

SCHOOL COMMITTEE

(Official Report)

Regular Meeting

Tuesday, May 17, 2005

Members Present: Mr. Fantini, Mr. Grassi, Mr. Harding, Mr. Lummis, Mr. McGovern, Ms. Walser,
Mayor Sullivan

Mayor Sullivan in the Chair.

Also Present: Student Representatives James Conway, Spenser Skates

A quorum of the School Committee being present, the Chair called the meeting to order at 5:25 p.m.

Presentation of the Records of Previous Meetings

On a motion by Mr. Grassi, seconded by Ms. Walser, it was voted that the Minutes of the following meeting be accepted as presented:

- Special Informal Meeting - April 26, 2005
- Minutes of the Regular Meeting of May 3, 2005 are placed on the Calendar at the request of Ms. Walser.

Public Comment on School Committee Agenda

There being no one signed up, on a motion by Mr. Harding, seconded by Mr. McGovern, it was voted to close public comment.

Reports and/or Comments from Student School Committee Members

Reconsideration of Votes Taken at Previous Meeting: None

Unfinished Business

Members passed over Unfinished Business.

New Business

Items #05-071 through #05-078. #05-071, Approval to go into Executive Session, was withdrawn. Mr. McGovern removed # 05-077. Mr. Lummis removed #05-078. On the following roll call, the remaining items were adopted:

#05-072, Agreement with Cambridge Teachers Association for Administrative Internship Program: that the School Committee approve the agreement with the Cambridge Teachers Association regarding the Administrative Internship Program.

#05-073, 2005-2006 State School Choice Program -Recommendation for Non-Participation: that the School Committee vote not to participate in the Statewide School Choice Program for school year 2005-2006, for the following reasons: 1) the need to maintain the quality and integrity of the Cambridge Program of Controlled Choice.

#05-074, Grant Award: that the School Committee accept and approve the grant award in the amount and for the period indicated:

The University of Chicago/Lesley University, for the period April 22, 2005 to June 30, 2005, proj/grant SC05801, in the amount of \$30,000.00. This grant is a sub-grant between the Ohio State University, the University of Chicago, Lesley University and the Cambridge Public Schools. These funds will provide support for Baldwin, King and Cambridgeport Schools for implementation of the Literacy Collaborative.

#05-075, Report of the May 5, 2005, Joint Meeting of the City Council Finance Committee and the School Committee Sub-Committee on the Budget (Committee of the Whole).

Called for 6:00 p.m. in the Sullivan Chamber, City Hall, Cambridge, for the purpose of discussing the FY05-06 School Department Budget.

City Councillors present: Councillor Davis, Vice Mayor Decker, Councillor Galluccio, Councillor Maher, Councillor Murphy, Councillor Reeves, Mayor Sullivan, Councillor Toomey

Brian Murphy, Chairman, Finance Committee, in the Chair.

A quorum of the Finance Committee being present, the Chair called the meeting to order.

School Committee Members present: Mr. Grassi, Mr. McGovern, Co-Chairs, Budget Sub-Committee, Mr. Fantini, Mr. Harding, Mr. Lummis, Ms. Walser, Mayor Sullivan

The Chair entertained public testimony.

The following individual was heard:

- Elie Yarden

The Chairman concluded public testimony and turned the meeting over to the budget Co-Chairs.

Co-Chairs McGovern and Grassi gave an overview of the educational initiatives and supports offered by the School Department. Superintendent Fowler-Finn presented the 2005-2006 Budget Plan for Education.

The Budget Co-Chairs and the Superintendent responded to questions and comments raised by the Councillors.

On a motion by Councillor Davis, it was voted to send the 2005-2006 School Department budget to the full Council.

The Chair adjourned the meeting at 9:35 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Marilyn Y. Bradshaw
Executive Secretary to the School Committee

#05-076, Email from Ms. Doris Partan re: Ouster of students of color from the Graham and Parks School. **Placed on File**

Mr. Grassi YEA, Mr. Harding YEA, Mr. Lummis YEA, Mr. McGovern YEA, Ms. Walser YEA, Mr. Fantini YEA, Mayor Sullivan YEA.

Mr. McGovern requested and received unanimous consent to return to Unfinished Business. Mr. McGovern asked the Superintendent to comment on the system-wide anti-bullying policy. The Superintendent was heard. Mr. Fantini asked the Superintendent to provide more information on the anti-bullying program, including some examples and common occurrences of bullying.

Non-Consent Business

Mr. McGovern was heard in support of his motion. Mr. Grassi offered a friendly amendment that Legal Counsel review our current policy on military recruitment and render an opinion on implementation of it. Mr. McGovern accepted Mr. Grassi's amendment. On a voice vote, the following was accepted as amended: **#05-077, Motion by Mr. McGovern** that the School Committee requests that Legal Counsel provide a legal opinion as to the possibility of requiring that a parent or guardian be present at any meeting between a CRLS student and a military recruiter that takes place on school grounds. Particular attention should be paid to the No Child Left Behind Act and its requirements. Further, that Legal Counsel review the current policy on military recruitment and render an opinion on implementation of it.

