

GROTON-DUNSTABLE REGIONAL SCHOOL COMMITTEE
High School Library
Business Meeting Minutes
December 15, 2004

PRESENT:

Ms Cindy Barrett
Ms Judy Converse
Ms Karen Lofgren
Mr. Chuck McKinney, Vice-Chair
Ms Patricia Murray, Secretary
Mr. Frank O'Connell (Arrived at 7:20 p.m.)
Mr. Alan Vervaeke, Chair

ADMINISTRATION:

Dr. Mary Athey Jennings, Superintendent
Mr. Craig Young, Business Manager
Dr. Susan Rubel, Director of Curriculum/Staff Development

Student Advisor:

Erica Schroeder

STAFF, PRESS, OTHERS: J. Kulesz, Groton Herald; P. Comtios, Groton Landmark;
J. Dillon, B. Raucci, B. Lavin, K. Tuomi, L. Zimmaro, B. Dinsmore, P. Myerson,
B. Morgan-White, J. Endicott, K. Brooks, S. Plausse, J. Trainor, K. Icenogle, J. Mills,
C. Mills, Attorney Greenspan, F. Aponte, K. Stone

CALL TO ORDER

The GDRSC Meeting was called to order at 7:07 p.m. by the chair, A. Vervaeke.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Dr. Jennings thanked the Squannacook Runners for their donation of \$250 to the Fine Arts program.

Dr. Jennings announced the John and Abigail Adams scholarships are beginning this year. They provide a tuition waiver for eight semesters of undergraduate education at any Massachusetts state college or university. There are forty-eight seniors this year who were awarded free tuition.

Dr. Jennings announced Connections has gone to press and households should receive it on Saturday.

Dr. Jennings announced the American School & University Organization has selected their architectural awards for 2004. The new high school has received one of the national awards for outstanding design for a high school in the United States. She distributed a page from the magazine. Dr. Jennings honored HFM Architects and in particular, Rob Juusola, who designed the building, and congratulated them for winning this award.

A. Vervaeke announced Mr. O'Connell has agreed to be the representative to GDAY.

C. Barrett has been assigned to the Personnel and Negotiations sub-committee.

A. Vervaeke announced he has received several names of Groton residents who would like to serve on the Naming sub-committee and he is hoping to get at least one name from Dunstable. He will be bringing names forward for the Committee's approval at the January 5th meeting.

REPORTS FROM SUB-COMMITTEES

Budget & Finance - P. Murray reported they expect to meet the first week in January.

Personnel & Negotiations - C. McKinney reported they have a recommendation for the School Committee attorney and treasurer positions and the Committee will be voting later this evening.

Policy - J. Converse reported they held two public hearings and thanked those who attended the December 6th hearing on the proposed Alcohol and Drug-Free Schools policy. She stated there was wonderful sharing of concerns and opinions in a very respectful way. The sub-committee met the following Wednesday and will be bringing drafts on Dress Policy and Alcohol and Drug-Free Schools for consideration on January 5th. These will be posted on the website.

Communications - C. McKinney reported they met last week and discussed how the School Committee can use their portion of the district website to post meetings, presentations and information. They also reviewed a list of ideas and activities. They will keep the public informed about the search for a new superintendent. They will advise when the focus groups will be held and let people know about the screening committee that will be appointed in February. They want as many people to participate in the process as possible.

MINUTES

J. CONVERSE MOVED TO APPROVE THE BUSINESS MEETING MINUTES OF DECEMBER 1, 2004. SECONDED BY C. MCKINNEY
SO VOTED IN FAVOR UNANIMOUSLY AS AMENDED

J. CONVERSE MOVED TO APPROVE THE EXECUTIVE SESSION MINUTES OF NOVEMBER 17, 2004. SECONDED BY C. MCKINNEY
In Favor: P. Murray, C. McKinney, A. Vervaeke, K. Lofgren, J. Converse
Abstention: C. Barrett

QUESTIONS/COMMENTS

On behalf of former Groton Dunstable School Committee members, Chris Mills read a prepared statement, dated December 15, 2004, expressing opposition to a district-wide substance abuse policy that diminishes or intrudes upon the ability of the administrators to respond to the threat of illegal drugs in the schools using strategies the School Committee judge to be best. They feel the proposed policy should not single out and specific prevention strategy. They would like references to specific strategies, including references to drug searches, removed from the proposed policy. A copy of the statement was given to the Chair.

