

GROTON-DUNSTABLE REGIONAL SCHOOL COMMITTEE

High School Library
Business Meeting Minutes
March 21, 2007
(Approved April 4, 2007)

PRESENT:

Ms Cindy Barrett, Secretary
Dr. Forrest Buzan
Ms Berta Erickson
Dr. Paul Funch
Ms Karen Lofgren
Mr. Chuck McKinney, Chair
Mr. Frank O'Connell, Vice-Chair

ADMINISTRATION:

Dr. Alan Genovese, Superintendent
Timothy Sheehan, Director of Business and Finance
Dr. Susan Rubel, Director of Curriculum/Staff Development
Ms Joan Endicott, Director of Pupil Services

STUDENT REPRESENTATIVE:

Kayleigh O'Brien

STAFF, PRESS, OTHERS: H. Sato, Lowell Sun; J. Kulesz, Groton Herald; P. Comtois, Groton Landmark; J. Mitchell, J. Robinson, M. Volpe, K. Gartland, K. McCarthy, J. Maguire, See attached sign-in sheet

CALL TO ORDER:

C. McKinney announced the GDRSC Meeting opened at 6:00 p.m. and the Committee voted to adjourn to executive session under M.G.L. Ch. 39, Section 23B-3. The meeting reconvened in open session at 7:11 p.m. , and the Committee plans to return to executive session following the business meeting. The meeting was called to order by the chair, C. McKinney.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Members read prepared announcements and a copy is attached to these minutes.

Dr. Genovese thanked Mr. Sheehan and Mr. Byrne for participating in a public forum to provide an update on the air quality at Prescott. He feels parents were satisfied they had the information they were looking for and the information will be available on the website.

Dr. Genovese thanked Jeanne Mitchell for facilitating the high school principal search process. Ms Mitchell said it was a team effort and they know they have four qualified finalists for the position. She announced the names of the finalists and provided a biography on each of them and a copy is attached to these minutes.

Dr. Genovese and C. McKinney acknowledged Ms Mitchell and the Search Committee for their work and C. McKinney stated the list is impressive. C. Barrett asked what the next step is in the process.

Dr. Genovese said Marisa Brisson will be coordinating site visits both here and at the candidates' sites.

C. McKinney read a statement addressing the concerns raised in the community over the past several months. He stated the Committee will do its best to provide specific information to raise awareness on how parents or residents can bring issues to the proper school or district resource, provide better communication around issues that are known and require some period of time to fully address and will study ways to be more

proactive in disseminating information the committee believes is of interest to the community. He stated the committee will form a communications team to review all of the district's current tools and practices. A copy of his statement was distributed to members and is attached to these minutes.

MINUTES

C. BARRETT MOVED TO APPROVE THE BUSINESS MEETING MINUTES OF FEBRUARY 28, 2007 AND THE EXECUTIVE SESSION MEETING MINUTES OF MARCH 7, 2007. SECONDED BY K. LOFGREN
SO VOTED IN FAVOR UNANIMOUSLY

QUESTIONS/COMMENTS

In an attempt to find answers to some questions, M. Volpe said she has tried to access meeting minutes from Committee meetings from December through today and they are not posted and asked if they could be updated on the website. C. Barrett said she is responsible for the December 20th meeting minutes and they are not finished due to the poor sound quality. The tape has been reconfigured and is hopefully better. Dr. Genovese asked that people call the office at extension 200 with issues like this so they can be addressed right away.

M. Volpe asked where a question goes when the Public Comments email is used on the district website and if every member receives it. C. McKinney said it depends on how it is addressed. The emails go to Administrative Assistant Joan Campbell and she and Dr. Genovese decide who the best person is to address the issue. In some cases it may be Ms Campbell (i.e.: posting minutes) and she copies the superintendent. C. McKinney said any responses he makes are copied to the other members. All communications may not be seen by the entire Committee. M. Volpe said it would be helpful if the person sending the message is copied so he/she knows all members have received the message if the sender has requested it. She said people are not sure their messages are getting through at all.

