

2007-01-23 School Committee Meeting

All members there
Sean Conway and Ella Hartenian, Student Reps
Kevin Hutchinson, Asst Super
BJ Cataldo, Special Ed Director
Sue Mazzarella, CFO

(notes taken by Josh Lobel for SPOT. I apologize for any errors or omissions)

Public Participation

Joanne Contardo: Have invited students from ASA for the past 12 years, they have participated at Arlington High without fees for these past 12 years. If we had a niece or nephew attending AHS, they would be allowed to attend for no fee. I ask that you continue this policy.

Gordon Jamieson: Head of Recycling Committee. Wanted to make you aware of an opportunity that is available to you. We have placed large containers in several locations around town – the rec center, St. Agnes, etc. Why is this an opportunity for you? There is a company in Canada that supplies these bins. They maintain the bins – they're good stewards of the bins. There is some revenue that gets returned to us. The other benefit is it provides another way for residents to recycle when they have too much to recycle. It provides a clear location for the schools to recycle their paper.

Sue Sheffler: Is there a time deadline for us to make a decision?

Gordon: No, there is not a critical deadline. If we could all save a pound a day per resident, we'd save \$450,000 yearly by reducing our trash costs.

Consent Agenda:

Approval of minutes

Approval of Warrant Article (without discussion)

Moved Warrant Article -- approval, passed 7-0

Minutes were corrected to note that Ella was student rep at that date, not Sean

Reading Update

All 3 of presenters are reading coaches

Linda Hansen

Marie Janiak

Evelyn Derosa

(ed note – I'm not sure I've always attributed right person to what was said – I can only see their backs.)

Key Elements for 06/07

- Uniform Spreadsheets – All 7 Schools
- Consistency in recording Data
- Student Progress and Service Review Meetings 2-3 times per year
- 3 Tier Model (Service Delivery Model)
- Literacy Team at ALL Elementary Schools

Have been pleased with the progress. Reading coaches have been present in many of the meetings – particularly the grade level meetings. When the coaches attended the meetings, learned a great deal from the school staff about how they were approaching challenges.

Have now established a mid-year assessment of reading so that the common assessments help track progress. Tells which students might be able to transition out of the program, and which students who weren't initially in the intervention program might benefit from it.

This second assessment is under way right now.

Marie: There were some differences in the input of the original data and this is being addressed now. On Feb 12, the coaches will meet to consolidate the data. (Marie presented a sample of how data will be reported.) After their review of the data, further discussion will continue from Feb 13-16th, when they will meet with building based literacy teams at each elementary school. Establishing these teams were part of the new structure created this year. The exact membership is up to the principal, but is similar to this:

Reading coach

Building based reading teacher

Staff member – perhaps a regular teacher (didn't get specific title)

Member of sped staff

Each of the meetings will be roughly 2 hours, and their purpose will be to present and understand the data.

Intervention services will be discussed, and it is possible that shifts may occur. At this time, letters will go to parents and classroom teachers to let them know about any changes.

On Feb 26th, the 2nd round program will begin

Evelyn did a presentation on progress:

Most teachers have felt that there has been a benefit from consistent intervention by trained staff. They also liked that there was data that was being used to guide the program, and that there is a mid-year assessment. They mostly agreed that there has been significant progress in reading ability.

She presented work of two students (kindergarteners).

First student didn't know any of her letters – couldn't differentiate between letters and numbers. Now she can identify all 54 upper/lower case letters and numbers, and knows their sounds. (note explanation of number 54 explained later – this includes different ways of writing certain letters – like g and a. At this point, she knows all of these things and is writing.

Another girl knew 9 letters at start of year, and now she is writing sentences.

Teacher reported that without the intervention, these students would not have made this much progress by the end of the year.

Nate: Like to add one additional point – when we started this program, when we started talking about programs like this, there were a couple of buzz words. Data driven decision making. District-wide approach. Teamwork. This program has touched on all of these things. The teams of principals, teachers, and specialists have been very effective to target individual students and see what the best intervention is.

It has also been great that the same group of coaches is circulating to all 7 schools. There is great consistency across the district.

This is to the credit of Mike McCabe, these 3 coaches, and the rest of the staff – something like 150 people.

Marty: Thank you for coming, great to hear directly from people in the trenches.

