

2007 03-27 School Committee Meeting

(ed note: these notes were taken by Josh Lobel, to the best of my ability. I apologize for errors, omissions, and mangled names.)

Meeting held in Red Gym of Arlington High School

All school committee members present, except Sean Garballey who is in Geneva participating in a model UN

Sean Conroy, Student Rep

Ella Hartenian, Student Rep

Nate Levenson, Supt

Sue Mazzerella, CFO

Kevin Hutchinson, Asst Supt

BJ Cataldo, Special Ed Director

Karen Fitzgerald, Administrative Secretary

Tribute to Shirley Vedoe, former principal of Dallin School

Lauren Jastremski (Dallin 1st grade teacher) and another teacher spoke eloquently and lovingly of Ms. Vedoe, who was obviously a very special educator in Arlington.

Consent Agenda

Several routine items were agreed to. Marty Thrope asked that approval of two sets of minutes be removed from the consent agenda so that they could be corrected.

The consent agenda passed.

Introduction to Meeting

Sue Sheffler's intro to tonight's meeting. It will be a unique format.

This has been a stressful period. We want to set an example of listening and talking so that we can move forward one step at a time.

There will be public participation. We will listen for 2 hours. We have asked a moderator, Robert McKersie to help us in this process. The school committee will comment, and then there will be regular agenda.

Supt's report

People have come wanting to be heard, and I am ready to listen.

I have been asked 3 questions:

What are reasons for decision?

Why is it that it seemed to happen so suddenly?

What is my vision for the middle school?

I can't answer the first question. It was made with much thought, discussion, and not lightly. I knew it would not be popular, but sometimes leaders have to make difficult decisions.

It may have seemed sudden. There are many aspects to a principal's job, some very public, some not. The decision was made over a period of time based on all of the qualities that we want in a principal.

I want all students to be healthy, happy and well prepared. This includes phys ed, no tolerance for bullying, etc. Schools need to be happy places – we can't let state and federal mandates and lack of resources take the fun out of our schools. We have great arts programs here – that is one of the things that attracted me to this system.

Preparing our students for the 21st century is of critical importance. Need strong reading writing and math skills. We need our students to have the ability to work in groups and with diverse communities. We want to encourage creative thinking and analytical thinking.

A vision without a roadmap is ineffective. My roadmap is similar to the roadmap that has been used successfully at thousands of districts across the country.

5 key elements to roadmap

Need to apply vision to all students. Must pay careful attention to needs of special ed students.

We can't succeed as 9 separate schools. Must insure system across schools, and from level to level.

We can not succeed by working alone. Grade level teachers must share what works well with their colleagues. Strengths of the middle school must become strengths of the high school. We must share successes. The principals cannot be educational leaders without support of teachers and curriculum leaders.

Embracing change will enhance our progress. We have already done many things successfully. We have 100's of examples of success. If we have successes, isn't there an obligation to share info with colleagues.

How do we know when we're effective. Common assessments give us feedback to know how we are doing.

We must strive for constant improvement. We must change as the world around us changes.

I believe these 5 points are supported by many teachers and leadership team.

The school committee has asked me to make this vision a reality. I believe the school committee has asked me to follow this roadmap.

Very sadly, I came to the conclusion that Ms. Bouris could not be part of this vision.

Susan Lovelace: Move that we use a facilitator for public participation.

Marty Thrope: Motion is contrary to policy. While it might be a good idea, this decision was not discussed or voted on prior to this meeting. The public may not have had this expectation. I don't think it's a good idea, and I'd like the minutes to so note.

Sue Shefler: we are doing this to give public maximum participation.

Motion passed 5-1 with Marty against

Robert McKersie – moderator

I worked with the administration and union on the last contract negotiation and that's how I got to know many people who are so concerned here tonight.

I am neutral, although I have 2 grandsons in the system.

Normally we would have a time limit of 3 minutes. We will attempt to follow this rule. We have a timer and a warning buzzer that will notify you when 3 minutes are up.

We have around 30 people who have signed up to speak.

Generally speaking, we will not ask for comments from the school committee, however if there is a quick question, I may determine that it is appropriate to get a quick answer.

