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School Committee Minutes 02/08/2011

Approved by the Arlington School Committee April 12, 2011

The Arlington School Committee
Regular School Committee Meeting
Tuesday, February 8, 2011
7:30 p.m.

Present: Mr. Joseph Curro, Chair, Ms. Leba Heigham, Vice Chair, Ms. Cindy Starks, Secretary, Mr. Thielman, Mr. Joseph Curran, Dr. Kirsi Allison-Ampe and Mr. Judson Pierce.

Dr. Kathleen Bodie, Superintendent, Ms. Diane Johnson, Chief Financial Officer, Mr. Mark Ryder, Director of Special Education, Ms. Linda Hanson, AEA Representative, Student Representatives Ms. Maggie Griesmer and Ms. Karen Fitzgerald, Administrative Assistant.

Absent Dr. Wallis Raemer, Interim Assistant Superintendent, Steve Pereira, AAA Representative

Mr. Curran exited the meeting at 8:50 and returned at 8:56 p.m.
Ms. Griesmer exited the meeting at 9:30 p.m.
Mr. Ryder exited the meeting at 11:00 p.m.

Mr. Curro opened the meeting at 7:30 p.m.

Reflection, Remembrance and Recognition

Mr. Curro reflected on the upcoming holiday of Valentines Day. Mr. Curro held a brief moment of silence for Varsity Hockey Coach Mr. Bill Langone's wife Paula, who passed away suddenly over the weekend.

Mr. Curro was pleased to be joined by the Elementary Chorus of 4th and 5th Grade students and the director Ms. Gina Sylva and her husband Tom who entertained the committee.

Public Participation (Per File BEDH, Arlington School Committee Policy Manual)

- Speakers will be allowed three (3) minutes to present their material.
- Issues requiring extensive discussion may be deferred to a future meeting with a scheduled agenda item.
- All remarks will be addressed through the chairperson of the meeting.

Mr. Sean Harrington, student of Arlington High School and Chairman of Arlington High School Chapter of Republicans informed the committee of the National Teen Age Republican Leadership Conference in July and asked the community to support this cause.

Mr. Michael Levi, SEPAC Chair has been charged to advise the School Committee on Special Education matters and issues. Mr. Levi commends the progress of Special Education in Arlington, such as the Peirce co-taught classrooms and Mr. Levi urges the committee to keep a view on Special Education and the students in the program.

Ms. Juli Brazile was speaking on behalf of FYArlington tonight and said this is a new citizen advocacy group that's been formed to get the community involved working on solutions with the town and schools. She informed the School Committee, the Board of Selectmen, the Town Manager, and Town Department Heads will hold a public forum on March 3 to discuss budgets for the town and schools.

Mr. Jim Pieroni reflected on the increase costs of gas, heating, transportation costs and food and Mr. Pieroni understands the crisis we are all in with the budgets, but he claims that the user fees the school is charging could be illegal. Mr. Pieroni will provide copies of his research to the full committee. Mr. Pieroni suggested a flat fee of \$175 per student instead of any overrides that would be a hardship for the community members on fixed incomes.

Snow Days/Calendar

Dr. Bodie said decisions are made very early in the morning due to snow days and reminded parents that they should exercise their own decision to send their children to school on snowy days. All roofs have been looked at all schools and town buildings. Dr. Bodie's concerns are now that we have already had five snow days and with the uncertainty of the rest of the winter, the discussion has been had with the unions to propose to the school committee that the professional day on February 28 become an early release day. This would make June 24th the last day of school unless we have other snow days, then additional discussions would have to happen.

Ms. Starks moved that the Arlington Public School's calendar be amended such that February 28, which is a district Professional Day, be rescheduled as an early release day. Schools on February 28 will be dismissed at 11:30 with no lunch served, seconded by Ms. Heigham.

Voted: 7-0

Ms. Heigham asked Dr. Bodie about the instructional minutes with the early release of 11:30 instead of 2:30 p.m. Dr. Bodie is comfortable with this plan at this time; regulations states 900 minutes along with 180 days are mandatory.

Ms. Heigham moved that the Superintendent is instructed to consult with representatives of the Arlington Education Association regarding other possible calendar changes and to bring any further recommendations to the School Committee for approval, as specified by File ICA: School Calendar of the Arlington School Committee Policy Manual and Article IX of the Agreement Between Arlington School Committee and Arlington Educations Associations Unit A 2006-2009, seconded by Mr. Curran.