C. McKinney stated the School Committee and the administration have been working hard to come up with a budget for the next fiscal year that is open and articulates the needs of the district. They have been working since November to engage the communities, Boards of Selectmen and FinComs to help them understand the budget and provide every opportunity to ask questions. As they near the end of this process, he stated he is distressed by the style of reporting he has seen, particularly in the March 16th **Lowell Sun** article. The article seemingly looks to take the School Committee and school district as being at odds with town officials. He stated there is no such conflict and they are all trying to work together on a budget that will be satisfactory to all sides. It is clear the needs of the district will demand an override this year and he stated he does not want the superintendent, Boards of Selectmen or FinComs to be characterized as being "dug in" on any aspect of the budget. He asked the communities to work with them, stay engaged and understand this is a cooperative process and does not have to be viewed as some sort of combat. He hopes the reporting over the next six weeks will reflect the cooperation they have had to date.

PRESENTATIONS/DISCUSSION

District-wide Assessments

Dr. Rubel provided an overview of the type of information they use, what the information is needed for and the different audiences that look at the assessment data. K. Lofgren asked if Pre-K is assessed and K. McCarthy said she met with the Boutwell staff this morning and they have scheduled a meeting to start some work.

Kathy McCarthy, ELA Coordinator K-8, said members had received a K-8 assessment plan and she reviewed a Grade 1 Literacy Assessment Plan. Tier I provides information teachers are expected to use with their students. They are assessing the five components of reading: phonemic awareness, decoding, vocabulary, fluency and comprehension. Assessments are available for those components. If a child falls below where they are expected to be at a certain time in a grade level, they have Tier 2 which is a Reading Specialist. They have more finite tools to help diagnose issues or potential problems and most of the assessments are normed. K. McCarthy stated Dibels (Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills), a series of assessments that

were developed in response to Reading First, are for progress monitoring in close increments. Ms Endicott used a special education grant for all special ed and reading teachers K-12 to be trained in that a couple of weeks ago. Any additional concerns would be addressed at Tier 3, Special Education testing.

At the elementary and middle school levels, K. McCarthy said parents hear about that as the Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA). She said it is a criterion reference assessment which means they are looking to see that children meet certain levels of literacy skills. The primary purpose is to assess a student's reading development in a literature based program over time and that information is handed from grade level to grade level so teachers know where a child was at the end of the last year. She noted teachers are provided with the opportunity to have a one on one conference with their children, listen to them read and understand what their reading abilities are. They can track knowledge and behaviors that are characteristic of good readers and this provides a common language for all the teachers and it informs instruction so teachers can look at the assessments as a class and think about what they might want to work on. The DRA is intended to determine a reader's independent level. She stated there are three levels of reading - independent, where they practice reading, instructional, where they need teacher support and frustration level, where a child has less than a 90% accuracy rate on a piece of text and learning breaks down for them. The DRA also helps teachers group students effectively for learning and identifies students working below proficiency so they can be moved to the Reading Specialist. K. McCarthy said this happens in the fall and spring at the elementary level and at the fifth and sixth grade levels and as needed in seventh and eighth grades.

K. McCarthy showed a copy of a DRA that follows a child from Kindergarten through 3rd grade and stated the actual assessment fits inside it. They hope to have the information electronically in the future. F. Buzan asked if the information is shared with parents and K. McCarthy said it is shared during conferences. It is difficult to send it home because it is easy to just look at the text level but the more important information is the continuum of reading behaviors and parents would get more information that mattered by talking with the teacher. Conferences are held twice a year but they do not happen at the end of the year so parents would not see end of year results. K. McCarty said she is not sure how to communicate this data in a comprehensive way.

K. McCarthy said they have a locally developed writing assessment that has been in the district for a long time and has evolved over the years. They are scored using a rubric and it is administered K-8. The data informs instruction for the student, the class, the school and the district and measures growth from the beginning to the end of the school year. Thirty-six third through eighth grade teachers participated in an after school writing course and they learned a lot.

F. Buzan said they are not seeing the "paragraph of the week" at home like they used to and asked if this is being done at school. K. McCarthy said they know that what is important for writers is that their topic is well developed, that they have good word choices and that their message is clear and articulated and she said you do not teach this through organizational structure. By teaching them to write a paragraph, she stated they got really flat writing and they lost the children's voice.