This is an attempt to have a reasonable discourse – let's attempt to hear each other.

Janice Bakey: grew up here. I went to Arlington public schools, as did my children. I was on school committee

We are here because we care about our children. We are modeling behavior about how adults conduct themselves. We have faced difficulties and controversies in the past with our sense of community in tact. We have had outside and internal issues, and we have survived. There are many great teachers at Ottoson, and there are also problems there.

The supt has a responsibility to run the system. The teachers have an association that should be used to resolve disputes. The supt has made mistakes, but he has also had successes. He has addressed special ed, he has added much improved intervention for K-2, he has made significant strides for diversity hiring. Any decisions should be made with the best interests of all involved.

Barbara Tilson: I am a parent of 2 children, one at ottoson and one at high school. One of my children has special needs. I have been so excited about the changes that have come about in special ed. When mr. levenson arrived, there was so little organization for special ed, and no targeted intervention. Addressing these things has been part of his action plan from day one. Literacy labs and math interventions have been very effective. Mr. levenson has been developing a 10-point vision for special ed. The mandate of no child left behind is to educate all students by 2014. mr. levenson's vision of standard's based instruction (which I think is a poor choice of words – it is not about more tests but more collaboration), but I think it's an important approach. I hope we will not abandon these initiatives. The result will be a better education for all of our students.

Cindy Starks: One child in 7th grade at Ottoson and one in 4th grade at Bishop. The decision to not renew Ms. Bouris' contract is of concern to me. Whether it is right or not, I don't know – there are many people on both sides. However, what is important is that the community work together to move forward. We need to use this as an opportunity to come to a common vision. We must do this for the sake of the students. We must work to make ottoson better by building on the legacy that ms bouris has built. We must reassure our children that this is not because of what they have done.

I would like to propose that we have an outside organization come to our community and do an assessment of Ottoson by talking to all stakeholders. The New England League of Middle Schools (NELMS) is an organization of professionals who can do such an assessment which will help provide a roadmap for how to proceed and move forward. We ask that the school committee direct the Supt to pursue this assessment. This is signed by several citizens..

Joe Daly: Good to be back in the high school. We all have many titles – one of mine is a member of the ahs hall of fame. Tonight, I am here as a former state rep to the great general court, and town meeting member for 40 or 50 years. The high school and school system mean so much to me. As a politician as I say with pride, I've never gone against a worker in town. I would like to plead with the school committee, we know that we will be having change in the school committee. We will have new members. Their makeup is going to shift. They will have a fresh look. I am not going to go through a litany of what has happened – although it all seems to have started with the traffic supervisors. We

made a bad decision there. Please retain the principal. Set aside things. We are going to have a new school committee, please let's give this a fresh start.

Judith Sumner – K12 science director and head of ace program. I'm here to talk about a small matter that may reveal some important things. In last week's advocate, Jeff Thielman had an editorial saying let's start a conversation. It had a paragraph saying that there was poor continuity between 5th and 6th grade science. I wish Mr. Thielman had spoken to me before he had written this. I am here to set the record straight about 6th grade science. We have a strong program, we adhere to mass frameworks. Our topics spiral, the weather unit in 6th grade reinforces the weather unit in grade 4. The biology work introduces new concepts and they will be part of future mcas testing. The 6th grade teachers are working hard to include creative and explorational activities.

I invite you to come speak to us and observe our classes.

Mike Healey: I'm here tonight largely because I cannot be here on April 10th. I'm here to thank marty thrope.

He's not afraid to ask questions, he's not afraid to express opinions. He's an expert on policy. He was the first one to urge budget scrutiny. I want to congratulate him again and wish him well in the future.

Jayne Thompson: Parent of 3 children – 2 have completed public school ed. My 3rd is a sophomore at Arlington high school. I want to express my great concern about mr. levenson's decision not to renew ms. Bouris' contract. I worked as a volunteer for many years at the ottoson, and I personally witnessed her contributions to make our children happy and supported. Ms. Bouris is a team player, she would not have this much support if she were not. She has made overwhelming positive contributions to our children – not only to their education, but to the well being. She has worked successfully with the staff and parents and used proven practices. I am a former OPAC chair. I find this decision incomprehensible. How did you obtain the necessary info to arrive at these conclusions?

