

## **SCHOOL COMMITTEE**

### **(Official Report)**

#### **Regular Meeting**

**Tuesday, March 21, 2006**

Members Present: Mr. Fantini, Mr. Grassi, Mr. Harding, Ms. Nolan, Mr. Schuster, Ms. Walser,  
Mayor Reeves

Mr. Fantini, Vice-Chair, in the Chair.

Also Present: Student Representatives James Conway and Spenser Skates

A quorum of the School Committee being present, the Chair called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m.

On a motion by Ms. Walser, it was voted to suspend the Rules to receive an update on the Main Library from Richard Rossi, Deputy City Manager, and Alan Burne, Library Project Director. Mr. Rossi explained that the first round of bidding was unsuccessful and the hope is to re-bid by August and this will cause minimal or no disruption to the high school. Mr. Burne explained that only one bid was received and the cost was completely unrealistic. Mr. Burne presented updated drawings and he and Mr. Rossi answered some of the following questions, comments and concerns raised by Members:

- Will there be noise during the school year
- When is the back wall construction taking place
- Will there be any changes that pertain to the high school
- Has the issue of burms been settled
- Can the School Committee, Principal and Deans be emailed with a monthly update of what is going on
- Would like to see a plan on traffic calming
- Is there a plan to involve RSTA students interested in construction and CRLS environmental students as construction goes on
- Is the commitment for an arts program still there
- To what extent does this setback compromise the quality of the building's aesthetics
- What is the estimate of when the library will be finished
- What year will construction begin on the CRLS HVAC and War memorial
- Is there concern that there will be construction at the library and the War Memorial at the same time

The Chair thanked Mr. Burne, Mr. Rossi and Library Committee members in attendance.

On a motion by Ms. Walser, it was voted to recess to the Budget Sub-Committee meeting.

Mr. Fantini in the Chair.

The time for recess having expired, the Chair reconvened the meeting at 7:22 p.m. and returned to the Agenda.

#### **Presentation of the Records of Previous Meetings**

On a motion by Mr. Harding, seconded by Mr. Schuster, it was voted to accept the Minutes of the following meeting:

- Regular Meeting - January 17, 2006

#### **Public Testimony on School Committee Agenda**

There being no one signed up, the Chair closed public testimony.

### **Reports and/or Comments from Student School Committee Members**

The students requested and received permission to hold their comments until later in the meeting.

**Reconsideration of Votes Taken at Previous Meeting:** None

### **Unfinished Business**

#### **A. Calendar**

On a motion by Mr. Harding, seconded by Mr. Grassi, it was voted to remove item **#06-35, Motion by Mr. Harding**, for discussion. On a motion by Mr. Grassi, it was voted to remove item **#06-17, Recommendation: Request for Architectural Services**, and place it on file. On a motion by Mr. Grassi, seconded by Ms. Walser, it was voted to remove item **#06-33, Joint motion by Mr. Grassi and Mr. Fantini**, for discussion.

**#06-33, Joint motion by Mr. Grassi and Mr. Fantini** that the School Committee adopt a policy requiring all CRLS, Extension School and Bridge Program freshmen to participate each year in one extra-curricular activity, community service activity or advisor/advisee program as defined and designed by the CRLS Principal. Members spoke to the spirit of the motion and raised the following questions, comments and concerns:

- Motion is not crafted in a way that brings together educators and stakeholders at CRLS, HSEP and Bridge to insure that there are no unintended consequences
- Motion needs some kind of assessment to insure the requirement is fulfilled
- What happens with students who need to work or care for siblings at home
- CRLS Principal should not be designing programs for the HSEP and BRIDGE programs
- A good senior internship might be a better way to connect students to the community (Mr. Grassi said he would accept a senior internship as a friendly amendment)
- The motion is concept-specific, not year-specific
- Spirit of the motion speaks to connecting all students with an adult
- HSEP students and BRIDGE students might benefit more than CRLS students
- To have strong student participation in extra-curricular activities requires strong programs in middle school
- Verifying this requirement could take guidance counselors away from other important duties
- Request the Superintendent to take into account all of the comments and issues raised prior to any recommendation

James Conway pointed out that having a requirement for community service stimulates drive but does not help to instill a sense of community. Spenser Skates said that he supports anything that gets students involved in extracurricular activities but thinks this is expecting too much of freshmen. On a motion by Mr. Grassi, seconded by Mr. Harding, on the following roll call, it was voted to adopt **#06-33, Joint motion by Mr. Grassi and Mr. Fantini** that the School Committee adopt a policy requiring all CRLS, Extension School and Bridge Program freshmen to participate each year in one extra-curricular activity, community service activity or advisor/advisee program as defined and designed by the CRLS Principal: Ms. Walser NAY, Mayor Reeves YEA, Mr. Grassi YEA, Mr. Harding YEA, Ms. Nolan YEA, Mr. Schuster NAY, Mr. Fantini YEA.

