles – move those to central office.

Marty: when were these conversations done? Nate: after the vote. Marty confirmed after the vote.

Susan wanted to clarify that there are some that are missing.

Suzanne – 3 special ed positions. Wants clarification. Special Ed program developer and coordinator. Is that person in charge of reviewing what we can do to bring students back in house. Nate says yes.

Nate – we have 19-25 programs in house now. These are thought of as inclusion programs. For people who are out of district placed, issues are substantially more complex. The second position is to oversee these ~20 programs.

Suzanne – who is responsible for overseeing IEP's for each student?

Nate: by law, the team reviews every IEP. We have 10.5 team leaders in the budget. Both of these people (position 1 and 2) become resources that can add to team, but are not managing IEP's.

Suzanne – special ed family outreach coordinator. What is that?

Nate says that we are asking parents to change IEP's. We are asking them to look at bringing students back in house. He has met with SPECPAC (parents advisory committee) and other parents on these issues. There is definite interest in trying new things. It is important to build parent support – someone to coordinate that is critical. Hopes that this position will go a long way to building confidence and trust. If it is successful can have a 6-7 figure impact on budget (in positive way) in the future.

Paul asking about House Dean. Effective mentoring of all essential and non-essential house staff. How are we looking at House Deans being instructional leaders.

Nate. Description of house dean is different than has been. They will wear several hats. Bridge between special ed and regular ed. Coordinate all services for kids that we have. Helping at risk kids. I would put all of these roles as number 1. Role of instructional leader would be secondary – based on skills of deans. Principal will be prime leader, and classroom teachers as peers. Instructional leadership will not be a primary focus, but certainly they should be leaders.

Paul has question about function of house deans. The house structure itself perhaps needs review. It is currently done alphabetically. How does there role relate to classroom management.

Nate has not discussed reorganizing it. It could be put on the table, but not there at this moment.

Sue – asking for vote on motion. One change made on the reading coach.

Job descriptions unanimously accepted.

School Calendar discussion

Marty asks that since there are people here to discuss the calendar issue, we should decide when it will be discussed so that they will know when it will come up.

Agreed that will discuss on meeting on May 9th (put off so that we have plenty of time to discuss with those affected

Paul noted that he cannot and will not vote for Saturday graduation

3rd quarterly Report on Special Ed and ELL

Have done much work. Particularly in elementary level. There was not any real structure for tracking students. Made a commitment that we would have structures in place by Jan 1, at time we didn't have a director. With Jill in charge, we have made incredible progress.

In Special Ed, Dept of Ed originally asked us to make changes over a 3-year period, then changed to 7 months. BJ Cataldo has implemented roughly 50%, which is also substantial progress.

Jill McCarthy made presentation on ELL. She presented 2 pages of narrative. Also presented some attachments. The organizing concept is 3-2-1. 3 hours of instruction/day for beginning student, 2 hours for more advanced, 1 hour for most advanced.

The attachment reviews what we are doing across grades, on 3-2-1 scale on listening, reading and writing. The teachers all come from different backgrounds – ESL, multi-cultural, etc. To get a common language to use for reviews will take some time, but that is a goal.

We are trying to evaluate students and rate on listening/reading/writing (level 1,2 or 3) and provide this information to the classroom teacher. Often times listening may be great, but reading not as strong. This becomes a starting point for conversation between ELL staff and classroom teachers.

Struggle trying to get 3 classes for ELL needs, K-12. Trying to build bridges to get students into mainstream. This approach in high school is still being worked on. Defining the 3 levels is important here too.

Nate – as a review of needs and evaluation of students, we have had 60 students graduate the program.

The assessment is now centralized. Jill can review every student.

Jeff is asking for data on the kids – how long they are in each level.

Jill – anecdotally can say that every child that started this year as a 1 is now a 2. However, we have gotten 7 new 1's recently.

Looking at which students who have ELL needs, where are they going in the system – are they going into special ed. Need to review communication and make sure students are in the right place.

Jeff. Would like data on how students are moving through the system. Are there other systems using a similar approach? How do we know how we are doing?

Jill. Feels like we are doing well with YAP's, she has also been focusing on beginners.