I am a parent of an 8th grade student at Ottoson. I have not been active here, but I was appalled with the letter that you sent out. I have always been so impressed by Mr. Greco – I refer to him as a god man. We had a personal situation where a letter appealing for help for my child was ignored for almost 3 months. Do I trust those who were out there for my child or those who ignore my pleas. This happened under your watch. (ed note – not sure of exact statement -- There was some decision about not having minuteman available which was bad for my child. I support those that are here for my child – not use.

Anna Collozo: Grade 6 science and language arts. I have been an educator in Arlington schools for 15 years. I must respond to Jeff Thielman's letter in advocate. You said that a report said that the Ottoson had one of the worst special ed plans in the state. In fact, this was a citation for the entire system – not ottoson. Your article stated that the ottoson

students did not meet their ayp in 2005, but you did not mention that they did pass in 2006 through the hard work of many teachers – both regular and special ed. If you would like to know the truth, come and talk to us.

You ask if we support K-12 education – absolutely. We accept assessments and rubrics and have been creating and using them. Our issues around common assessments is not about the testing, but about balanced assessment – we do not want to teach to the test.

If you are commenting about the lack of challenge at the middle school is this a veiled call for tracking? This is in conflict with the middle school philosophy.

I'm sorry that you published this article without checking your facts. It is a sad day for you and the school committee. It is a moral obligation for us to express ourselves. We must tell the truth. If you'd like to know more, just ask, and we will tell you the truth.

Moderator: applause will cut into time for speakers

Marty Thrope: 2 hours is arbitrary. I believe we should hear everyone speak.

Chuck Coughlin: here representing the finest faculty in the state – the faculty of the ottoson middle school. I am sharing with you the truth about ottoson middle school. It is not the first time this has been shared.

I am quoting from an article by brooke leister in 2005. nate was hired by the school committee with a 6-1 vote, with Barbara Goodman expressing concern about his qualifications.

When he was hired, there was concern about his credentials in Harvard. The Harvard school committee wanted to hire him as a special projects advisor. It is on his resume that he was asst supt in Havard. He was working as an asst to the supt – not as asst superintendent. That is not the same thing. Even the man who hired him, mr. Kerosian (sp?), says that he was not the asst supt. This is the same man who was hired as a coach to ms. Bouris – was this quid pro quo? Who do you trust, someone who would misprent his resume or Ms. Bouris?

Sue Sheffler: want to correct the record about mr. levenson's hiring – it was the culmination of a year long search. We worked with a professional search firm. We checked references completely. I am reading from his employment contract from Harvard – “we are employing Mr. Levenson as asst supt”. She also read a letter from Mr. Kerosian. “I do not usually write in public situations like this, but I do not want my words to be taken out of context. Nate's role in Harvard was unambiguous and clear. ... Although I could write to you about his accomplishments while in his role in Harvard – I hired him as an asst supt – he was a perfect fit for our system – he was collaborative and effective”

Chuck Coughlin: The school committee member in Harvard told me Mr. Levenson was not asst superintendent. Were you or were you not the asst supt?

Nate: I was the asst supt – I have two contracts to that effect. It is true that I was paid a dollar for that service. The school comm. member you mention was not there when I was originally hired.

Craig nedick: Resident and teacher at Ottoson. Could I ask ms sheffler a quick question. Could you please read the signatures on the bottom of the contract?

Sue Sheffler: Signed by mr. levenson and mr. kerosiyan.

Craig: AM I correct in saying that there are no school committee members on that contract.. Am I not correct that the school community is supposed to sign the contract?

Sue: We don't sign the supt's or asst supt's contract. (ed note – I may have misquoted sue here – if you are closely attending to these detail, do not take may notes for the gospel)

Paul: The only contract we may sign directly is with the supt. The committee does not sign the asst's contract.

Craig: Can you tell us why the school committee member from Harvard said you were not an asst?