K. O'Brien said they had the five paragraph essay format drilled into their heads and what they wrote was not important but it was important that they had the format down. She said her grade is now having a difficult time with creative writing and SAT's and their English teachers are expressing concerns about them being so focused on the five paragraph format.

F. Buzan suggested they are not doing enough to communicate these changes to the parents and K. McCarthy agreed. Florence Roche third grade teacher Scott Middlemiss celebrated his kids' writing by inviting parents in for a tea and an expression of their writing and she said many other teachers are doing the same thing. F. Buzan asked when students learn to use cursive handwriting and K. McCarthy said it is formally taught in third grade. She said they are running out of time in a school day and there are not enough

hours in the day to do what they need to do. She said handwriting has been pushed aside a bit in an effort to make thoughtful and deep thinkers who read and write for meaning and clarity of purpose. She acknowledged it is a topic the district needs to address.

K. McCarthy reviewed a fourth grade writing prompt that was given in the spring and samples were shown. C. Barrett asked if these are written in the classroom or given as a homework assignment. K. McCarthy said they are done in the classroom and are given a lot in test taking situations. She highlighted what they can do with the writing data over time. Dr. Rubel noted the third grade was at the 63% benchmark in the fall, which was very different from the other grade levels, and this tells them something about this group of students. K. McCarthy said it is a huge undertaking to score them; teachers meet in teams and come to an agreement about a score for a paper, with the child's name removed, in an effort to make it as fair a scoring process as possible.

K. McCarthy said the rubric allows them to look at the different areas of writing and teachers are able to look at their own classroom to see where they did well and where they need to focus more time. C. Barrett said it is encouraging to see the three elementary schools are scoring very similarly to each other. K. McCarthy said what is interesting about the assessment process is that it is not only about the end results but the work that happens while teachers are meeting as grade level teams to score them and having conversations about it.

F. Buzan asked if the kids are getting the idea of what it takes to write a paragraph that is cohesive and carries an individual idea through that explains it and highlights it. K. McCarthy said she believes students are getting paragraphing, the organizational structures a child uses to convey their meaning. He said he is very happy with the way his older son writes and found the "paragraph of the week" nurtured him and gave him structure. K. McCarthy said they have lots of evidence that they have strong writers but they do have children that are focused on the organizational structures that have let go of the other characteristics of good writing. She said organization is only one of them and paragraphing is one form of organization.

K. Lofgren requested a copy of the power point presentation with only one or two slides on a page since it is difficult to read. Dr. Rubel noted members received a full copy of the data in their packets.

Karen Gartland, Math Coordinator 5-8, reviewed two small pieces of what they do around summative assessments. The 8th grade just finished the unit Looking for Pythagoras and she noted the Pythagorean theorem was found. Teachers get together at the beginning of the unit and review the Connected Mathematics assessment and can alter the test items if necessary. A scoring rubric is prepared and the resulting data is collected and analyzed as a team. An item analysis is prepared and decisions are made about the next steps regarding instruction. Two examples of questions from the Pythagoras test, and how they were scored, were reviewed. The assessment results were reviewed and K. Gartland noted 70% of the students scored above the mean.

With respect to the item analysis, they look to see what percent of the students in all three classes found the correct/incorrect answer for each item. If about 30% of the students found an incorrect answer, the question is flagged for review and the review may include bringing all the students together, or just a subset of the students, to discuss the question again. When students do not learn the content of a particular question, or group of questions, review materials are given for homework and SPED and Title 1 teachers are informed that students did not do well on a particular type of question. The content is often re-tested at a later date.

F. Buzan asked where they are getting the tests and if they can share evaluations with other people using these tests to get a sense of how the district is doing. Dr. Rubel said it is not a standardized test but is an end of unit test produced by the textbook publisher. K. Gartland said everyone who uses the CMP materials is allowed to make changes to the test so there would not be complete commonality.