Nate says that there are very few districts who are collecting this info.

Paul. Looking for info on how many students are in the program, at what level, at which schools. How are we best serving these students? Data would be very helpful.

Jill is working with Josephine to gain confidence in the data. Have done a lot of language cleanup. For the first time we may be ready to provide this data.

Suzanne – also interested in the data. With PowerSchool (the new student info system), are you or someone in each school able to review this information for each student to make sure they are getting what they need.

Jill – still finalizing the data that will be in the system. Still determining which info is most pertinent. People can get access to the system, but all data is not there yet. We are already looking at multiple services to kids.

Suzanne question. Do we have any students who qualify for sheltered immersion? We do not at this time.

Nate: School committee must approve waiver for Dept of Ed.

They voted to approve the waiver.

BJ presentation on Special Ed

Have completed professional development on IEP writing. As a group, have covered all of the points in the dept of ed review. Teachers have been taught to write effective goals. BJ has been reading the IEP's on a daily basis, and has noted improvement. Parents appear to be happy with progress.

504 Review.

Translating services. Had not been solidified in dept of ed review. Now doing so – budgets for translation bear this out. Translating forms.

MCAS accommodations. Have been collected district wide the accommodations, and are matching their system with the data. Can now cross compare.

Extended school services – put a policy in place. Reviewed with staff. Will have a program this summer. If students appear to be at risk for significant loss by summer break, will have this program available. This summer's concentration is K-5.

Rules and regulations around extended evaluations. Had been cloudy as to when additional testing should be done. Teams now have policies in place.

Consents to evaluate now being sent out on time.

All of these things have been accomplished during this CAP period.

Additional things worked on outside of CAP.

Worked on additional evaluation tools. Had need for Early Intervention (EI) program, will be opening a preschool at Dallin as a program for students with atypical diagnosis. For summer will include roughly 4 children. In fall, will incorporate typical students. This will be fee based – working on implementation plan.

At Thompson, working on pull out program. Had more students than had staff for – were able to hire a new teacher already to help with this load.

Utactics – this is the database used to track info. It is web based. Although it was difficult to get used to it, it is now a great plus. The data has been cleaned up, so that we can have much more accurate information to report. This was a huge task, but has been a huge bonus.

Reviewing transition from middle school to high school. Will have a breakfast for parents shortly to discuss changes.

When she arrived there were 5 outstanding issues for resolution from her office, they have now all been resolved.

Put together a policy for the district on suspensions.

Put together a home/hospital plan for students who can't be at school.

Put together a policy for age of majority.

Some things still to be done:

Work on establishing a pre-referral format. Need consistency across schools and also ensure that we are meeting needs of students.

TAT teams need to be improved (not sure heard that right).

Seeking avenues for parents in district to contact the special ed dept. Looking at improved communication.

Paul: move that BJ share her policies with the Policy and Procedure subcommittee so that they can be incorporated into the policy handbook. For instance, manifestation determination, that should be included.

BJ – the word perhaps could be more oriented to procedures – perhaps not policies.

Marty – this kinds of stuff comes up all the time.

Jeff – if BJ has a procedure manual, then the easy way to do this would be for school committee to approve that manual.

Paul – if we are instituting new policies that put us in compliance, then they should be in the book.

Paul withdrew motion, but asked BJ to bring policies back to the school committee.

Sue asks that several items moved from this agenda to future meetings.

One items is goals review. Some discussion about the information provided in the packets.

Goal 1, measure 1 – we're not doing at next meeting. Goal 1 measure 6. Jeff can't vote on this. Asked that Jill be back again.

Paul made motion to postpone goal review. Passed unanimously

Motion about school committee rep to vision 20-20 task force. Josh Lobel has submitted an application.

Marty makes comment about this. He held the position for many years. This is not necessarily a school committee appointment. This is a generalist position.

New Business:

Suzanne – wanted to recognize 16 students in 11-12 grade who scored very high on national mathematics exam. Their scores placed in top 5% of all students. Suzanne read list of the 16.

Agendas are available online at Virtual town hall

Marty asking about supplemental materials also available on the Friday before. That would be helpful.