This sounds very good.

I do have a question about your note about consistency. (ed note, I think there was a reference to an issue here in the packet) What is that?

Linda: Developing the consistency and communication is a process. In order for all of this to happen, materials need to be handed out, discussions have to take place for instructions, etc.

Marty: How do you know when there are issues?

Linda: As we move around, we pick things up from our observations.

People want a clear direction and relish a clear direction.

Marty: One more question for the superintendent. Can you give us any insight into leadership positions for next year and the budgeting implications?

Nate: Answer is no. Mike McCabe is current director of the program, and Thompson Principal. He is retiring. It has been very successful having a principal direct this. It was controversial last year, but it has worked out very well. The principal has the understanding, knows pitfalls, and has a relationship with the other principals. I don't know yet how it will play out, but very happy with this year's structure.

Marty: Change is an opportunity to take a 2nd look – encourage you to do that.

Sean: Thanks for coming. What do you think is the most challenging thing facing this program? What have been your greatest initiatives?

Marie: Consistency. We want to make sure that every teacher is looking at the same interventions and the same data.

Evelyn: Sitting in at meetings has been very helpful. People come to meetings with data.

Linda: The intensity – it's been such a gift to have a consistent program for 5 days/week. We have a very systematic program. This has been great.

Sean: Has there been any integration with the speech program?

Linda: we share space, so there has been overlap, but not a direct relationship. We hope to do that more.

Sean: I think it will be important to follow these students into the middle and high schools.

Evelyn: We do have an Ottoson teacher sitting in with us to create the assessments – that has been very helpful.

Paul: I don't want to take you down the road too far into the technology, but I am curious as to how you are collecting all of this info.

We have all of the data on servers located in each school. Each teacher enters their class into a specific spreadsheet. There is some manual work done still.

Paul: Can you get this into PowerSchool in any way – in the grading component.

Marie: That is something we'd like to get to. We are working with Steve Mazzola on something like that.

Nate: I'd take this on the back of a napkin right now – I'd so please to have the data. IN the long term, we will create a way to streamline it and make better use of the information.

Paul: You have some great data to use to track these kids through their school careers and show how effective our interventions have been.

Linda: I agree. We're not there yet. Right now it is manual. We do have the information, and the teachers have it, but it is not integrated.

Paul: I think it is really important to get to the point where the data is integrated and we can demonstrate to the K-2 teachers how effective their work is.

Susan Lovelace: I don't usually like to provide parent feedback, but I'll make an exception here. It's been very beneficial that the information on the intervention is shared with the parents so that they can help with a similar approach with their children. Also, as an aside, my son says that he likes being pulled out for this program, because then he gets to miss reading!

Jeff:

Linda: We are using 3rd grade MCAS as one of the assessments.

Jeff: The important thing is that you'll have that data and be able to use it to make adjustments in what you do.

Sue Sheffler: I've had kids in schools for over 12 years. Back then, Kindergarten was a 2-hour program that was only a socialization year. Reading wouldn't start until 1st grade. In this short time, we've gotten to a point where you are doing fantastic things with an all-day Kindergarten program.

Also, we've talked about leadership, but much of the work is really done by the 3 of you. I commend you on your work.

Linda: Thank you, we need to share that with the entire staff. At the beginning of the year, we didn't know each other, we didn't know names, but now it has grown into a team.

(They clarified again about the building-based teams)

Special Education Update

BJ Cataldo: Jeff – one other way of looking at this is that one of the number one referral for special ed is reading. My hunch is that the success of this program may reduce the number of students who will have special ed needs.

(ed note: BJ has announced that she will be leaving the district at the end of the year)

It's been a busy 19 months since I started – back in June 2005 when the program review came out, there were 190 items that needed to be addressed. We're down to around 7. (committee applauded). I need to spread that appreciation down to the staff. They have worked very hard. Much of what they have had to do was administrative. We now have a foundation built to support the programs, and now we can focus on the kids and on the curriculum, and further the interaction between special ed and regular ed. It's been a very positive experience.

Some things that have definitely approved:

Timelines. We are able to meet our timelines much better than before. There are times when we are not always successful, but there are reasons, paper trails, etc.

Department infrastructure. Majority of the time our staff knows who to call for what question. We have team leads in the schools.

