

# SCHOOL COMMITTEE

## (Official Report)

**Special Informal Meeting**

**Tuesday, January 3, 2006**

Called in accordance with Chapter I, Section 3, of the Rules of the School Committee for the purpose of a roundtable discussion on the 2006-2007 budget and the Cambridge Public Schools' policy on paraprofessionals.

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

Mayor Reeves in the Chair.

Also Present: James Conway, Student School Committee Representative

The Chair called the meeting to order at 6:20 p.m. and turned it over to the Superintendent.

The Superintendent gave a brief statement on the FY06-07 budget. Members raised the following questions, comments and concerns:

- Look at summer program
- **Advisories at CRLS**
- Increase and strengthen mentor programs in schools
- There is a need for more adults in the classroom
- Put money into more achievement in classrooms
- Put more emphasis on middle school programs
- Expand extracurricular programs and activities for middle school students
- Address the question of surplus
- Consider continuing professional development
- Budget for clubs
- Budget for marketing outreach
- Look at a walk to school campaign
- Insure that death by a thousand cuts is eliminated
- Expand some of the successful programs, i.e., AVID
- Capital improvements need attention in the near future
- Align budget with goals
- Insure that there is stability in the classrooms - keep them small
- Evaluate newer programs that have been created, i.e., Extension Program, summer school, etc.
- Create an intervention program for students suspended out of school
- Create an intervention program on academics for middle school students
- Five-year projections on achievement
- Have programs presented to School Committee, i.e., RSTA, SPED, Science, Extension Program, etc.
- Insure stability for the next five years
- Is there value to setting up a fund to deal with deficits
- Look at a Horace Mann model
- Fund more active recruitment of teachers
- Look more closely at professional development for paraprofessionals
- Give paraprofessionals out of class time to spend with lead teachers
- Encourage stronger civic participation in schools

- Look at Montessori models in elementary schools
- Include money to fund a study on CRLS graduates
- Include money to fund recruitment of minority teachers
- Expand funding of arts
- Increase funding for participation in local student government and civic education at CRLS

The Superintendent and staff responded to some of the above raised by Members.

At this time, the Chair turned the meeting over to the Superintendent for a presentation on paraprofessionals. The Superintendent made an opening statement and spoke highly of CPS' paraprofessionals.

The Superintendent walked the Members through some of the following research articles on the effectiveness of paraprofessionals in the classroom:

- Student/Teacher Achievement Ratio (Project STAR), April 1998
- Teacher Aides and Student Learning: Lessons from Project STAR
- How Small Classes Help Teachers Do Their Best
- "Who is Teaching our Children?", ERIS Spectrum, Spring 1994
- December 20, 2005 Memorandum from T. Fowler-Finn re: "NAEYC Criteria"
- "Value-Added Assessment and Systemic Reform: A Response to the Challenge of Human Capital Development", Phi Delta Kappan, December 2005

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

- Are our aides complementing teachers in the classroom
- What does the research say on paraprofessionals and special education students
- Interested in receiving more data comparing our paraprofessionals to the STAR study
- **All five articles presented used one study - the STAR study only**
- Include professional development for paraprofessionals
- Compare our educational level, years of experience, and range of abilities of parents
- Add back aides that were taken away in last year's budget
- What role is most appropriate for paraprofessionals to play and how we can support it
- How do we support paraprofessionals who are hired mid-year
- Look at programs that transition paraprofessionals into teaching positions

Mr. Fantini in the Chair

- Are there any findings in opposition to the research Dr. Fowler-Finn presented
- If the population of a school changes, are adjustments made in aides

Mayor Reeves in the Chair

- Pay attention to what some of the studies are saying about the drawbacks and train to prevent them
- Will the high school be included in paraprofessional training
- How will smaller class size be funded
- Create a career ladder for paraprofessionals
- Paraprofessionals are goodwill ambassadors
- Find a way for paraprofessionals to participate in professional development with teachers
- If class size is decreased it will be very difficult to get off the wait list

- There needs to be a good reason to decrease class size
- Is there a uniform plan on how aides are used

The Members thanked the Superintendent for the presentation and the paraprofessionals and teachers for attending this evening.

On a motion by Mr. Fantini, it was voted to adjourn (8:25 p.m.)

Adjourned  
Marilyn Y. Bradshaw  
Executive Secretary to the School Committee