C. MCKINNEY MOVED TO SUSPEND THE RULES FOR THE PURPOSE OF ADVANCING THE APPOINTMENT OF A NEW SCHOOL TREASURER AND ATTORNEY. SECONDED BY P. MURRAY
SO VOTED IN FAVOR UNANIMOUSLY

C. McKinney introduced Mr. Fred Aponte. The Personnel sub-committee is recommending he be hired for the school district Treasurer position. He lives in Shirley, is currently working in Harvard and has more than fifteen years of accounting experience.

C. MCKINNEY MOVED THE SCHOOL COMMITTEE APPOINT FRED APONTE TO BE THE GROTON DUNSTABLE REGIONAL SCHOOL DISTRICT TREASURER.
SECONDED BY J. CONVERSE
SO VOTED IN FAVOR UNANIMOUSLY

K. Lofgren thanked Mr. Aponte for his patience during this process. C. Young stated

Ms Dulaney would like to meet with Mr. Aponte on Friday.

PRESENTATIONS/DISCUSSION

Swallow Union School Council Presentation/Discussion

Principal Myerson recognized School Council members. Although they miss the fifth graders, he stated it makes a big difference having everyone in the main building.

Scott Plausse explained the fourth grade health program called "FitKids". It is an interactive health awareness program specifically designed for the fourth grade and the core of the program is a set of seven lessons called "The Body Workshops". The lessons discuss various body systems and three focus on the effects of tobacco and the benefits of good nutrition and physical activity.

The lessons are instructed by Dr. Cappetta, pediatrician at the Dartmouth-Hitchcock Clinic in Nashua, with assistance from various health care professionals. The program is free and done through a series of grants. S. Plausse stated they are the first Massachusetts town to take advantage of this program. P. Myerson stated it is a well run professional program.

John Trainor discussed TERC investigations math curriculum. He stated he attended a Teacher Leader Institute with five other teachers from the district this summer and is a math curriculum teacher leader in the elementary schools. He presented some math problems to Committee members to see the process they used to arrive at the answers. He pointed out there are flexible ways to solve math problems. He stated TERC offers students meaningful mathematical problems and helps them understand what goes on to solve problems. It is a standards based program and designed to mimic the state frameworks. Three units are being used in K-2 and one unit is being used in grades three and four.

With respect to assessments, J. Converse asked if students are assessed using manipulatives and if there is a way to measure what kids are doing in an interactive style rather than just on paper. J. Trainor said they are allowed to use manipulatives and the tools they would use in a classroom. S. Rubel stated one of the strengths of TERC is that it requires students to communicate their mathematical thinking, both in writing and verbally. This closely mirrors the kind of testing experiences they get with MCAS. They plan to have parent education workshops around the TERC program because it is a new approach to teaching math. It is being taught in all the elementary schools.

Kelly Brooks distributed sample student folders. She explained the Direct Reading Assessments (DRA) being used across the district. Swallow Union was part of a literacy grant several years ago and one of the requirements was to have a measurement tool to assess student progress throughout the year. They adopted the DRA for K-2 and is now consistently used K-4.

K. Brooks stated they meet individually with each child at the beginning of the year and again at the end of the year and keep track of their progress on several different areas. She explained how children are grouped together who are at similar levels and how teachers can use the tool to group children who are at different levels. She noted the more groupings they do, the more dynamic the reading program will be and children learn from each other. She reviewed the sample student folders. She stated parents appreciated having the folders to look at during conferences and the folders help teachers set personal goals to have students become more fluent readers.

S. Rubel said the DRA has been implemented K-8 across the district and the folders will follow the child.

Joint School Committee/Administration Budget Discussion

Dr. Jennings stated the Strategic Plan was revised to three goals in the fall, the vision was

restated, the mission was redefined, the goals were aligned with the mission, the budget was aligned to the goals and they began a two year budget planning process.

Tonight they will discuss the first year of the process.