Vision for the future: We've begun to do that to help the dept move forward in the 21st century we have school-based meetings. These are targeted, which is helpful for the staff, and then occasionally we come back together.

Better integration between regular ed and special ed.

We have a very strong PAC group. These people have been responsible for creating some very good programs in the evening – people sometimes come from all over the state. This has been phenomenal. They've been strong contributors to the department. These are very dedicated parents. They've been part of looking at the special ed vision, and have contributed some very important ideas.

We've begun the work of looking at how we can keep more of our kids in the district.

We've discussed professional development. I've heard from staff some very useful ideas.

I really feel like our programs are in place, and we can really focus our energies on the kids, where it should be.

Nancy Campbell and Ellette DiPietro

Nate: I've asked Nancy Campbell and Ellette DiPietro here tonight to talk about what they've been doing, and what kind of directions we are moving in. When we reorganized the budget last year, we created two new Special Ed positions. We have something like 20 or so special ed programs. They are pretty wide ranging from kids with few needs and some with significant needs.

We are not expecting to be specific about our plans tonight, but to provide you with background.

They passed around some materials describing current programs. We have a lot of programs, but there may not be continuity. We might have something at a particular grade level, that doesn't continue to another year. There are some gaps.

We do have a new program at Peirce this year. The program has 3 students, including one from outside the district.

This has been a strong program. Two of the children came out of other programs that were not as good a fit for them. These two were slotted to be out of district this year, but they have been very successful by staying in the district. It's been great to have them also tag team with the regular ed teachers to give them better integration in the school.

The other program is the "life-skills" program at the Ottoson. This program has the kids doing very similar academic work to their peers. The teacher is doing a great job integrating the academic and life skills development. This has been a very successful integration.

Nancy Campbell is primarily responsible for out of district placements, and Ellette DiPietro does the in-district work.

We have been able to do some professional development at the high school working with the regular ed teachers. We've gotten a better sense of what obstacles and issues the teachers there face and given us an opportunity to share some approaches.

Ellette DiPietro: Also want to share some of our challenges.

Because it looks like we have a lot of programs, we really don't. The programs were initially set up for a particular set of children, but over the years, the programs have stretched and strayed from their original purpose. One consequence of this is that when the program becomes so stretched, it may not address the needs it was originally created for. We need to look at the programs, and assess what might be done to improve them.

BJ mentioned the inclusion that the department does. There is some inclusion, but it is not as strong a model as we would like. As a result, we might have some kids taking up seats in the special ed programs, and there are other kids who might benefit from those seats as well. If the inclusion model was better, the seats might be transferred.

The model now is very dependent on para-professionals. Our first step is now to provide a 1-1 assistant in the classroom with the student. When we do that, we are asking these people to do an educator's job, but without the education support and training. So although it looks like we are helping the child, we might not be achieving what we should be doing.

We really want to take a look at this approach. We might be reducing the number of 1-on-1's that we have, but increasing the number of specialists. This ultimately might prove to be a more effective model.

Nancy Campbell: If you look at the grid, you can see the nice arrangement of services that we have available. Especially if you look at the Ottoson. We don't have all of those programs available at the elementary level. This influences how we decide who needs to be placed outside the district.

For children who are really cognitively impaired, we end up with these children placed in the LABB collaborative. Ideally at the elementary level, we would have two tiers available. I frequently get called into meetings to help with children that we don't have a program for.

Another common theme is at the high school for kids who have referrals because of emotional needs. These are kids who may be functioning adequately academically, but really need help keeping their lives together. I'd like to see more work done for high school age students with emotional needs. There have been students who have been referred out of the district for those needs too.

Sometimes a lot of these issues all spiral together. We feel that the parents and teachers are looking for more programs to address their kids in the most effective way.

Ellette DiPietro: we do need to deal with K-5. We need to look at developing the broader based inclusion model. This is along the idea of reducing the 1:1 aides with fewer professional special ed teachers. We need to look at effective inclusion programs in other districts, and how we can do the same thing here.

We need to create these programs with sufficient infrastructure so that they can last over time – they won't be dependent on the staff that is here at the time.

This may not be a cost-saving measure in the short term. Building a quality program can be expensive – we need to invest in staff and infrastructure, but this will eventually build capacity within the district, and may ultimately result in cost-savings.