Voted: 7-0

Fiscal Year 2012 Budget Discussion

Dr. Bodie said we would have at the Public Hearing a detailed budget that will be considered by the School Committee. Dr. Bodie said all budget documents are provided on our website.

Five principals present are: Ms. Sheri Donovan, Thompson, Mr. Steve Silvestri, Bishop, Ms. Stephanie Zerchykov, Bracket, Mr. Alan Brown, Stratton, and Ms. Deb D'Amico, Hardy and that Ms. Rossi and Ms. Hartley were ill.

Ms. D'Amico had been asked to share the impact of the budget reductions on the elementary program and said the effects are not theoretical they are very real. The two major proposed budget reductions are increased class sizes and loss of instruction in the Arts and Physical Education.

The elimination of 15 to 20 teaching positions at the elementary level will make the average class size 28 students. The reduction of Art and Physical Education for students would be class time just one day a week.

The Elementary Principals see an impact on two critical components of effective schools:

Frequent, high quality interactions among students and between students and teachers

- Less small group and individual time with teacher

- Less time and opportunity for differentiated instruction, conferencing in writing, extensions to curriculum, opportunity to meet with reading groups

- Decreased project-based learning

- Less time for student talking and discussion – more teacher directed instruction

- Less time for teachers' response to the "teachable moments" those are the bedrock of personal connection around learning

Crowded classrooms cannot adequately provide for small group learning spaces, interest centers, and room for children to spread out and learn

Opportunities for professional conversations among teachers about their students' learning

Common planning time threatened
Successful reading intervention program will be compromised
Effective Science and Social Studies instruction rests on innovative practice that is often the result of opportunities for teachers to collaborate and share best practice. Time to do so will be decreased.

The committee members expressed concern with the large class sizes, fewer specials, library schedules, teaching assistants covering classroom time, historical average class sizes. Other years parents covered art classes and it was suggested to ask again for parents support in covering these classes.

The principals said if a special were cut now, it most likely would not be brought back into the budget. Teaching Assistants are in the classrooms to provide support for students and if they have to be pulled to cover the library or planning time for teachers, then less support is delivered to students. Dr. Bodie agreed the reductions are grim and said previously she tried to make reductions with the least effect on classrooms, with reducing administration, supplies, text books, custodial and secretarial staff previous years, now the teachers would be affected.

Dr. Bodie brought up the MSBA will be meeting tomorrow to decide on the schematic design for Thompson School. The Thompson School Building Committee had a recent vote to instruct our architects to build our school for \$20 million and all indicators show that we will have a new Thompson Elementary School. We cannot use the money that is in place for this project for any other purpose. With the Thompson Elementary Schools current cost to heat the building, the old boiler that could go any day, and the hot water heater is going and the list goes on. Dr. Bodie said to spend money on any of these repairs when she is very confident the Thompson Elementary School project will move forward, is not cost effective. Dr. Bodie is looking at an option to have Thompson Elementary students moving out of the building next year. The students would be located in two or three of the current elementary schools.

Dr. Bodie and Mr. Curro said the discussion on moving students out of Thompson Elementary School would continue.

Mr. Curro thanked the elementary principals and acknowledged Mr. Alan Brown's announcement of his retirement and that he would be sorely missed.

Mr. Curro said Ms. Juli Brazile made reference to the suggestion made at the Board of Selectmen's meeting to add and organize public forums on the budget with the Board of Selectmen and School Committee to discuss both town and school budgets and to help raise awareness of the budget crisis.

Mr. Curran moved to authorize and direct the School Committee Chair to contact the Chair of the Board of Selectmen to offer the School Committee's full support and willingness to assist in joint activities to raise awareness of Arlington's fiscal crisis, and to express the Committee's ongoing commitment to participating in long-range planning activities to address the crisis, seconded by Ms. Starks.

Voted: 7-0

Athletic Advisory Committee.

Mr. Curro said due to past rate schedules on Athletic Fees that were presented to families at the beginning of the school year and how it has caused heated discussions it had been suggested to create of an Athletic Advisory Committee. Mr. Jack Crowley, Chair of the Athletic Advisory Committee is here to present the Athletic Progress Report dated February 8, 2011.