The middle school math teachers, administrators and parents have been meeting to discuss the appropriate

criteria for recommending students for pre-algebra in 7th grade and algebra in the 8th grade. The criteria for algebra includes having a test average of 85% or above on grade 7 common unit assessments given throughout the year and on the Orleans-Hanna Prognosis Test (a predictive test on how well students will do). A student must also have received a proficient or advanced score on the 6th grade MCAS tests. Teacher recommendations will include a student's ability to work independently, efficiently and at an accelerated pace and in an organized manner.

C. McKinney said they have talked about how kids transition from middle school to high school and there is a lot of angst among parents about what it means if their child did or did not get into algebra. He asked if they are addressing how kids will transition if they are in algebra, or if they are not, and noted it is not as big a deal as some might think. Dr. Rubel said they have done a lot of work to improve communication during the transition process and K. Gartland is launching a website tomorrow night for the middle school math. K. Gartland said every 7th grade student will be tested whether they are in pre-algebra or not because it is about being developmentally ready for the content. She noted a student can still end up taking calculus in 12th grade even if they do not take algebra until 9th grade.

B. Erickson asked if there is any part of the basics that students are missing out on by pushing this at this age. Dr. Rubel said one of the reasons for developing the criteria is because pressure has been put on the middle school principal in particular, and the teachers, to accept any child whose parent wanted them to go into pre-algebra and algebra. The intent of these criteria is to make clear to everyone that they are raising the bar. C. Barrett asked if there is enough room in the algebra class for every child who meets the criteria and K. Gartland said absolutely.

Dr. Rubel showed updated data around students and the AP exams they have been taking and noted students do quite well. The SAT exam mean scores were also shown and Dr. Rubel stated they were way above the national mean in 2006.

The percentage of students going on to post-secondary institutions from 2002 through 2006 was shown and Dr. Rubel stated the percentage is consistently declining and feels this is something the guidance department may want to explore further. In 2006, 89% went on and F. Buzan asked if they know where the other 11% is going. Dr. Rubel said she is not sure that information has been collected but guidance may have it. F. Buzan said it could include students starting their own businesses or taking a year or so off before going to college.

Dr. Funch wondered how many students actually get college credit for the AP courses they have taken. He stated they often talk about "teaching to the test" and said AP courses are content driven by a test. He asked how much this constrains the curriculum in a way that may not be helpful in the long run.

Dr. Rubel thinks many times districts are judged by the number of AP courses they offer and knows this is one of the things on the New England Association of Schools and Colleges accreditation. She believes it is intended to raise the level of rigor. She stated she does not have a specific opinion. K. O'Brien said it is a step above honors and it is not the test they are worried about, it is taking the course. She said students feel a lot of pressure to take them as they look good on your college application and it shows you are proficient enough to go to that level.

F. Buzan asked what the difference is between taking calculus, honors calculus and AP calculus. K. Gartland said there is pre-calculus, calculus, calculus AB and calculus BC and the goal is to be able to take calculus BC by the time you graduate from high school. They are different levels of calculus, as though they were college courses. If someone is passing the AP test, he asked how many semesters the student gets out of and K. Gartland said probably a couple at the college level.

GDAY Annual Presentation

GDAY President Jackie Maguire stated they are a community based alliance and are independent of the school district and it is nice that the district takes the time every year to hear what they are doing. Members of

GDAY include parents, students, educators, local law enforcement professionals, community health care and business professionals, neighbors and community members who come together to discuss a wide variety of topics and to work on initiatives to strengthen the community. She stated they are governed by a Steering Committee and Dr. Robinson is their coordinator. She said they are successful and continue to grow because they have a good relationship with the schools.

J. Maguire read their Mission Statement and stated they develop their programs and initiatives each year by looking at the Youth Risk Behavior Survey, paying attention to the parents and community members that come to their meetings and by watching the media. They try to provide educational programming and support the community for the youth but also look to promote the positive choices being made by the youth as part of a preventive strategy.

Dr. Judy Robinson highlighted a number of their programs which include Community Reading Day, Rainbow Players, the safe prom and graduation campaign, the distribution of the *Red Flags and Resources* booklet to all families in grades 5-12 and Community Circle. She stated they have held three Community Circle forums: the YRBS Community forum, Alcohol Use and Teens: Rite of Passage or Risky Business and Preventing First Use of Alcohol and Other Drugs. The purpose of the Community Circle series is to bring students, parents and community leaders together to discuss critical issues. Beyond the College Tour will be held next week and discussion will be about life on the college campus.