Nate: Now you can see why I'm so happy that the two of them are here. There is a lot of work to be done.

Susan Lovelace: I want to thank BJ for all of the work she has done. I know it was a huge task.

I found what you have said to be very interesting. I know that the parents and kids want to be back in the district. I think the ideas of better inclusion, and better continuity are great goals. However, we face the monetary constraints that you know about. One of the things you spoke about was re-allocation of resources. Can you talk a bit about the infrastructure changes you might envision?

Ellette DiPietro: It's important to look at the big picture. We need to look at who we are serving. We know that there are children who will need services that have to be provided out of district. We need to know what our programs are, who is responsible for them. We need to know who is responsible for the kids – the regular ed teacher, the special ed teacher? We don't have the answers yet – we are still reviewing the programs.

Susan Lovelace: I appreciate that you have to go from vision to implementation.

Nate: To contrast this with the reading program. The reading program was much more confined. The entire program is much more complex, and we are trying to work on the program while we are looking at changing it. The metaphor of carrying a broken airplane while you are flying it in a storm comes to mind. There are constant changes and new needs – new kids coming into the program, etc.

Paul: What worries me, is that if we're not meeting needs adequately early, then we get a snowball effect and have to send the kids out of the district. If we can address issues early, ultimately we can help the children more and perhaps save resources.

Do you see our enrollment figures?

They seem to show a large spike at the middle school.

Nancy Campbell: We have seen them recently. The numbers don't agree with what we are managing.

Nate: Some of this is due to our data updates into PowerSchool. There are kids in Arlington, but may be in parochial schools where we are providing some services. We want them in PowerSchool so that we can track the services.

Paul: OK, well do you see any spikes that we need to be concerned about?

Nancy Campbell: We do have a concern about some of the cognitive issues. There are some new diagnosis that are growing everywhere. Sometimes at middle school, you suddenly see a lot of referrals because of increased need to put things together academically. As the cognitive requirements increase, you see more referrals. In High School, you see a lot more of mental health diagnosis – these usually are not diagnosed at an earlier age.

Paul: Are we high, comparatively, with our special ed placements.

BJ: yes, we are higher than we should be.

Sean: Thanks for coming. You did speak about prof development. I think it is very important for our regular ed teachers to know about special ed. Can you talk about the program you did at the high school.

Charlie invited us to come and talk about disabilities in general, and then how some of these disabilities could be accommodated in a regular classroom. We have been there twice. Our last meeting was about IEP accommodations and recommendations.

We know that managing a class of 25 with 3 children with IEP's is not easy. When you multiply that by the full class load, it can become very unmanageable. We need to talk about how we can set up strategies to help with them without it being overwhelming.

Sean: How many teachers were there?

Nancy Campbell: There were roughly 40. This was a full-day workshop. We wanted to have homework. They would say please tell me about a graphic organizer and how I can use it in math.

Every single evaluation said thank you for defining what an accommodation and modification is. By defining those things, we've helped to clarify what resources are available in each area. Who people can turn to for help.

Nate: There are roughly 50 people who write IEP's in the district. One of the challenges is trying to make those consistent. One of the things that we're trying to do with the regular ed and special ed staff is to try and reduce the set of issues from thousands down to a more manageable 25 key accommodations and modifications, so that we can be more effective in implementing them. The regular ed teachers are being quite overwhelmed with all of the things they are currently being asked to do. We need to simplify.

Sean: Can you talk briefly about the inclusion model you are trying to achieve.

Ellette DiPietro: If we talk about inclusion as meaning that we are trying to integrate the students in the regular ed setting, we often see an aide in place now. Often they are taught by the aide and not the teacher. Sometimes we get an attitude that the student is not really part of the class – they are not the responsibility of the teacher, but rather the aide.

We want real inclusion, where the child really is included. We need better opportunities for co-teaching rather than parallel teaching. We currently have the look of inclusion, but it's not really the norm. It seems to happen more by accident than by design.

Marty: I'm very glad that you said they are all Arlington's children. We have a funding mechanism that sometimes pits groups against each other, and I think it is important to stress that we are all part of the community.