Nate: During a tight fiscal time, she was concerned about the appearance of hiring an asst. she was not a fan of the supt, or of mine.

Sheila Peoples: I have 3 kids who have gone through the ottoson middle school and 1 who is there now. I think we need to step back – there is a perception that the middle school is not doing well. If we look at English language arts mcas – they are in the very high category – what is wrong with that. In math, it is one step down. What is wrong with that? It is progressing. If you look at the sub groups, there was a one-time problem in 2005. They are now making ayp in 2006. what is wrong with that. The performance speaks for itself. The spcial needs program is a district wide program – it is not a middle school problem. It is a statistical reporting problem because there are subgroups that are counted in middle school that are not counted in elementary school you are taking one data point to illustrate your point – that is rubbish. I trust ms. Bouris with my kids. MCAS is only one tool to assess our leader. The safety of my kids is another measure. She is a dedicated leader, she is respected by her staff. It is sickening that this committee is even thinking of letting her go. We need to keep ms. Bouris in this system, and maybe it is the supt that needs to go.

Lisa Sullivan: I have two in the system, and 2 have graduated. I have seen many changes, but none like this. After hearing this rumor about ms bouris last year, I dismissed it last year. In several decisions last year, the supt said that he has made bad

decisions – the crossing guards, etc. There have been so many programs that have been lost since the school committee and Mr. Levenson came to our system. We need to take a closer look at what Mr. Levenson is doing before it is too late. With all of the retirements, we should have taken notice before. The need is for Ottoson to have good leadership. Ask the students and the parents. They have good leadership there now. We put you in office, but you are not listening to us. We want our school committee to represent us. We want you to stand up for what you believe in – as you did when you were trying to get our votes. We want you to stand for us, and not try to save face. We want the people we voted for to stand up and fight the good fight. We encourage an early buyout of the Supt's contract. I know there are many questions that cannot be answered tonight. I would encourage you to have a QA at the next school committee meeting. We want to have conversations with the Supt, with you, and with Ms. Bouris. I want to thank the citizens of Arlington for standing together. I want to thank Marty for representing us so passionately, we will surely miss you.

Pauline Fennel: I want to speak about an issue that has some bearing. I retired 8 years ago after 26 years as a special ed teacher at the Ottoson and elsewhere in our system. I was hired in the 70's when the system took special ed seriously. There were challenges in those early years, but we had a program that was the envy of many other systems. We faced those challenges and improved. Paul Lamereaux supported us, as did Supt Walter Devine. They understood the needs of these kids. In the 80's, there was a sea change in the movement. I finished my career under Kathleen Donovan and Marie Biscobis. We were told to keep our numbers low and to mainstream these kids. I was called to the carpet by the director when I spoke up for these kids. I didn't feel that what we were doing was appropriate – there was pretense that we were doing the right thing. I wasn't too happy to retire. And it said something that my position wasn't filled – putting additional load on the staff who remained.

I say that you should not put pressure on the Ottoson – I say not so fast. I encourage an assessment. I encourage you to explore this fully, I ask you to compare yourselves to other schools who are more successful. How many aides do we have, what about follow up work? Are there sufficient alternative classrooms. You should find out if there are sufficient resources at the Ottoson, or if it is still a deceit. Stavroula Bouris cannot spin gold out of straw without help.

Claudia Hughs – lifelong resident of Arlington. My husband works for the town, and I substitute teach in the elementary schools. I have 3 kids at the high school and 1 in the middle school. I hear the committee asking for money all of the time – we ask you to support us tonight. When the teachers say something isn't working I think you should listen to them. Especially with the MCAS. We have tried to encourage schools to compete against each other, to teach to the test. This is not right – how does it make the other schools feel?

I have worked with Ms. Bouris many times while my children were at the Ottoson. She has been a class act. If there was ever a problem, she was always there to resolve it – she's the best thing going up there. Please keep her.

Joseph Roselli: Town meeting member, retirements board, former police officer. Recently appt to state and municipal association for retired employees. Supervisor for first national stores and many other positions.