**#06-35, Motion by Mr. Harding** that the Superintendent schedule a workshop presentation to discuss how professional development for elementary school teachers is scheduled and implemented during regular school hours. Further, that this presentation include information on the frequency of substitute teachers being used to support professional development activities in the absence of regular classroom

teachers. Mr. Harding asked the School Committee to work with the administration to offer meaningful professional development while at the same time keeping certified teachers in the classroom. Ms. Nolan was heard in support of the motion. On a motion by Mr. Harding, seconded by Ms. Nolan, it was voted to adopt the foregoing motion.

### **New Business**

Ms. Nolan moved, seconded by Ms. Walser, for adoption of items #06-38 through #06-43. Ms. Nolan removed #06-39. Mr. Harding removed #06-41. Ms. Walser introduced a substitute motion for #06-41. Mr. Fantini removed #06-42. Mayor Reeves removed #06-43. On the following roll call, the remaining items were adopted:

**#06-38, Statutory Transfer of Funds for Debt Stabilization Fund**, be adopted as follows: that the School Committee approve a transfer of funds in the amount of \$450,000 from the General Fund budget to the Debt Stabilization Fund in the Statutory Categories specified below. This amount was planned in the FY05-06 Budget to be allocated to the Debt Stabilization Fund to help offset future capital and debt costs:

<u>A. General Fund</u>	<u>Increase</u>	<u>Decrease</u>
Extraordinary Expenditures	0	\$450,000
<u>B. Debt Stabilization Fund</u>		
Extraordinary Expenditures	\$450,000	0

**#06-40, Cambridge Public Schools Controlled Choice Plan Issue Report**, be referred for a second reading: that the School Committee approve the following changes in the Cambridge Public Schools Controlled Choice Plan:

A. **Transfer Policy on Twins/Qualifying Siblings**

That an extended time period of ten days be allowed for the parents/guardians of twins/qualifying siblings to deny or accept a transfer when only one of the twins/qualifying siblings is offered a transfer opportunity. Qualifying siblings are defined in the report of the Controlled Choice Committee. This recommendation follows the recommendation of the Controlled Choice Committee.

B. **Assignment Policy on Gender Balance**

For grades one through eight gender will be considered in the assignment process when enrollment exceeds 18 per section. Assignments would be restricted to the under-represented gender if balance exceeds 65%. This recommendation follows the recommendation of the Controlled Choice Committee.

Ms. Walser YEA, Mayor Reeves YEA, Mr. Grassi YEA, Mr. Harding YEA, Ms. Nolan YEA, Mr. Schuster YEA, Mr. Fantini YEA

### **Non-Consent Business**

Superintendent's Recommendation **#06-39, 2006-07 State School Choice Program** - Recommendation for Non-Participation. At the request of Ms. Nolan this item is placed on the Calendar pending a public hearing.

**#06-41, Motion by Ms. Walser** that the School Committee determine a process and timetable for evaluating the Superintendent and renewing his contract; and, further, that the process include at least one public hearing prior to a vote on extending the contract; and, further, that the decision on renewal be made by June 1 prior to the August deadline. Ms. Walser moved, seconded by Mr. Grassi, the following substitution: That the School Committee schedule appropriate meetings for evaluating the Superintendent and for considering the renewal of his contract. Further, that the schedule include at least one public hearing on the contract prior to a vote and, further, that the decision on the contract be made by June 1 prior to the August 20 deadline. Mr. Harding asked Ms. Walser why the June 1 date would be advantageous. Ms. Walser was heard. Mr. Harding moved, seconded by Mr. Grassi, the following substitution: That the School Committee schedule appropriate meetings for evaluating the Superintendent and for considering the renewal of his contract. Further, that the schedule include at least one public hearing on the contract prior to a vote. Members discussed the process and timeline for evaluating the Superintendent. On a voice vote, the following substitute motion was adopted: That the School Committee schedule appropriate meetings for evaluating the Superintendent and for considering the renewal of his contract. Further, that the schedule include at least one public hearing on the contract prior to a vote. **Ms. Walser is recorded as voting NAY.**