It's clear from what you've said that that this is a never-ending process. It seems that perhaps what we are dealing with now is what were once cohesive programs that have now lost their focus. If we review it and restructure it now, we have to make sure that we review it before 25 years have gone by and it is again incoherent.

Sue Sheffler: Want to talk about financial implications of in-district and out of district placements. We currently have ~30 children in elementary school who are out-of-district. This will cost them millions of dollars over the course of the 13 years in the schools. Please do look at how we can restructure the services here because it will be better for the kids, and can have a significant financial impact.

BJ: Important not to deprive the students of services they need because of financial considerations.

Susan Lovelace: It is not the child that costs us money, it is our inability to provide the service in district that costs us money.

Jeff: Thank you for all you have done in the last 19 months. I appreciate your honesty and directness in dealing with everything that we faced. I hope that this will continue with the department in the future.

Brief adjournment

Presentation on Diversion Program

Charlie Skidmore (AHS Principal)

Fred Ryan (Chief of Police)

Cindy Bouvier (Dir of Health, Wellness and Counseling)

Nate: I've asked Charlie and Fed and Cindy to come before us tonight to start to explain a concept. This is not meant to be a concrete proposal.

Fred: I always get requests to talk about children who are breaking law, want to know that the great majority are law-abiding.

A diversion program is a way to deal with first time offenders in a way that avoids criminal prosecution. Right now we have inconsistencies based on the discretion of the officers involved.

A diversion program might involve community service or a drug treatment program.

Sending offenders to court does not always end up with a positive, long term solution to induce youthful offenders not to re-offend.

Middlesex County does offer a diversion program, but does not include a program for school-based offenses. There is nothing that prevents us from creating our own program.

Another alternative is a restorative justice program. This brings offenders together with their victims, if there are victims. Another interesting program.

That's a quick overview of these approaches.

Questions?

Sue Sheffler: How would this be created and supervised?

Fred: There are several approaches, court-based, police-based, community-based. I think our best approach would be to use a coalition.

Sue: When you say school-based – is that school age offenders, or school-based infraction.

Fred: Infractions that happen on school grounds.

Kathy: I think these models have a lot to offer, especially if it could proceed all the way to restorative justice. I think that is very powerful.

Susan Lovelace: This has been very interesting to me – enjoyed working with Fred and Cindy. Charlie, are you aware of other programs like this?

Charlie: No, this is all new to me.

Susan: Great, we're ahead of the curve!

Paul: What are the rules? Can we decide how we participate in these programs?

Fred: We can choose on whether to participate in the Middlesex program or not. My opinion at this stage is that we would look not to engage the DA's program at this time (because of limitations), but rather create our own.

Paul: The school resource officer will be helpful here.

Nate: I don't think there can be an effective diversion program unless the schools, the police and the community are working well together. We can't be hiding things from each other. If we have silos, we won't be effective. I think it is to Charlie, Fred and the coalition's credit that we are making progress here.

Paul: The DA's program limitations is not a barrier, it does not prevent us from doing something.

Jeff: I want to clarify what the DA's restrictions might have on us.

Fred: The DA's program only covers juveniles who commit offenses outside of the school. They have their reasons for doing that. We think it doesn't do all that we would like, and there is nothing to prevent us from creating our own program.

Sean: Does this overlap with any existing program?

Charlie: I think that's what we are saying. We have detentions and suspensions, which don't do enough, and criminal prosecution which does too much. We're trying to create strong incentives and programs to help get the kids back on track. That's what we're talking about, we don't have these programs in place.

Sean: Want to talk about the role of the School Resource Officer (SRO). I think that we've don't a good job in selecting the SRO – he's accessible.

Charlie: Certainly he is a resource for forming a bridge between school and police. I don't think the SRO would be the coordinator of this program – he has a lot on his plate already.

Mary: Sorry to ask this question again. The DA's office has a program, but it does not divert school-based offenses. This has no bearing on what we do?

Fred: No, we can do what we like. We do it now, but it is very informal. We have discretion about which cases we prosecute now, and which ones we don't.

Charlie: Principals have discretion to move kids out of schools – 37H. If they were to do that county wide, principals wide might be reluctant to give up those rights. Where are we are talking about just within the town, we can do it however we want.