I don't know this young lady. But I ask, is her termination justified? I know that as a supervisor, if I had an employee that was not doing what I thought, I would work with this employee. If this lady was covered under the union, you would never get away with this – there would be a right of appeal.

As for the school committee – you have not justified the action either. Have you as supt justified this to the school committee? Why doesn't the committee go into executive session so that he can explain it to them. I don't know this lady, but I think there is real good reason why you should reconsider your actions.

Ed Rogers: As the most senior staff member at Ottoson, with over 30 years working as a counselor, I would like to offer some of my opinions. Ms. Bouris is one of the most hard working and effective principals I have worked with. I have found her to be friendly, compassionate with students and staff. She is also firm and demanding.

Mr. Levenson, you made the mention of team. When I was first hired, I spoke to Eric Saum who told me you would like it in the middle school – it's all about team. He was right. Ms. Bouris is on top of so many things. Being principal is clearly not just a job. Her dedication is outstanding. I don't think people realize what a day in the middle school is like. Every day, there are crisis that involve the utmost skill on the part of teachers, counselors and administration. I have been very impressed with her clinical abilities as a social worker. I work in many settings as a social worker. I've worked many years with alcoholics – there's an old adage t here – if it ain't broken – don't fix it. The middle school is not broken. In my opinion, it does not need a major fixing. On the other hand, this whole process is breaking the school on the backs of the staff. This could take years to fix. In my opinion, that would be a waste of time. I call on you to renew the contract of stavroula bouris.

Peter Davis: Parent, resident, have 7th grader at ottoson. Administrator of Arlington list.

Want to talk tonight about trust. Trust is a critical component of any organization, especially a school. The principal, ms. Bouris has clearly earned the trust by her actions. The appeals by the faculty and parents is good evidence of that trust. She has been principal and asst principal for many years. Many of her former students and their parents have offered their support. Their MCAS scores have improved in 2006 – they passed their AYP.

On the other hand, Mr. Levenson comes with a very thin resume. We appreciate that he is working for the kids in our system, but he has not earned our trust. He comes from a business background – from a family business that made cranes, etc. His educational experience is from the Broad Academy – a part time program at Harvard for business

people and others who are trained to lead urban schools. Education is much different than business – in business we abandon defective parts. That is not what education is about. Mr. Levenson said that he has no vision for the middle school – his vision is for a k-12 system. I'm not saying that Mr. Levenson does not know the difference between business and education – I suspect that he knows that he is not manufacturing MCAS test takers.

But what are his credentials? Why should we trust him? Why should we trust him with our children? He must convince us that greater good will come from his decision regarding Ms. Bouris, or if he can't then he should resign.

Jeffrey Carver – former Ottoson parent. I'm coming here to extend my support for Ms. Bouris and for the things we value in a school system. I don't argue the importance of objective measures, yet neither do I think we should kneel at their altar.

I want to share what I think a principal should be. I think it should be someone who reaches out to the community, who earns the respect of the faculty, someone who will go the extra mile extending herself to home schooled parents or to the kids who are walking to school on a cold winter morning and need someone to direct traffic. I believe I am describing Stavroula Bouris. The letter said that she was not hired because of fit – I suggest that there is no one who is a better fit for our community. I know that as a school committee, you don't hire principals, but I urge you to set a preference as you set policy.

Kathryn Gandek-Tighe -- have student at Ottoson and am PTO president at Dallin. I was recently asked what I thought about Ottoson. I had felt confident about Ottoson – now I am concerned. I don't know what to say to people when they ask me about this. I am a reasonably informed parent. If I am confused, imagine what other parents must be feeling. I don't know what the issues are. It seems like one of the main issue is communication, which has been an issue in other controversial decisions – such as the Bishop bus and crossing guards. Shouldn't we be reaching out to the community to gather input on these decisions? We are squandering good will – we have schools that can't afford nurses and librarians. We are asking adults to fill in for crossing guards. We cannot afford losing good will. I do want to acknowledge Susan Lovelace's attendance at PTO meetings to discuss the budget. However, I want to encourage the administration to do the same.