Dr. Jennings stated their vision is "Together a Promise to Excel". Their mission is "By 2007, all students will make progress in all subject areas and will meet or exceed established standards in English/Language Arts and Math". Three goals were set:

1. Successful student development: To support the development of the whole student.
2. Buildings/Facilities: To provide and maintain facilities which serve the needs of students and fulfill the district's stewardship responsibility.
3. Staff: To retain and support quality staff.

Dr. Jennings noted School Improvement Plans must address at least one district goal. Student learning is at the center of this process.

C. Young discussed how the facilities budget was developed. He stated they identified three general areas - to ensure the facilities respond to the programs, that the facilities respond to the community needs and that they create a healthy and safe environment. He distributed copies of a Five Year Building Improvement Plan. The facilities costs for FY06 total \$315,512. He stated the technology component is not part of this plan as it falls under modifying the facilities to meet the needs of educational programs. In the future, they will be doing a community needs assessment. There will also be a primary focus on the PTYC.

With respect to Goals 2 and 3, S. Rubel and J. Endicott worked together to look at instructional practices and staff development practices. Dr. Rubel stated their first objective is to use student performance data to assess student progress. The second objective is to improve student learning by strengthening instructional practices and programs. A draft of the strategic plan was distributed. Dr. Rubel reviewed the FY06 budget items tied to the strategic plan and how money is being allocated toward different content areas at each building location. The cost of meeting these goals is \$420,912.

Dr. Jennings asked if this is an effective process for building the FY06 budget.

C. McKinney feels it goes a long way in starting to connect the dots and defining what they want to achieve. Principal Dillon feels the process was informative and very productive. He noted in the past, the budget was more building-based. Principal Raucci agreed and stated the middle school cannot help but be the connector of the dots because they truly are in the middle. When times are tight with the budget, Ms Raucci said money must be spent wisely and all the dots need to be connected between elementary and the middle school and moving on to the high school. She stated creating that synergy with money, programming and student learning is powerful.

Principal Zimmaro said the process was amazing. In the past, they have been working at being dollar driven rather than goal driven and this year they began from a different base. She found the process very energizing.

A. Vervaeke asked why the columns are blank under the ECC. Dr. Rubel said they started doing their planning on content area and the ECC focuses on pre-academics. She stated they are part of the strategic plan but there are areas that need to be revisited. She noted it was also hard to articulate the PPS portion because they support students throughout the infrastructure. J. Endicott stated the regular and SPED curriculum is aligned and embedded throughout the documents for training. She stated the PPS services support individuals on an as needed basis and the ECC is doing the pre-literacy, pre-math and pre-academic level curriculum building and staff training.

K. Lofgren stated the curriculum frameworks include Pre-K. Dr. Rubel said their frameworks are K-12. She stated they do not intend to leave the ECC out of this.

C. Young stated the budget process has articulated its focus a little bit better; it is not just input driven as they can now see some outputs and it also shows how the output of each content area connect to each other. Dr. Jennings said it also respects the sites - Prescott has devoted more money towards science than math and Swallow Union has devoted more money to math than science. This is based on the experience of the students, test scores and staff development at those two schools.

F. O'Connell would like a better understanding of how they approached this process and how they moved ahead. Dr. Rubel said she met with the curriculum leaders and principals many times. They talked about where they were going and how they were going to get there. They were asked to write down their long range thoughts on what the effort is going to look like and what the associated costs would be to go along with it. She met with each of them individually to go over each of their plans. The Administrative Council reviewed how the plan would affect the budget.

Dr. Jennings stated the funding for the three strategic goals totals \$736,424. Other funding needed to run the district totals \$31,575,105 for a total budget request of \$32,311,529. C. Young reviewed the other budget funding assumptions which he stated are more input-driven. These include current class size and current staffing ratios which account for approximately 70% of the budget. They anticipate an enrollment increase of 3.7%, a 5% increase in energy costs and a 15% increase in health insurance. Two contracts are currently being negotiated and technology infrastructure needs to be upgraded. The PPS tuition increases they know about have been funded and C. Young noted there is no contingency built into the budget. They used the same fee structure for activities and each SIP has some funding for their projects.

C. Young stated there is a \$2,040,605 (a 6.74% increase to the total budget) increase from the current budget. He stated he has not forecasted any increased debt for the FY06 budget. There will likely be some bonding next year as the projects get closed down and they start to get state money.