Marty: To me, community based seems right for Arlington. This is not a huge community, it doesn't act like a huge community. To have people collaborate in the town on this seems right. It seems more human.

Fred: For non-violent offenses.

Cindy: There is a contract involved on what the rules of the diversion are.

Fred: Right, there are clear provisions of the contract, and consequences for breaking the contract.

Sean: How does this integrate with current systems – suspension or detention. Sometimes those are effective, and sometimes they might just end up as a vacation.

Charlie: Currently we have some 5-10 day suspensions that might culminate on a 2-day in-school detention where the students are guided more. However, a more concrete program would be helpful.

Sue Sheffler: Along these lines I've become more familiar with City Year. We have many graduates of AHS who now work with City Year. Often times these kids will come back into the schools to help with exactly these types of interventions. We should explore this. City Year brings its own set of resources and experience.

I think we should also look at the Middle School. We don't have a resource officer at the middle school.

Fred: Absolutely. It is a lot of work to look at best practice research. Want to be sure that we're on board with this.

Kathy: Prevention is always cheaper in the end.

Jeff: Moved that the Supt proceed with plans for a diversion program, and report back with a plan by June 2007.

Passed 7-0.

Superintendent's Report

A motion passed that I missed. I think it was for a placeholder warrant article for town meeting.

Last year we had a warrant article on a Special Ed revolving fund. Don't know if we need another one..

Jeff moved to put the special ed revolving fund on the town meeting warrant.

When of my and Charlie's concerns is that the district has a significant concern for helping these kids that are at risk. There were many programs – perhaps 16. Creating the position of Health, Wellness and Counseling helped to put all of them under one umbrella. Guidance, Nursing, Deans, Principal all involved. They are really working to case manage the kids at risk. Often times there were things that some of the people knew that was of great benefit to share and coordinate. I want to note how many walls have been knocked down to collectively help these kids.

Smart Growth Survey has been included in your package. The town is looking at long term planning. Kevin O'Brien from the planning department has given us this survey. They are seeking input from many different corners of the town. If you would be kind

enough to complete it in the next week and return it to Karen Fitzgerald, that would be very helpful.

Sue: Kevin will be here at a Feb meeting

Nate: Posed question to staff – Other than pay me more, what could be done in the district that would increase your desire to stay in the district. One large response was better child care. We have added a new childcare program, and it is already filling up.

Sean: Do we know when this will start at Stratton?

Nate: Next September is when the program will start.

Sean: This is an old building, will we be testing for air quality and mold, etc.

Nate: I'm confident it will be a first rate facility. It will be certified by the state. It will be a self-sustaining program – there will be no cost to the town. The place that makes it so cost-effective is that all other daycare programs run all year – this one is specifically tuned to the 180 days that teachers work. It is also very convenient to have your kids within the district.

Marty: This will cover all of our costs including allocated occupancy costs?

Nate: Yes, it is definitely my intention. That will be part of the budget review of space rental. Also, our programs are still 30-40% less than other programs. I think that it is quite possible to make this attractive and fair to staff and to the district.

Ella: Had a question about diversion program – what are goals?

Nate: We want to prevent bad behavior from happening. We want to prevent it from re-happening. If it does re-occur, we want tools in place that might really help. We want to help rehabilitate and prevent re-occurrence. We will need a series of tools to help us do that. When a student does something destructive to themselves, often we want to help, but feel that we don't have enough options to deal with it.

You and Sean Conway both asked is suspension a vacation. For some kids it is a deterrent, for some kids it is a vacation. We want a wide range of interventions available to us.

Ella: I'm sure you know that this is a huge task. I encourage you to get student input on what ways might be the most effective. I don't think that this should be just at the high school. I think that it is very important for it to be in place at the middle school too.

FY07 budget update

We have done a thorough budget analysis of this year's budget – trying to assess where we are to date – looking at ~600 line items. These roll up to 6-7 categories.

All but four of the 600 are on track. There are some slight deviations, but nothing extreme. If you look at all salaries, we're collectively about 75K below budget. This is not because of great planning, but we have some openings, particularly in custodial staff where there is a civil-service process for hiring.

The places where we are not on budget are:

Special Ed Staff

Out of District Special Ed placement

Out of District Special Ed transportation

Special Ed consultants

You see the theme – our special ed spending is more than we expected.