Kevin McCarthy – parent of two students at Ottoson. I want to talk about communication and trust. I want to talk about how changes are going to happen. For me, actions speak louder than words. A valued program is scheduled out of the school day. There is not communication about it. By the time it is discussed, we are told it's too late – maybe next year. Who knows what will happen at the Ottoson – by the time we are told what changes will happen, will it be too late.

Sean Conroy: I would ask to suspend the 3 minute rule – as student rep to the school committee I have been asked to speak.

I prepared something to say. Usually I stay quiet on issues relating to staff, but when issues arise that affect students I feel it is important to speak.

Yesterday both sides in the struggle in Ireland met with each other. They were able to set aside the violence of the past.

We must not allow the horrors of the past to be an impediment to our future. These men have been willing to work with each other.

Over the past several weeks, I have seen a breakdown in respect between parents, teachers and students. Let me say that the voice of 100 teachers should not be ignored.

Our school system is on a tight budget. We have many great programs. I appreciate Mr. Levenson's ability to navigate and manage this budget. Several weeks ago we spoke about the importance of an important adult in every child's life. When you are looking for those adults, I ask you to look no further than the teachers in this room. One of the teachers who held that place in my life left our system for a better paying job in another district. How can we retain these teachers without paying them more. We must work together as a community. Reconsidering a decision is not a sign of weakness but one of strength. An old Irish saying is that Strength Lies in Unity. Let's have a conversation, let it include all people – parents, teachers, students and principal Bouris. Nearly every student I have spoken to has agreed with this position. I ask you to reconsider.

Lori Talanian – parent of Stratton students – never have had children at the middle school. I am concerned, I need questions answered. I need to know how your roadmap will improve the education for our students in the middle school. I am nervous about sending my child there next year. I want to know how you are going to bridge the gap between the administration and the staff? From a business perspective, I know that disgruntled employees are not effective employees. I ask you to delay your decision – take a year to think this through. I am concerned about sending my 5th grader to a school which will have so much turmoil. I respect the teachers there, I have never heard one word of ill will towards the principal. Please clarify your roadmap. I'm going to go to the Ottoson for the first time on Thursday – I will hear what they are planning, but will you change it?

Amy Duke: speaking as Arlington resident for 22 years, as a parent who has sent 4 kids to elementary and middle school, and as an 8-year ace teacher. I am here to support Ms. Bouris and to express that this is a severe blow to the Ottoson community. The ace program serves the academically able. Our students have made significant progress on the MCAS, both in middle school and at the high school – which builds on the middle school success. Academic success is not the only thing we must support – we must support the social and emotional success of our students too – without that nurturing environment, we will fail. Arlington has always expressed that in relationship to our students and faculty. I have personally had much support from our community – particularly when my husband died 7 years ago. Part of this strong expression of support

in Arlington is the support for our 7 elementary schools. Ms. Bouris represents all of these values which Arlington holds.

Julie McDaniel – resident, ottoson teacher in 6th grade of math and language arts. The recent decision has focused a lot of attention on ms. Bouris' leadership abilities, as well as those of the supt, Nate Levenson. I have tremendous confidence in Ms. Bouris – she is the epitome of grace under pressure. We have felt under pressure from the administration since mr. levenson arrived here 2 years ago. It is true that our AYP scores in 2005 were not good, but these improved in 2006. we were in good company with many other districts. It seems that the only one who benefited from this good news in 2006 was mr. levenson who earned a salary increase. There has been great pressure to employ more assessments, more testing, which has been counter productive. I was present at the march 13th school committee meeting. The school committee does have the ability to not rehire the supt in 2008. sadly this may be too late for many of the faculty who move on to other communities.

Sandy Caffelle – 30 year veteran – teaching science and language arts in 6th grade. Reading a letter on behalf of non-tenured faculty.

Arlington schools are at a crisis. Staff who feel increasing pressure to succeed on standardized test scores were shocked when ms. Bouris was not renewed – she is an extremely effective leader.