C. Young reviewed the funding assumptions. State revenues will likely be flat but they anticipate \$700,000 in increased funding through new growth and taking the levy limit up to the threshold of Prop 2 1/2. They anticipate \$500,000 from the SPED circuit breaker reimbursement and they have applied Pre-K and kindergarten tuitions of \$220,000. They project School Choice tuitions received for incoming students will balance, or possibly exceed, those for outgoing students. He stated they still need to fund \$1,340,605.

C. Young reviewed other sources that might be available to fund this gap. He stated their E&D will be certified at about \$1M and the Committee will hear from the auditors in January. The towns' stabilization funds might provide support and he feels a good use would be to support the building improvement plan. He noted grants are a possibility but are scarce and the towns could bond some money rather than using stabilization funds.

If the gap cannot be closed, they may be faced with another override request. If state revenues do not increase, it is projected they will face Proposition 2 1/2 overrides for several years.

P. Murray stated the towns have said they would consider using their stabilization funds if the district had a five year building improvement plan. A. Vervaeke noted cutting every single goal and using the stabilization funds for the building improvements still results in a shortfall of about \$280,000. He stated every district has to grow and they have to have improvement. He feels this plan provides that and asked if things have been prioritized if some aspects have to be put off. Dr. Jennings stated this would be a School Committee decision since the goal says "all students will improve in all subject areas". They have not said one subject is more important than another.

Dr. Rubel said they could slow some of their efforts but cannot totally cut them out.

J. Converse asked if funding for a marching band, football team and activity buses are included in the budget and C. Young stated they did not add anything new other than what was seen in the strategic plan. A. Vervaeke stated contract negotiations will have a huge impact. J. Converse stated the mission statement has translated into tangible pieces that drive what they are all about and feels they are at a place where they can put their money behind what they really believe in and can make it happen. She feels they are moving forward and heading in the same direction.

C. Young stated community members also provided input to the strategic plan and this gave a different look to the planning process. A. Vervaeke stated the budget format is awesome but will come to a screeching halt on town meeting floor if they ask for an override. He stated in the past they have seen taxpayers, and the state, expect them to do more with less money. J. Converse feels the challenge is to get voters behind them and the Communications Team needs to get on this. They need to get people involved and interested in all the good things going on in the district and thinks they can do it.

C. Young said the reality is that you do less with less and feels this format will show what those consequences would be. Dr. Jennings said a lot of effort goes on in the schools that is not driven by money but people also have to be understand that by not doing a particular goal, their students will not achieve in that area. The budget shows that things cannot be picked out of the budget and still add up to achievement.

A. Vervaeke stated all budgets are naturally going to grow. He asked what the percentage increase would be if they took last year's budget statically and grew it by cost of living increases and increases that are contractually bound. He noted the budget will grow a set percent even if they do nothing new and the actual increase is a lot less than what it appears if they compare black and white. C. Young said they could do an analysis to get this information. He stated there is really very little new in the budget.

C. McKinney stated Groton's town budget has gone up six to eight percent every year and they are all dealing with the same issues. The difference is the way the town breaks out their numbers.

School Improvement Plans: Middle School, Prescott, Swallow Union, Florence Roche

Members had no questions or comments about the submitted School Improvement Plans at this time. It is expected the Committee will vote on these plans in January.

Groton Dunstable Education Foundation Grants

Kristen Stone announced sixteen grants, totalling \$26,873.97, were awarded on November 1st. She noted seven were submitted on their new "mini-grant application" which is for grants under \$500. The grants touch all the students and the activities they fund will encompass a broad spectrum of educational issues. Ms Stone reviewed the list of funded grants. She thanked all their volunteers, especially the community members, many who are educators, who provided valuable advice. April 1st is the deadline for the next grant applications and information is available at www.gdefinc.org.