Initiatives and networks were highlighted and Dr. Robinson stated they have a parent-to-parent network, a half-day network and the Nashoba-Merrimack Valley Coalition Network. The half-day network originally began because they saw a need to raise parent awareness around risk behaviors that might take place on half days as well as trying to facilitate within the community, activities and programs for children to participate in on days when parents are working or have other commitments. She stated this was somewhat successful but the requests and needs outpaced their capacity. This year they have partnered with local businesses who offer discounts on half days. With respect to the Positive Youth Development/Developmental Assets initiative, Dr. Robinson said they are trying to connect with initiatives all ready in place in the community and what role they can play to support their work around supporting children and teens. She is in the process of conducting focus groups with high school students and collecting data on where they see the assets and gaps in the community.

GDAY was approached by the greater Lowell Community Foundation about ways to look at fundraising opportunities and doing it collectively. The Nashoba-Merrimack Valley Coalition Network was formed and they have applied for a capacity building grant, which is pending.

J. Maguire said all their programs and initiatives are accomplished by volunteers. She stated GDAY is not made up of parents in a crisis situation and they believe if parents and a community can form relationships while things are working well, they are better equipped to handle them. The focus is to strengthen the positive and creating a sense of community. As with any nonprofit organization, fundraising has been an ongoing challenge. GDAY's fundraising efforts include grants, the brick courtyard, a community partners campaign and other donations. Their biggest event is in the spring with the Battle of the Bands, where they showcase adult bands. This year it will be held at the Groton Country Club on April 27th. She stated over the last six years, more than \$40,000 in grant monies has been awarded to GDAY and has been applied directly to programs for the parents and students. Each week, over twenty hours of volunteer work are contributed to promote programming and prevention efforts targeting students.

Dr. Robinson reviewed their planning for 2007-2008 and some of the programs and initiatives will be repeated. Focus areas will include alcohol and other drug use prevention, bullying and sexual harassment, positive youth development, sexual behavior and teen dating violence. They are looking to have a post prom all night party next year. They will also expand their capacity at the community level. Dr. Robinson said the time and dedication of the volunteers and the professionals is truly appreciated.

B. Erickson asked how many volunteers they have and Dr. Robinson said there are 12 to 15 on the Steering Committee and the numbers vary on the other committees depending on their needs. J. Maguire said there

are health care professionals, educators and law enforcement professionals in the community that volunteer their time.

Dr. Funch said GDAY provides great things for the community. He has attended some of their recent events and said it is really like a continuing education program. He said the parents and community need to follow up on what the kids have learned at school and there have been some very good discussions at the forums. He said with some things, the schools cannot do the whole thing and everybody needs to be involved.

K. Lofgren encouraged everyone to take out their March Madness calendar.

Communications with District - C. Barrett

A group of concerned parents have said they did not know how to communicate with the district and C. Barrett reviewed five communication flow charts that show established ways for communication in the district. She said the most important thing people can do is to constantly circle back and provide feedback to the people they are working with.

1. Classroom: Teacher → Principal → Superintendent

If your child is struggling in class, talk with the teacher first and try to resolve any issues at the lowest management level and when this is not possible, be courteous and let the teacher know you will be talking with the principal and if necessary, the superintendent. When adjustments are made for the student, positive feedback is encouraged. C. Barrett stated a teacher may recommend talking with a curriculum coordinator and parents need to be open to other recommendations from people in the communication flow chart.

2. Classroom for students with an IEP: Teacher → IEP Team Chair → Principal → Director of PPS → Superintendent

C. Barrett stated special education is building specific with an IEP Team chair for each building.

3. Bus - student related, student behavior: School principal at Swallow Union, ECC and Prescott; Assistant Principal of the larger schools

Bus related - driver, route: Karen Roensch at the Central Office. Her contact information is available on the district website under "transportation"

4. Athletics: Student athlete → Coach → Director of Athletics, Dan Twomey

C. Barrett noted it is important that the student advocate for himself. There is an established process for parent/coach relationships and this information is available on the website.