That's part of the process. The budget process is based on the kids we know about in April. The reality is that we have substantially increased the number of kids receiving services. The number of kids getting transportation, the number of consultants we have providing these services.

Special ed is a growth business – particularly in diagnosis of autism and developmental delay. There are more kids qualifying for these programs – not just in Arlington.

There has been a paradigm shift about how the services are delivered. I think there are inefficiencies in how we operate. I mentioned that that are 500-1000 accommodations. This makes delivering services very difficult – we should have fewer standardized services.

We have had many new staff, which also results in inconsistencies

When we discussed the special ed vision, we talked about fewer services, more intensively, much like our reading program, makes sense. Intellectually, that's where we're at. Structurally, that's not where we're at. Intellectually we have shifted, but the trajectory that we started 2 years ago just keeps chugging along.

It is great that we've taking the corrective action plan from 190 to 7 issues. But none of that work addresses any of the problems I am talking about.

There needs to be more conversations with Principals and team chairs – they want more structure. But it is hard work. And it is very hard to do it at the same time the programs must continue moving forward. It is putting large strains on the staff.

One piece of good news is that we did establish the 300K special ed account at town meeting. It is extremely likely that we'll be tapping that account. It's too early to say to what degree.

Right now our heating and utility bills have been below budget – that may help offset these expenses.

I don't see anything that will blow us past that 300K reserve.

It highlights the need to address these issues in order to get the budget under control in coming years.

We do have this month's summary for the budget. We're trying to integrate the budget with the grant income. This month's summary is a little odd because we haven't integrated all of the changes yet into the system. Bottom line is that we're in pretty good shape.

Sub Committee Reports

Budget Sub-Committee

Susan Lovelace

Met tonight at 6pm.

Upcoming Budget Forum on Monday the 29th, 7-9pm in school committee room. Will be presenting the issues we face and some possible solutions.

I have tried to publicize the forum to all of the pto groups. Also have let them know that we will come and visit them at PTO meetings.

Will be hosting a survey on parent/public opinion about choices we are considering.

We have been meeting with subcommittee studying nursing. That has been very effective. There has been a lot of excitement about it. We originally had asked for this group to provide a report back to us by January. We had hoped for this because it might have budget impact. They feel that there will not be impact on the budget, and we are delaying the presentation until March 13th so that they can complete their work and that all members can be present.

Also discussed the Japanese exchange program and possible fees, and also reviewed the fees for exchange students who are attending AHS. There has been very inconsistent fee structure for exchange students.

I am going to move that if a fee is to be charged for exchange students, then it should be set at the average per-pupil cost as set forth in the annual budget.

Marty: I think that the structure will have a severe impact on the exchange program that we have heard about several times in public participation. From my understanding, the way that that organization structures their program, there is no tuition provision. If that budget amount is so critical to our overall budget, then I think we should be looking at other places.

Paul: We discussed what might be a recommended number if we decide to charge a fee.

Marty: then the policy and procedures has not dealt with this yet?

Paul: Right. We are trying to come up with something that is consistent and reasonable.

Sean: I shared many of Marty's concerns. We did discuss if there is a fee what it would be. We will plan a policy and procedures meeting to deal with the second part of this directive from the committee meeting before this.

Marty: My attempt at amateur research was that there are certain kinds of visas which require a tuition, while there is another visa which doesn't.

Sue Sheffler: I'd like to deal with the motion on the table, and know that there will be other research for policy and procedures.

Marty: Is that different than the number we provide to the state?

Nate: Yes.

Marty: It will be the budget divided by the number of students?

Nate: Yes. Sum of operating budget, grants and revenue, divided by enrollment. We will write this up explicitly.

Amended motion passed 7-0.

Policy and Procedures

Marty moved approval of BDEA

Kathy: I wanted to talk about this – I was not at last meeting (was sick), but was a member of the committee that designed this program.

At that time the committee was 9 members, mostly men, and each year they would get together and decide who would chair. Eventually it evolved into a cat fight. It was ugly.

We wanted to set up a system where the chairmanship and vice-chair were assigned very routinely. One reason for that is that the chair doesn't have a lot of power on their own. You server based on votes of the committee. It is a lot of work.

I like that new people got the chance – it is a terrific education.