**#06-042, Motion by Ms. Nolan** that: WHEREAS: the School Committee recognizes the need for greater improvements in achievement levels; and  
WHEREAS: the current budget proposal cuts positions in schools; and  
WHEREAS: our budget resources are extraordinary; NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT  
ORDERED: that the School Committee direct the Superintendent to add one professional staff position in each elementary school. Further, that the budget for each elementary school shall be increased by \$75,000 to allow for the hiring of an additional staff member, to be allocated by the Principal with the directive that s/he add whatever position most likely will help that school meet the goals of the School Improvement Plan. Examples of additions would be in the area of literacy, math or behavior specialists; and BE IT FURTHER  
ORDERED: that the Superintendent be provided flexibility in finding resources to do the above and be encouraged to look at all possible sources of funding with the exception of school-based staff accounts. Ms. Nolan was heard in support of her motion. Members raised questions, comments and concerns as follows:

- Would support motion if Principals requested the funds in their school improvement plans
- As Budget Co-chair, this should have been worked out and Members informed
- This should not come as a surprise since it was consistently asked that more money be allocated to classrooms
- Process is flawed and is putting Members in a difficult position
- As policy makers, we should respect the process that happens between the School Committee, the Superintendent and the Principals
- Let Members know if this is the time when anybody can bring things in
- Would like to have seen this come in after the first proposed draft
- If we agree we should do this where will the money come from
- This motion leaves out too much of the story when we need to be more fiscally responsible
- What are Principals saying about the need to have money for more positions
- There is nothing in the Rules that say a Member cannot bring a motion forward
- There has been a shift regarding the budget supporting educational goals
- Unsure if we are getting results from the use of discretionary funds
- It's easier to add positions than to cut people
- Hopeful that we learn that process is important – this is not a free-for-all process
- Shop proposals with colleagues to improve team work
- Surprised that the motion was brought in without a process for evaluation
- This idea came from grassroots teachers, etc.
- We are confusing capital budgets and operating budgets

- What's the perception of some that there are not enough people in classrooms to be able to work effectively with children
- There needs to be a conversation with teachers re needing more adults in the classroom
- The curriculum has been chosen so that students can access it and go further
- What might we do to consider this motion before adopting the budget
- If a commitment cannot be made for five years out, it shouldn't be made

The Superintendent and staff responded to some of the above questions, comments and concerns. On a motion by Mr. Schuster, item **#06-042, Motion by Ms. Nolan**, is placed on the Calendar.

The Chair recognized and welcomed Councillors Denise Simmons and Craig Kelly.

**#06-043, Motion by Mr. Schuster** that:

WHEREAS: the Cambridge School Committee is charged with the stewardship of the Cambridge Public Schools and its delivery of the highest quality educational experience; and  
WHEREAS: the Cambridge School Committee understands that a strong school system is, in part, dependent upon having integrated schools that contain healthy moderate income populations; and  
WHEREAS: Cambridge's declining family and school-age population is, in part, a result of changing housing policy and high housing costs; and  
WHEREAS: this loss of families and school-age children is, in part, responsible for the steady decline in Cambridge Public Schools enrollment; and  
WHEREAS: the future vitality of the Cambridge Public Schools is, in part, dependent upon our ability to reverse the decade-long trend of declining enrollment; and  
WHEREAS: the Cambridge School Committee recognizes the Cambridge City Council's strong record of promoting affordable housing; NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT  
ORDERED: that the Cambridge School Committee requests the Cambridge City Council to ensure that future zoning laws promote increased moderate income housing and provide greater incentives for the construction of increased family friendly housing; and BE IT  
FURTHER  
ORDERED: that the Cambridge School Committee requests the Cambridge City Council to go further in prioritizing family and moderate income housing policy over financial considerations.

Mayor Reeves spoke to the motion and said that he had met with the City Council regarding the motion. On a motion by Mr. Harding, seconded by Mayor Reeves, it was voted to adopt **#06-043**.

#### **Late Orders**

Ms. Nolan announced the Cambridge Green Streets Initiative is reserving the last Friday of every month as a walk/ride day to encourage more physical activity.

On a motion by Mayor Reeves, seconded by Mr. Harding, it was voted that the Superintendent provide the School Committee with a "blue paper" on the Intensive Studies Program (ISP).

On a motion by Mr. Grassi, seconded by Ms. Nolan, it was voted to adjourn (9:23 p.m.).

Adjourned  
Marilyn Y. Bradshaw  
Executive Secretary to the School Committee