J. CONVERSE MOVED TO SUSPEND THE RULES.
SECONDED BY K. LOFGREN
SO VOTED IN FAVOR UNANIMOUSLY

J. CONVERSE MOVED THE GROTON DUNSTABLE REGIONAL SCHOOL DISTRICT GRATEFULLY ACCEPT THE FUNDS PROVIDED BY THE GDEF IN THE AMOUNT OF \$26,873.97. SECONDED BY K. LOFGREN

SO VOTED IN FAVOR UNANIMOUSLY BY ROLLCALL

Recommendation: District Legal Counsel

Attorney Howard Greenspan was invited to the table. C. McKinney stated the Personnel and Negotiations sub-committee conducted several interviews and they were favorably impressed with the preparation and research on the district Attorney Greenspan did for the interview. He lives in Lynnfield and currently represents several school districts and municipalities. C. McKinney stated he spoke with many of his references and they were all complimentary about Attorney Greenspan's creativity in helping his clients solve problems. Dr. Jennings stated she also spoke with superintendents who have worked with Attorney Greenspan and they felt they had a great deal of accessibility to him and he answered their needs.

Attorney Greenspan thanked the sub-committee for their recommendation and confidence in him. He knew there were concerns about whether he had the ability to meet their needs in terms of time and service and he assured the Committee he would not have entered the process if he could not provide the quality of services they are looking for and do it more economically. He stated he looks forward to developing a relationship of trust in the future.

K. Lofgren stated Attorney Greenspan's preparation stood out for her and showed a solo practitioner could put in the time and effort to learn about who they were. A. Vervaeke asked if he belongs to a Massachusetts Association of School Attorneys and he stated he does. It is also affiliated with the national school board attorneys.

C. MCKINNEY MOVED THE GROTON DUNSTABLE REGIONAL SCHOOL DISTRICT HIRE HOWARD L. GREENSPAN, ATTORNEY AT LAW, TO REPRESENT THE SCHOOL COMMITTEE IN ANY AND ALL MATTERS IT SEES FIT.

SECONDED BY J. CONVERSE

SO VOTED IN FAVOR UNANIMOUSLY

Recommendation: Groton School Funds

Dr. Jennings said there are three proposals for spending the \$10,000 the Groton School gave the district. These are an outdoor speaker system for use at all schools (\$2500), a new mixer system for the microphones used for public meetings (\$7500) and assorted educational software (\$10,000). There was a proposal for a flagpole but this was purchased out of the building funds.

A. Vervaeke asked if it makes sense to use the money to reduce FY06 operating items such as the math and science items at the elementary school level. Dr. Jennings said it could be applied to the budget but for a gift of this amount, they wanted to tell the Groton School what their money bought.

P. Murray said she is uncomfortable using the money to fund something that would primarily benefit the Committee. She feels the intent was to help with education and likes the idea of purchasing educational software to provide more resources in the classrooms and computer labs. She suggested they discuss adding the mixer system as a budget priority for next year. F. O'Connell agrees and likes the idea of buying the software and outdoor speaker system.

C. Barrett said there is a budget item that focuses on books for the school libraries and noted this would be a tangible gift. K. Lofgren likes the software idea as well as taking a budget idea that ties into the strategic plan. J. Converse does not feel they would be spending money on a microphone system for their personal use. She stated it would be used for lots of different meetings, would make them better communicators as the public could hear and understand what is going on and it would not need to be replaced soon.

A. Vervaeke stated any software eventually needs to be upgraded or replaced at a cost down the road. He likes the idea of buying books for the libraries as they are forever.

If Ms Barrett is referring to the part of the strategic plan that talks about building a literacy library at the middle school, Dr. Rubel stated it is their intent to go to the Building Committee and ask for a sum of money from the SBA funds for MSN. A. Vervaeke feels they should look at reducing something rather than buying something above and beyond. C. McKinney said he is in favor of buying books and they could be distributed throughout the district. J. Converse noted the suggestions for spending the money came from the administrative council and they did not ask for books. Since the suggestions were from the administrative council, C. Barrett proposed they purchase the software since it will benefit the most students. Dr. Jennings said the administrative council suggested the purchase of the speaker system.

J. CONVERSE MOVED THE SCHOOL COMMITTEE FOLLOW THE LEAD OF THE ADMINISTRATIVE COUNCIL AND ACCEPT THE FUNDS TO PURCHASE THE OUTDOOR SPEAKER SYSTEM AND USE THE BALANCE TO BUY EDUCATIONAL SOFTWARE FOR PRE-K THROUGH 12. SECONDED BY C. MCKINNEY

A. Vervaeke stated any software they buy now will be obsolete in two or three years and more funds will need to be expended to upgrade or replace it. P. Murray feels they can support them.