On march 13th, many supporters came to the school committee meeting – there was hostility towards the crowd. Bear in mind that the group had come to the committee because this was the appropriate venue. Instead, we were treated like trouble makers. In general, we were treated with great disrespect. There have been unsubstantiated statements about the quality of education at the ottoson. We are facing a crisis. When the school committee is unresponsive to the community, then we say that the whole system is in crisis. We have severe reservations about the system. These concerns will be expressed again and again. We demand that the school committee stop acting as partisan partners with the supt, and instead act as our representatives.

Donna Dolan: parent, teacher at Ottoson in 6th grade. Also reading a statement from a non-professional status teacher.

We have worked side by side with our colleagues, and it has been a pleasure to be working with them. Since I have worked here fewer than 3 years, I do not have professional status, and therefore can't risk speaking personally. I am concerned about the demise of the Ottoson middle school. I came here from out of state. I told my old friends about the supportive staff and great programs that were in place to help children who were in need. The students are articulate, they are leaders, they are passionate and caring. Principal bouris embodies and inspires these qualities. The atmosphere at ottoson is different now. There are tears in the lunch room. We feel misled by the statement of the supt when he arrived that he would support and respect our staff. He has done neither. We wonder why someone who they respect and admire is being forced to

leave. I ask you to consider which leader should be leaving the Arlington school system. Principal Bouris is dedicated to the success of her staff and students. Mr. Levenson's decision is a grave error. Ms. Bouris is the heart and soul of our school. Removing her will be a mistake. I urge the committee to do whatever you can to work hard in these last few hours to save our school.

John Burns: Was principal for 19 years, husband to Ann Burns. I've taught at Boston College, at Lesley, etc. After my retirement I served as an interim principal at the Ottoson Middle School. While I was there, I had a chance to observe Ms. Bouris. She is excellent. She is loved by her faculty. Ms. Donovan and I often thought she would leave Arlington to be an asst supt or supt in another district. I come forward because I think a big mistake is being made.

I don't envy you Mr. Levenson. You can change your decision and be a hero, or you can keep your decision and you will have an open wound for 5-6 years. It will be difficult. You say you have a roadmap – I encourage you to get out your Rand McNally and find a different route.

Vicki Ford: 15-year resident of Arlington. Worked hard on last override and active member of Stand for Children. Although my husband and I don't have children, we believe in education, and work hard to support our schools. Despite the severe budget issues of the recent years, Mr. Levenson has been able to do many positive things – K-2 reading intervention, restructuring school day, increased professional development, improvements in special ed.

We are here tonight to talk about the Ottoson. I have already said I don't have children at the Ottoson, but want to share some comments that come from conversations I have had in the last several weeks. What will happen at the middle school? What will happen if the supt hires a principal with same communication issues that he has? Parents with children already at the Ottoson are concerned. They don't see the connection to a 21st century education. They are not seeing the connection with what is happening now. People with kids who have special needs are concerned that the programs they rely on will not be there next year. Faculty feel pressure to conform. Many believe in a strong K-12 system, but are concerned about how these changes will be made. I hope that you will foster communication in the future. I encourage you to form a citizen's advisory committee.

Larry Greco: Want to make some comments about listening. At the beginning of the meeting you invited us here, and said that you wanted to hear what we have to say. I am concerned that you have already advertised Ms. Bouris' position. How could you say you want to listen, when it appears you have already made up your minds. You still have an opportunity to listen and I hope you hear.

Ann Marie Bouts – parent of student who graduated from Ottoson and is now in 9th grade. I don't feel comfortable speaking in a public forum like this, but I felt I must speak in behalf of Ms. Bouris. I am a language and reading specialist with 30 years experience. I

have the utmost respect for ms. Bouris – she manages a middle school magnificently – she makes this difficult task. It astounds me that you can say that she is not a good fit for Arlington – if she is not a good fit, then who is. If you stick with this decision, I will be the toast of the town that I work in when I take her with me.

Sue Sheffler thanked Mr. McKersie for his work as moderator.

10 minute recess

School committee response

Susan Lovelace: it has taken me some time to collect my thoughts. I don't have a prepared statement because I wanted to listen to what was said.