Mr. Crowley said the committee had met at least eight times and their mission is to ensure that every student in Arlington has the opportunity to participate in any sport they choose at the lowest possible cost to the student. The Athletic Advisory Committee was created due to parent concern over the sharp increase in 2010 user fees and the large family cap. The subcommittee presented the following updates on Advertising Initiative - PeirceField location, CBDG submission – warrant article for \$50,000, in the process of establishing the Arlington Athletic Foundation Inc., High School and Ottoson parent Poll Results. Student representative Maggie Griesmer read the results from the Athletic survey.

Mr. Crowley said that the result that most surprised the Athletic Advisory Committee is that most parents are willing to pay a fee for sports. The Activity through Two Sport Seasons did see a drop in students from the previous year. Mr. Crowley reviewed the fees from surrounding communities, and said Arlington is the highest in the DCL league that we are currently playing in and the Middlesex league that we will be going into next year. Mr. Crowley reviewed all purchase orders for the last four years and noted they never exceed \$200,000 in expenses. Mr. Crowley said the cost of the programs are not the cause of the problem, it's the fee structure that is the problem. Mr. Crowley and the committee wanted this to be fair and equitable. The activity through two sports seasons is that it looks like there are 123 fewer participants.

The progress with the collection of fees to date is the following: 707 Participants through Winter Sports, 73 Scholarship recipients, 634 Paying participants w/ 8 having a balance due. Over 95% Collection Rate and an 80% Collection rate was the basis for the existing family cap. Only seven families have reached the Family Cap, \$306,300 Collected (Includes 2/15/11 credit card payments), Gate receipts to date of \$20,000 + CDBG of \$8,000=\$28,000. Mr. Kevin Wall, Attorney, CPA, member of the Athletic Advisory Committee spoke on the legality of current fees and he thinks that this is a violation of proposition 2 ½. Mr. Wall pointed out factors to distinguish fees from taxes and references a violation of proposition 2 ½ in Emerson College vs. Boston.

Mr. Crowley asked the School Committee to reduce the family cap to \$1,200 and said this would not cause any concern with the budget because all fees received will be over the amount budgeted.

Mr. Crowley had already requested to meet with the Budget Subcommittee and continues to wait to meet with them to discuss budget numbers further.

Mr. Curro had suggested waiting until March 1 to take any action with the reduction of the family cap. Ms. Heigham did receive Mr. Crowley's request to meet but has no date yet when it would be possible to meet. Ms. Heigham asked why a decrease on family caps rather than actual fees to sport. Mr. Crowley replied that is was the way the School Committee set the fees and voted the fees this way and the whole family cap would benefit a family more than just one individual sport.

Mr. Curran pointed out the School Committee made the decision to support the fee structure last spring without this detail of research and suggested the following motion, to accept the Athletic Advisory Committee recommendation to the family cap of \$1,200.00.

Dr. Allison-Ampe cannot second the motion until she can verify the numbers and would like to see a spreadsheet of the numbers before supporting this. Mr. Curro asked Mr. Dever if this could wait till March 1 and then he could receive the right information and make an informed decision by March 1. Ms. Starks would like to see the numbers during the Budget Subcommittee meeting and said we need legal advice from Juliana Rice regarding the Progress Report received from the Athletic Advisory Committee that Arlington Public Schools is charging a tax versus a fee.

After no one on the School Committee seconded Mr. Curran's motion, the following motion was made:

Mr. Thielman moved to direct the Chief Financial Officer and the Superintendent to meet with Town Counsel Juliana Rice to get an assessment of the Emerson College vs. Boston, seconded by Ms. Heigham.

Voted: 7-0

Recess 9:55 – 10:05 p.m.

Vote to endorse CDBG application

Mr. Curran moved to endorse the Community Development Block Grant Funding Application submitted by the Athletic Advisory Committee and Arlington High School Athletic Department for the purpose of funding athletic fee scholarships on the basis of financial needs and to authorize and instruct the Chair to send a letter of support to the Director of Planning and Community Development, seconded by Ms. Heigham.