SO VOTED BY ROLLCALL

In Favor: P. Murray, F. O'Connell, C. McKinney, K. Lofgren, J. Converse, C. Barrett

Opposed: A. Vervaeke

Dr. Jennings will send a thank you to the Groton School. K. Lofgren requested the Committee receive notification of the software each school receives.

Superintendent Goals

Dr. Jennings reviewed her goals for this year. She is working to keep the district focused on its main mission, supporting teams of people to move this mission forward. She will work with the administrative council to look at what is goal-based behavior and what the advantage is to them as leaders. She will continue to work on ways to communicate the goal that constantly simplifies things. Supporting teams of people means allocating time and energy to them and supporting them as individuals. Dr. Jennings stated they are a district who is moving every student forward. Another way to support them is by seeing them in action and she tries to visit classrooms regularly.

Her second goal is to create a smooth transition from her administration to the next. Much of the transition is making sure that most of the things that are part of the district are in other people's heads and she feels she has done this over the past ten years. She wants to work behind the scenes with the superintendent search team, advising them of what she knows about personnel searches. Dr. Jennings stated she wants the best superintendent possible and her transition with that person will personally begin in May and June. She stated these goals are very important to her and the district. Input from Committee members on how she might achieve these goals would be appreciated.

ACTION ITEMS

VOTE: Approval of Bond Anticipation Notes

C. Young stated \$3M of BANs come due on December 17, 2004. The MSS building project comprises \$2,300,000 of this issue with the remaining \$700,000 attributed to MSN. SBA will begin reimbursing the district for these projects and will be reimbursed \$2,169,951 on December 15, 2004. The remaining \$830,049 must be financed through the sale of BANs. Through the efforts of their financial advisor, they can place the \$830,049 in Fleet National Bank at an interest rate of 2.4%. The interest cost at maturity is \$8,687.85.

P. MURRAY MOVED THE SCHOOL COMMITTEE APPROVE THE SALE OF BOND ANTICIPATION

NOTES IN THE AMOUNT OF \$830,049 FOR OUR MIDDLE SCHOOL SOUTH BUILDING PROJECT AS RECOMMENDED BY THE SCHOOL DISTRICT TREASURER AND THE DIRECTOR OF BUSINESS AND FINANCE, AND THAT THE SALE BE AWARDED TO FLEET NATIONAL BANK AT 2.4% NET INTEREST COST. THE INTEREST COST AT MATURITY ON MAY 24,2005 IS \$8,687.85.
SECONDED BY F. O'CONNELL

P. MURRAY MOVED TO AMEND THE MOTION TO INCLUDE "APPROVAL IS IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE VOTE DRAFTED BY OUR ATTORNEYS ROPES & GRAY". SECONDED BY C. MCKINNEY
SO VOTED IN FAVOR UNANIMOUSLY

P. MURRAY MOVED THE SCHOOL COMMITTEE APPROVE THE SALE OF BOND ANTICIPATION NOTES IN THE AMOUNT OF \$830,049 FOR OUR MIDDLE SCHOOL SOUTH BUILDING PROJECT AS RECOMMENDED BY THE SCHOOL DISTRICT TREASURER AND THE DIRECTOR OF BUSINESS AND FINANCE, AND THAT THE SALE BE AWARDED TO FLEET NATIONAL BANK AT 2.4% NET INTEREST COST. THE INTEREST COST AT MATURITY ON MAY 24,2005 IS \$8,687.85. APPROVAL IS IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE VOTE DRAFTED BY OUR ATTORNEYS ROPES & GRAY.
SECONDED BY F. O'CONNELL
SO VOTED IN FAVOR UNANIMOUSLY BY ROLLCALL

QUESTIONS/COMMENTS

None

ADJOURNMENT:

J. CONVERSE MOVED TO ADJOURN THE MEETING AT 10:28 P.M.
SECONDED BY C. MCKINNEY
SO VOTED IN FAVOR UNANIMOUSLY

Respectfully submitted,

Susan H. Smith
Recording Secretary