5. School Committee (as a body): Questions and comments at a school committee meeting; send a letter to Tarbell addressed to all members, send an email to public_comments@gdrs.org or comments at gdrs.org

C. Barrett said they want community members to feel free to speak to each of them as individuals and tell them their concerns and as individuals, they can listen and hear but they cannot act as a body.

C. Barrett noted other resources available for questions about health and social and emotional issues include the nurse, guidance counselor, student resource officer (high school), Health and Wellness Coordinator and the social worker.

F. Buzan hopes these flow charts will be put on the website in a prominent location and B. Erickson suggested they be put in the newsletter. K. Lofgren advocates getting this information out in multiple places and said a lot of people do not like a face to face confrontation. She said it is important to recognize that the teacher is a critical person in the step. She said it is also important to take the time to let people know when something is going right. She encouraged people to try to be part of the solution.

Dr. Funch agrees this is great information but feels this does not address the concerns expressed in the community for a more general discussion with the school committee in particular. He said Ms Erickson has suggested having forums with the public and feels it is a good idea to let people discuss things. He suggested

they think about scheduling a forum and feels this is another means of communication they should be open to. C. Barrett said she was highlighting the established means of communication in existence today.

C. McKinney said most successful public forums have been topic-focused and allowed for direct participation of individuals interested in that specific topic. He said they need to discuss if there are forums they are missing and noted they have had multiple presentations on many different aspects (athletics, budget, football). He feels the communications effort will be the genesis of a forum to get feedback. He feels people would walk away disappointed if they have a forum with numerous topics as none could be given their own due other than listening. Dr. Funch said not all issues may fit into one of the communication paths and they need to see if they need new mechanisms for answering them or not. He said they should hear the issues and not presuppose the answer before they hear it.

F. Buzan agrees and said they had discussions two meetings ago and a particular group came and presented a diverse list, covering a number of topics. He wonders when they will provide some clarification and/or an action plan and said he would see forums or a town meeting format. He has no problem dividing them into topics and addressing them that way. He said it is self-serving for them to address this before town meetings take on the budget as they need to make it well known that they have their house in order and they know where they are going and what they are doing and that the concerned citizens know it as well. C. Barrett referred Mr. Buzan to Mr. McKinney's earlier statement which highlighted many of the topics and a plan to organize those topics. C. McKinney said he does not want to double up on Dr. Rubel's efforts on the math curriculum questions. She has been very diligent in meeting with the parents, there have been a number of ongoing meetings and there is another tomorrow night. He said it would be presumptuous of the school committee to usurp that process by having an open forum that might get into "what are you doing about math" questions. He noted many of the topics were recent school committee topics and it can be as simple as getting the presentations on the web. He said there may be further questions.

Dr. Funch said the members do not act individually so if he was to write something up about the athletics budget, he feels the Committee would need to look at it before it was given to the public and that would be a long process. He said it is faster to address some of these questions as a group, in a forum, and maybe have a resolution in a faster way. He agrees the budget is getting people more concerned about things.

C. McKinney said there are distinct choices about how they spend their time. They can talk about the FY08 budget and the need to support it, they can talk about the list of issues they know about and help people understand which ones have been addressed and which ones are being addressed or they can have an open forum to try and discover issues they don't yet know about that might be affecting the budget. Dr. Funch said there may be issues that are not well defined but can be resolved by the Committee. C. McKinney said in this plan, the only way to find out the issues they understand well and the ones they do not, is to play it right back out to the community - this is what they heard is the issue, this is what the current plan is and this is the first person to contact if there is an issue. He said it may come right back to the Committee. Dr. Funch is concerned about the time frame.

B. Erickson said no matter how they look at it, it is a process. She thinks they should have a forum occasionally and hopes the group is happy with the progress they have made so far. She said they have to be a little more patient, listen to the community and the community needs to be a little patient too. As a point of clarification from policy, K. Lofgren stated the chairman is to be the public spokesman for the Committee at all times except when his responsibility is specifically delegated to others. If he delegated Dr. Funch to write the summary on the athletic budget, she assumes it would only need to be reviewed by the chair. C. McKinney said he has no problem with Mr. O'Connell and Ms Lofgren talking to the reporters specifically about their areas of expertise as he does not want to be the sole source of communication from the district.