Voted: 7-0

Readiness Emergency Management REMS Grant

Dr. Bodie introduced Ms. Kathy Kaditz, previous House Dean for five years and Project Director of the REMS Grant. Ms. Kaditz said all Goals have been met per grant timeline; the grant is completed except for filing the final report. She is awaiting FPO's approval of interim report, a prerequisite, before submitting the final report

Ms. Kaditz presented the following report to the School Committee:

Final Goals Achieved Fall 2010:

- Conduct four tabletop exercises:
 - The first one was for district level administrators using the new District Emergency Communication Book, developed by our school safety consultant
 - Three tabletop exercises were conducted using the administrative emergency policies and procedures flip charts.

Tabletop exercises were conducted for elementary school personnel, middle and high school personnel. They were each 2.5 hours in length.

All personnel were given PDP points and a \$50.00 stipend, from grant funds, for attending the training. Participation was strong especially among elementary staff.

- PowerPoint training tool with notes were given to building principals. The PowerPoint was used to introduce faculty in the use of classroom flip charts during a faculty meeting early in the fall at which time classroom flipcharts were also distributed to building principals.
- Lucite holders for administrative and classroom flipcharts were installed district wide. John Flood did an excellent job.
- Safe Serve training was completed by cafeteria staff district wide, arranged by Denise Boucher.
- CPR training was completed by Lucille Nicholson. Number of participants exceeded grant goals.
- Parent emergency information brochures were distributed to each school. They were created by our school safety consultant, aligned with our procedures and policies. Brochures are now available online, but copies are also available to hand out at school events. They will be mailed annually in the "back to school" packet. The purpose is to remind parents of what to do in an emergency, remind them to view the parent portal on the emergency website and to remind them to update their emergency contact information whenever it changes.
- One evening parent meeting was conducted re: school safety procedures as required by the grant. Ellen Digby assisted in the presentation. Principals were asked to also conduct one for their PTOs, tailored to the needs of each school.

I attended the AHS and OMS trainings.

- Principals were asked to conduct one assembly for students on school safety procedures in the fall. Wallis Raemer will follow up to make sure they were completed.
- Alert Now, an emergency notification system was contracted by AHS, OMS and three elementary schools as a pilot program. PTOs paid for the service this year. Next year it is the expectation the district will pay for Alert Now in all schools (\$2.50 per student, per year, plus a \$500.00 installation/IT fee). It is an invaluable communication tool in emergencies but also for the day to day operation of schools. Half of all school children in the U.S. are currently covered by Alert Now.
- Principals will schedule one lock down drill and one evacuation drill before the end of the 2010-11 school year. Ellen Digby and Bryan Gallagher are supporting the schools in their effort. Ellen is scheduling the drills.
- A school safety online survey was given to all staff, parents and students grades 3-12 in November/December to assess the effectiveness of the grant (baseline data taken last winter) and to help us determine current safety needs which still need to be addressed. Our outside evaluator used an encrypted version of professional survey monkey to administer the survey, which satisfied David Good's criteria for surveys conducted through the APS website. Participation and results were better than expected, a credit to a very caring, committed, professional staff at all levels.
- Administrative Go Kits were given to all principals. Nurses and principals were all given red emergency canvas, waterproof over the shoulder briefcases for emergency supplies and student contact and health information.
- The emergency website portal is available on the APS homepage and on the homepage of all district schools. It

is up to date. Claudia Bertoli can make modifications to it on an as needed basis

- All REMS files will be stored with Ellen Digby. We have a reserve of 100 classroom flip charts. The goal is for these to have a ten-year shelf life.
- I am maintaining an APS email account for a year in case we are audited, so I can respond to any questions that may come up.

Ms. Kaditz thanked Dr. Bodie for the opportunity to administer this grant and for her support.

Dr. Bodie appreciated all the work and reported that Ms. Kaditz has completed working with Lexington and continues to work with Cambridge on a similar project.

Special Education Overview

Mr. Mark Ryder, Director of Special Education explained how there will be no reductions in FY 12 budget for Special Education. Because of the efforts and investments made over the past five years, much has been accomplished in regards to inclusions, effective interventions and restrictive programming. Newly created programs in the district have resulted in fewer students in out-of-district facilities.