I think it works. I don't see any great benefit in changing it. The committee can always change the decision in April when they elect a new chair.

It is even simpler now that it is 7 members. I don't support a change.

Marty: I'll be very brief – I don't anticipate that I will change anyone's minds. I think that this approach will eventually change. It did not anticipate frequent turnover in the committee. It prevents members from becoming too powerful, but also circumscribes involvement of more experienced members.

I understand that Paul wanted to postpone this until after the election, but see that it is inconsistent with his approach to the extension of the Supt's contract.

I understand

All of us who have ever been chair are subject to chairmenitis. Fortunately it's not fatal.

Sue Sheffler: It's getting very late.

Marty: I'm not done. Certainly there is great growth opportunities for people who serve as chair. How about the educational opportunities for junior members to see an experienced member watching a chair do it for the 2nd time around?

Paul: This has come around many times, probably 3 times this year. I have learned from other chairs, and I can help new chairs without them watching me be a chair. Our current system gets people into the swing of things very quickly – it builds the committee much faster. I wish we had postponed it indefinitely last time – instead we have to discuss it again.

Jeff: I'm going to be voting yes. I don't think it's that complicated. I wasn't here 10 years ago, don't know that history. This amendment is not contradictory to the intent or the literal words of the policy. We're talking about an amendment that preserves a policy – it preserves a rotation of the chair without politicking. It recognizes in the case of senior members who have served at least 10 years, of which we've had very few. This will only impact that member or members who stay here that long (which is not the trend). For the public when they are up for their 4th term. You have to look at whether you want that responsibility. It's a lot of work, a lot of responsibility. I think that this amendment makes eminent good sense.

Sean: Want to thank Ms. Fennelly and Mr. Schlichtman – I wasn't here then and I appreciate the history. I've been trying to look at this as how the community would want us structured. The biggest concern is the best education of our kids. The way this reads, as a new member, I would have the opportunity to become chair pretty quickly. I think that's very important. But when I'm done being chair, I think it's a benefit to look at the possibility of being a chair again. I see it both ways. I will support this change for those reasons.

Paul: I want to say one thing. I am a set of nomination papers away from being the most senior member of the committee. I wouldn't be the most talented chair, I don't think. To short circuit the policy to let me cut in line simply because I'm senior does nothing to benefit the committee. It actually hurts the committee by not advancing the committee.

Sue Sheffler: I agree with Paul.

Marty: Utterly counter intuitive.

Susan Lovelace: I've changed my mind on this four times.

Motion on floor is to change 5th line in 4th paragraph

Marty: yes

Sean: yes

Kathy: no

Jeff; yes

Paul: No

Susan L abstain

Sue S: no

3 yes, 3-no, 1 abstain – the motion fails

Secretary's report

Paul: met with group regarding field use

Scoreboard donated by Bill Armstrong. Made motion to nominate Mr. Armstrong from MASC friend of education award. Passed 7-0

Sean Conway: The SAFE group is hosting a meeting about global warming. The meetings will be on 2 days so that the same teachers will not be impacted each day. The event will be to show Al Gore's film "Inconvenient Truth" in two sessions.

At Battle of the Bands on Saturday, the STAND group raised \$3,700 for Darfur.

Sue: I thank you – I did not hear of any problems there.

Ella: To the credit of the presidents of the club, and the faculty advisor.

Received letter from Mr. Russo about events presented in the schools without proper notice.

Marty moved to move the topic to Policy and Procedures.

We should look at our policies and see if this is covered. We should then inform him of the details.

Sue: I had a conversation with Mr. Russo today, and I think we can have a productive conversation.

Committee asked Karen to acknowledge Mr. Russo's letter.

Paul: I think our policy is pretty complete on this topic. I don't think any need to revise it. I don't want to take anything from them, so I will abstain from this vote.

Sue Sheffler: In talking to Mr. Russo, his concern was that parents be advised about things that could be controversial. He is not aware of current communications.

Vote 6-0 with 1 abstention

Curriculum and Instruction

Will meet Monday at 5 to discuss special ed and special ed/regular ed overlap. And also changes to the handbook.

New Business:

When is the next retreat? April 6th. I would like to recommend that the school committee read Good to Great, and discuss it at that meeting.

Motion to adjourn