FY08 Budget

Dr. Genovese stated the budget was done in partnership with the towns and noted a budget is always in process. He has framed it as resetting the bar and stated Mr. McKinney pointed out at one of the meetings that they have passed over a number of initiatives in the past several years that probably should have been picked up. He stated he will not be making a recommendation this evening but shared an experience the Administrative Council had recently. The challenge was re-looking at the budget and seeing what they would cut if they had to cut an arbitrary figure of \$.5M. It generated a lot of debate and he noted introducing the new positions and trying to trade off other essential positions did not make a lot of sense.

Dr. Genovese said he looks at this as a revenue problem and not a spending problem. He said great services are being provided. The district received an increase in revenue of less than \$1M from FY06 to FY 07 to help support the budget and in FY08, the increase in revenue is \$143,000. T. Sheehan stated it is close to \$2M to \$2.1M just to maintain their services.

Slides showing the Chapter 70 trends was shown. A slide showing the areas under discussion was shown and Dr. Genovese stressed this information is very new and he is not endorsing these items at this time as he wants to go back and talk with the Administrative Council some more. It became evident as they looked at anything they might be able to "put off", that the need did not go away. It was a very difficult process and he noted if they were able to do something like this, they are immediately into other services - class sizes, support services, music, art and phys ed. Items under discussion, among others, include level funding deferred maintenance, technology and after school activities at the middle school, not funding the technology coordinator, reducing the proposed increase in the athletics budget by 50% and eliminating one existing elementary teacher.

Dr. Genovese said the idea behind this is to see, as they work with the towns, if there is some number they can work toward that will maintain the integrity of what the district is trying to do and make it within reach of an override that the communities feel is reasonable.

Dr. Genovese noted the new technology position is on this list and stated they need to take advantage of the expertise they have in the communities around technology that could help with the infrastructure. The middle school math position has also been reduced to 0.5. K. Lofgren asked for a definition of "paraprofessional adjustments" and Dr. Genovese said they are being vague but it could mean restructuring some of the paraprofessionals they have and/or adjusting schedules. He said they have not had a lot of conversations with the staff and an email was sent to the principals today, asking them to share with their staff that these may be looked at if some modifications need to be made to the budget.

C. McKinney asked how you level fund utilities. T. Sheehan said an increase is built into the utilities budget between FY07 and FY08. It appears the FY07 utilities budget will come in under budget and this gives him a small degree of confidence that he feels he does not have to project as large an increase for FY08. He acknowledged there is some risk associated with this but based on the trends for this year, he feels they can do it. C. McKinney said it is being assumed that the rates and usage do not change next year and T. Sheehan said he is assuming the dollar expense will not increase above what they have budgeted for this year. He said he is leaving a little "wiggle room". Dr. Funch does not think they should count on having a mild winter two years in a row. T. Sheehan said he will recalculate the usage at the end of this heating season but the projection for next year is based on the last three years of usage data.

A slide showing the override request for the proposed budget (10.27% increase) was shown. This equates to a 16.45% increase for Groton and 15.17% for Dunstable. A slide showing the assessments with a \$500,000 reduction was shown and this equates to a 13.37% increase for Groton and 12.03% for Dunstable.

C. Barrett asked Mr. Sheehan to discuss the regional agreement figure discussed at the joint budget and finance meeting. T. Sheehan said \$194,937 was presented as what Dunstable's increased assessment would be if Groton's increase was exactly \$850,000 and there were several officials who thought that number was too low. He agreed with them when he did a rough calculation at the meeting but the next morning he revisited his calculations. District Accountant Polly McGrath went over his figures and then did the same calculation using a different method and came up with the same figure. The reason for the difference is because the assessment

for each town has two distinct components: the minimum contribution level established by the DOE and the amount raised from the regional agreement based on the proportion of the population on the district as a whole. The percentage for Groton is 77.07 and 22.93% for Dunstable but the minimum contributions are at a slightly different rate. To get an accurate figure, you have to add up separately the increase for each town from the minimum contribution and the increase from the regional agreement and put those two numbers together. He is confident the \$194,937 is correct and a memo and spreadsheet have been sent to the FinComs.