#05-078, Memorandum from the Superintendent, dated May 13, 2005, re School Committee Order #C0-094, Timeline on Decision for Facilities Use. Mr. Lummis offered a motion that the School Committee authorize the Superintendent to begin conversations with the City Manager pertaining to the feasibility of relocating the offices of Central Administration. The Superintendent asked Mr. Maloney to speak to the report on space needs. Mr. Maloney walked Members through the following:

- Space Requirements for All Central Administration
- Currently Anticipated Facility Needs Within Next Three Years
- Recommendation for a Permanent Home for the High School Extension Program and Challenge Prep
- Space in Buildings that Are or Will be Available
- Conclusion

The Superintendent and Mr. Maloney responded to some of the following questions, comments and concerns raised by Members:

- Insure that all information is made available to make process transparent
- Insure that Challenge Prep is an educational issue and that it can have access to the high school
- Look at the timeline in the Elementary Facilities Plan to see what buildings need to be updated
- Keep children in the building during renovations at the high school
- What is the vision for educational facilities
- No where in our goals does a project for a new administration building fit
- Need to look at how we justify spending this kind of money
- Proceeds from the sale of a vacant building could help fund a new administration building
- There are a lot of educational benefits to bringing central administration and other departments together
- This plan is very different from the one presented two months ago
- When does the least at 159 run out

The Members thanked the Superintendent and Mr. Maloney for the presentation.

In response to a question by Mr. Fantini if the motion can be tabled, Mr. Lummis pointed out that there will not be a vote prior to June 21. On a motion by Mr. Harding, seconded by Mr. McGovern, on a voice vote, the following was adopted: that the School Committee authorize the Superintendent to begin conversations with the City Manager pertaining to the feasibility of relocating the offices of Central Administration. **Mr. Fantini is recorded as voting NAY.**

Late Orders

On a motion by Mr. Fantini, seconded by Mr. Grassi, it was voted that the School Committee Executive Secretary prepare a Resolution on the retirement of Ellen Varella.

Mr. Harding in the Chair.

On a motion by Mr. Grassi, seconded by Ms. Walser, it was voted that the School Committee Executive Secretary prepare a Resolution on the retirement of John Schmitt.

On a motion by Mr. Fantini, seconded by Mr. Grassi, on a voice vote, the following was adopted: That the Superintendent report to the School Committee on strategies used by schools to communicate with parents. Further, to what extent the following mechanisms are used and how effective they are: Internet, phones, paper communication, and other. How effective is our outreach to parents. At the request of Ms. Walser, Mr. Fantini asked that his motion be attached to the strategic plan for communication due from the Superintendent.

Mr. Grassi requested and received unanimous consent to amend his last motion to ask the Executive Secretary to prepare any other Resolutions that Members wish. The amendment was seconded by Mr. Fantini and adopted on a voice vote.

On a motion by Mr. Grassi, seconded by Mr. Fantini, it was voted that the Superintendent present a report at the next meeting on the Senior class graduation rates and MCAS scores.

On a motion by Mr. Fantini, seconded by Mr. McGovern, it was voted to suspend the Rules to allow public comment.

The following individual was heard:

- Jean G. Blaise, Graham & Parks, re: letter on behalf of Haitian parents

Mr. Lummis raised a question on when is it appropriate to respond to the letter read by Mr. Blaise. The Chair placed the item on the Calendar for the next meeting.

On a motion by Ms. Walser, seconded by Mr. McGovern, it was voted to suspend the Rules to bring forward Calendar item **#05-063, Joint motion by Student School Committee Members Conway, House and Skates**. Ms. Walser asked the students to speak to their motion. Members Conway and Skates were heard. The Superintendent was heard. Members discussed the "Class Grading Policies" and agreed that some of the language could be more user-friendly. The Members asked the Superintendent to insure that the students meet with Principal Knight and report back to the Committee. On a motion by Ms. Walser, seconded by Mr. Fantini, it was voted to refer the following to the Superintendent for a report back with revisions to the language in the "Class Grading Policies":

#05-063, Joint motion by Student School Committee Members Conway, House and Skates that the Cambridge School Committee direct the Superintendent, after consulting with the Principal of Cambridge Rindge and Latin School, to develop a policy to allow all students to have the opportunity to understand the context of their grades.

Further, that this policy shall allow all CRLS students to request access to and receive information from their teachers regarding how that student's grade was calculated for a particular course.

Further, this policy will establish a system for maintaining records of grades allowing students the right to access their grades at appropriate times, and the right of students to have access to a course syllabus outlining their grading policy for each course at the start of each course.

Further, this policy will ensure that a grading policy for each course will be available to students upon request.

Nothing in this policy shall prevent teachers from setting their own grading policies in the syllabi provided they are consistent with the policies of the Cambridge Public Schools and that they are available to students and that they are maintained during the course.

The Members congratulated the students for a well-written motion and thanked them for bringing it in.

Mr. Grassi asked the Superintendent to speak to the differences in progress reports, report cards and periodic assessments. The Superintendent was heard. Members raised questions, comments and concerns:

- The book of report cards is an eye opener
- Does each school develop its own system and timeline
- Does central administration provide guidelines around report cards
- Are there other report cards that do not appear in the book
- Could each classroom have a different report card
- How do we use tools to close the achievement gap
- Would it make sense to align periodic assessments with report cards
- How easy is it for a parent to interpret report cards
- There should be some consistency from classroom to classroom
- Insure that assessments get sent home
- Need to help teachers with communication with parents
- What can be done about strengthening communication
- What is being done to improve effectiveness of the periodic assessments
- If school improvement plans, etc. have been standardized, why not report cards
- We need to have common strands across schools
- Are report cards mailed or sent home via backpack
- We should explore web-based systems
- Cambridge is not unique in having different report cards
- Costs to implement a standard report card would be huge
- We should concentrate on how to involve parents rather than on a report card

The Superintendent and staff responded to some of the above questions, comments and concerns.

On a motion by Mr. Fantini, seconded by Mr. Lummis, it was voted to adjourn (8:53 p.m.).

Adjourned
Marilyn Y. Bradshaw
Executive Secretary to the School Committee