Mr. Ryder reviewed the design of Arlington Public Schools programs and with the support of professionals and the programs are doing fine. The Peirce Elementary School integration program will now include kindergarten, so the Peirce will have co-taught classrooms PreK-5 next year. Mr. Ryder spoke how the DESE accommodations report highlighted concern within the Special Education Department and most of those concerns have decreased since the last report was made.

Mr. Curran asked Mr. Ryder what Arlington Public Schools cost is currently to support the students currently in all the group homes in Arlington and what is our expectation to receive the \$500,000 from Germaine Lawrence from services received last year. Mr. Ryder said not all students in group homes receive services but 20-30 students come from group homes now to the Arlington Public Schools. Mr. Ryder said that he hopes that we will have more success with receiving funds from Germaine Lawrence this year and that he has not given up on the money from last year.

The committee requested a hard copy of Mr. Ryder's Special Education Overview for FY 12.

Ms. Johnson spoke that she budgeted eight percent growth rate for Special Education and budgeted conservatively with the Circuit Breaker because this rate would not be finalized until September.

Mr. Curro said that Mr. Pierce is the liaison to SEPAC and some members have concerns that the study prepared three years ago from Walker Partnership has had no closure and would like to review it again.

Ms. Heigham moved to direct the District Accountability/Curriculum, Instruction & Assessment Subcommittee to coordinate with appropriate administrative staff and the Special Education Parent Advisory Council a review of progress in implementing the recommendation of the review of the Special Education Programs and Services, Ottoson Middle School conducted by Walker Partnerships in 2007; and to further direct the Subcommittee to develop recommendations concerning the regular review and oversight of District special education offerings, seconded by Mr. Curran.

Voted: 7-0

Mr. Ryder did note after Mr. Curran asked if this report was obsolete, that the report was outdated but would put a closer look into it and would highlight what Special Education is doing now.

Approval of Early Childhood Tuition Schedule

Mr. Ryder presented the Preschool rates for a five percent increase and asked the School Committee to adopt the modest increase since it has been a while since any increase has incurred.

Mr. Thielman supports the increase. Ms. Starks asked what the increase would be used for. Ms. Johnson said to defray the cost to run the programs. Ms. Heigham asked Ms. Johnson what the impact is to charge different hourly rates for children who attend daily and for children who attend 3 days a week, we charge more per hour than someone attending 2 days a week.

Dr. Bodie replied that the School Committee voted the fees back when the program started. Mr. Curro suggested delaying the vote until next week after the public hearing and after family input is received from families already in the program. Ms. Heigham would like to resolve the difference of cost to attend 2 days a week versus 3 days a week and Mr. Curran suggested a survey from parents. Mr. Curro suggested again delaying the vote until next week.

Ms. Starks moved the 11 o'clock rule to 11:30 p.m., seconded by Ms. Heigham.

Voted: 4-3, Mr. Pierce No, Mr. Curran No, Mr. Thielman No

Motion passed

Update on Redistricting Planning

Dr. Bodie said she is waiting to start the plan of redistricting until the Town Manager hires someone. The Massachusetts School Building Authority requires a report that must show design capacity that shows enrollment is equitable through all seven elementary schools. The process to redistrict and a written plan must be completed by June 30, 2011.

Dr. Bodie said once we have the person in place and the software, we should start the parent groups and look at redistricting. Dr. Bodie will provide an update in a few weeks.

Secretary's Report

Ms. Starks reported on all correspondence received:

- email from a parent pointing out places where classes at AHS and Minuteman overlap as potential places to cut classes if needed
- email from a parent concerned about budget cuts at Ottoson
- Notification of the house committee assignments for state house democrats - locally:
- Brownsburger: member of bonding, capital expenditure & state assets; member global warming & climate change; member public service
- Garballey: vice-chair of election laws; member municipalities & regional government; member tourism, arts & cultural development
- Kaufman: chair of revenue
- MASC legislative bulletin dated January 27, 2011
- copy of the report and recommendation of the decision of the magistrate assigned to hear the arguments for dismissal of charges in the Coughlin/Bouris lawsuit
- copy of a letter to the chair of the Athletic Advisory Committee from SC Chairman Curro regarding a vote by the SC to support the warrant article they submitted for town meeting
- copy of the report to the SC about the REMS grant
- copy of a memo from Mark Ryder and Lori Villani about a potential tuition increase for the Early Childhood program
- copy of a letter sent to parents and community members outlining the achievements of the APS for 2010
- announcement of a free violin & piano concert to be held at Town Hall on Friday, February 11 at 7:30 pm
- email from Superintendent Bodie that the search for a principal for the Bishop school has begun
- email from Superintendent Bodie informing us of the announcement of Principal Brown at Stratton to retire this summer
- email with a link to a website that rates school districts on their educational productivity - Arlington ranked very high
- copy of a letter sent to Governor Patrick from Arlington parents requesting that funding for the circuit breaker be fully restored for FY11
- information regarding a scholarship program that rewards schools for having blood drives
- letter from the Maynard Public Schools informing us of their search for a superintendent and requesting us to forward any qualified candidates
- letter from attorneys Murphy, Hesse, Toomey & Lehane regarding the Governor's proposed reforms to the public pension system
- letter from attorneys Murphy, Hesse, Toomey & Lehane regarding the Governor's proposed changes to municipal health care
- approved minutes of the District Accountability & Curriculum, Instruction & Assessment subcommittee dated Nov 19, 2010
- approved minutes of the Policies & Procedures subcommittee dated Jan 7, 2011
- approved minutes of the SC mtg dated Dec. 14, 2010
- email from an Ottoson parent concerned about the quality of education with teacher actions canceling learning activities
- email from AHS parents in support of an override
- letter from the new Middlesex Sheriff, Peter Koutoujian introducing himself and letting us know how to reach him
- email regarding the safety of the school roofs in Arlington

- letter to Massachusetts superintendents from Mitchell Chester, the Commissioner of Education giving guidance on the 180 day school requirement and snow days
- correspondence giving the date, time and place of the National Teen Age Republican Leadership Conference

Superintendent's Report

Dr. Bodie congratulated Arlington High School student athlete Rebecca Robinson who is a member of the Track Team and is the third fastest runner in the nation. Dr. Bodie said she has received positive feedback from the after school enrichment program and announced the WGBH Quiz Show would be aired this weekend with students from the high school participating in the Quiz Show. It was also announced that PBS will show a documentary on Difference Between Us this Friday 7-9 at First Parish Church.

Roundtable

Dr. Allison-Ampe as a member of the Budget Subcommittee would like to write a statement for the Arlington Advocate on the budget impact and asked the committee for a motion to authorize her to do so.

Mr. Thielman moved that the School Committee authorize Dr. Allison-Ampe to write a summary of the budget impact statements for the Arlington Advocate, on behalf of the Committee, seconded by Ms. Heigham.

Voted: 7-0

Mr. Curran informed the Chair that in March he plans to make a motion to enter Executive Session for a Disciplinary Action. Mr. Curran believes that if the School Committee wants to get the public behind them then they have to gain the public trust.

Ms. Starks expressed concern that the Ottoson Middle School teachers would not attend a fundraiser because of the Union Work Actions. Ms. Starks said other teachers at the high school and elementary are not following the union's request and asked what the School Committee can do about it. The committee suggested discussions of union issues in executive session due to the impact of public discussions with our negotiations. Mr. Curro would like to speak with counsel too on this topic.

Ms. Heigham announced the Elementary Public Parent Forum on the FY 12 Budget at the Thompson Elementary School at 7:30 p.m.

Executive Session

Ms. Starks moved to enter into Executive Session at 11:18 p.m. To discuss strategy with respect to collective bargaining or litigation when an open meeting may have a detrimental effect on the bargaining or litigation position of the committee and to conduct strategy sessions in preparation for negotiations with nonunion personnel, or to conduct collect bargaining sessions or contract negotiations with nonunion personnel and only to exit for adjournment, seconded by Ms. Heigham.

Roll Call: Mr. Pierce Yes, Dr. Ampe Yes, Mr. Curran Yes, Mr. Thielman Yes, Ms. Starks, Yes, Ms. Heigham Yes, Mr. Curro Yes.

Voted: 7-0

Adjournment

Mr. Pierce moved to adjourn at 11:26 p.m., seconded by Ms. Heigham.

Voted: 7-0

Respectfully submitted by
Karen M. Fitzgerald
Administrative Assistant
Arlington School Committee/cs/jc