I have learned a lot tonight. I deeply respect the teachers and parents who came out tonight. I respect the passion that I have heard. I understand that there has been a serious breakdown in communication in the district and that has undermined the trust that you have in nate and in us. I am concerned that you feel you have been treated with disrespect. I have also heard the concern from the parents who are worried about what their children will face when they enter ottoson.

I find these things heart wrenching.

I am looking for ways to build these bridges. I know there is one answer you are looking for tonight. That is not an answer I am in a position to give. I ask that we support cindy stark's recommendation of bringing in NELMS (new England league of middle schools) to work with our middle school community on a comprehensive assessment on how to move forward.

Seconded by ms. Fennelly.

Jeff Thielman: I'm the guy who wrote the letter in the advocate, so I'm do for a response. I want to thank all of you who have come here tonight to share your passions, ideas, concerns with us. That is what a democracy is about. The anger you feel is understandable. As many of you know I work with an organization that has schools all across the united states, and I am in many of those schools. I know that a school is a family, and when one member of that family is in trouble, I understand that you respond with anger.

I know that there are many wonderful aspects to our middle school. I know that our faculty is a group of learners – they are constantly looking for ways to improve, new ways of teaching, etc. we have been placed in an incredibly difficult position. We have people in the ottoson community who are angry, who feel betrayed, and don't feel listened to . I understand that. We have a new supt, who we hired 20 months ago who is trying to make change in the Arlington public schools. The one thing that I have concluded for sure from the discussions tonight and from the many emails I have

received. There is clearly a lack of communication and lack of good process. If there's one thing I take away from tonight, it's that we have to do a better job of listening and communicating and getting buy in to what we are trying to do as a district. It is important that as we supervise the supt it is important that we emphasize that it is important that he do this better.

I am going to go home and think about what I have heard. I will think and I will pray. (applause). I don't want to get anyone's hopes up. I want to talk about the evaluation of the supt. His contract is up in 15 months. It is our responsibility to evaluate him in all ways. We will take into account everything that we've heard tonight – the evaluation is about the totality of his performance. I am not going to vote for Susan's motion – but I think it would be a good idea to refer that to a subcommittee. I welcome the discussion about what I wrote in the advocate – that's fair game. I welcome that conversation and all others.

Susan Lovelace: withdrew her motion.

Marty Thrope: Mr. Thielman mentioned evaluation. What I heard tonight fleshed out what I felt a year ago – it's pretty much what I thought when I did his evaluation a year ago.

I'd like to share something that Sean said to me – he's concerned about low morale and it's affect on teaching and learning. The genie is out of the bottle, if the school committee does anything resembling stonewalling, it will only get worse.

Paul: This is a difficult place to be. Part of the difficulty is I live this every day because I work in public education, and I see these things from both sides. When we hired nate, we had just gone through a change in leadership at the high school because the community did not support that principal.

As a result of that, people who supported teaching and learning, we brought in 4 final candidates. We put all 4 through the same tests – we had all of them talk to whoever they would like to during the course of the day. We then had them report back to us what they had learned about AHS. The person who had the best answers, the best observations about the high school, we found mr. levenson to be most perceptive. When we interviewed people in Harvard about nate's experience, we found a very divided school committee. We did find people who could have hated him who were very impressed with the things he had done. We told him that we had a very good system. We told him that we wanted him to make the best system in the state. When he walked in the door, we were in such disarray with our special ed that the state demanded we fix many things that were wrong. He did that. That is the context of how I know the supt. It does not match the context of what I am hearing in the room.

I have to ask myself if he is making the right decision here. I have heard what people have said. I am dealing with as much of a black hole as you are in terms of the actual information.

I have heard the love and passion that has come into this room. I don't have the info I need. The conversations here, and the conversations there don't match.

(ed note, unfortunately, at this point, my battery ran out – the rest is from memory)

Kathy Fennelly: It's not black and white. There are 300 people here with 300 different opinions on direction, but we can only go in one. We must ultimately make decisions about which way that way will be.

Ella Hartenian: student forum on april 10th to hear from the candidates. Many students will be voters for the first time in this election, and we are excited about the opportunity to be well-informed.

Meeting adjourned