B. Erickson said the statements she will be making do not preclude the fact that she will be supportive of the final budget. She stated the budget depends on the ability and desire of the communities to support it. They are in the straits they are in largely because of less state aid, who has placed their burden on all cities and towns, and because of the constraints of union contracts which have no wiggle room at this time. She stated they have made great strides in their communication with the towns and there is growing transparency and understanding between the boards but it is a process and it will take another year or two, in her opinion, to get a handle on it. Although one of her favorite new endeavors, she is willing to postpone the startup of the JV football program for a year until they get a handle on where the fundraising group is going. She said she has been assured the group will privately raise money to do the program if the budget is cut. She suggested small ways to save/raise money could include raising the \$25 parking fee, having a recycling program, encouraging students be to use both sides of their paper and having Committee members pay for their own conferences. She encouraged people to give them their suggestions. She stated the schools and towns are in this together and they can all do better.

F. O'Connell said he feels he was "asleep at the wheel" and said this problem did not just appear the other night; it has been a freight train coming at them for a few years and they have not necessarily done a lot about it yet. He stated 1/3rd of cities and towns are facing the same situation of reduced funding and they need to be proactive. He said perhaps there needs to be a meeting with representatives from other towns and together, they figure out what they are going to do. He stated these are significant increases in the assessments and their responsibility is to advocate for education. On one hand, he is ready to say this is what it costs for education and they are going forward with that amount and on the other hand, after talking with people, he does not have a good feeling about an override this substantial, passing. He feels a responsibility for bringing forward a budget that has the best chance of passing and protects education. If no override passes, he said they have not done their job. He appreciates Dr. Genovese and the administrative team continuing to scrutinize the budget in the best interest of providing an education.

C. McKinney said they cannot control the revenue but he does not want to look past the effort the Committee has put in the last few years to identify and forecast those issues. He said 2/3rds of the cities and towns are benefiting from the new formula while 1/3rd are paying for the other 2/3rds. He said they need to continue with their Resolution, that was their specific, proactive effort, to talk about what needs to be made right in the foundation budget. Six years ago, Mr. Young wrote a five year budget forecast and presented it to the towns and his numbers have played out. Mr. Young's overall forecast of what it would cost to run the district in these years was right. C. McKinney said two years ago, the towns wanted them to wait on an override and plan together. He said the district waited two years and this is the year. He does not believe the towns missed the message. C. McKinney said they have been lowering the budget number and saying "will they take it"? They did not receive feedback in November that they were spending too much money. He said the rallying cry is pass the budget because this is what is right. They are not throwing money in general, they have shown money being used for continued improvement. He wants to maintain the focus on considering that athletics are part of the educational experience and as enrollment grows, so must the sports opportunities. If they do not believe this, he said they should not spend any money on athletics. He is not happy about the impact the cuts would have and said they need to invite the town officials to support the budget and carry it forward. He stated the Committee needs to respect the decisions made by the administrative council.

F. Buzan asked where the \$500,000 figure came from and Dr. Genovese said it is an arbitrary number selected to drive conversation. These items came out of that conversation and requires more discussion about

what unintended consequences there might be with these cuts. F. Buzan asked if they did not get indications from the town officials early on as he had heard they thought the preliminary numbers were pretty high. C. McKinney said it is one thing to say "that's a lot of money" and another to say "I don't know why it costs that much" or "I think that is a bad initiative." He stated a fundamental gap in understanding is that the municipal budgets increase year on year 7% to 8% and are divided out differently. He noted in Groton, there are 15 to 20 warrant articles to spend money that are not accounted for in the general budget and there is a fall town meeting every year that spends the additional money after the accounts are settled. He said they are on the same spending slopes, they just do not always acknowledge it.

Dr. Funch agrees with Mr. McKinney's assessment. He said they have not had a successful override in quite a while and they have done what they needed to do and they have increases they cannot control. He said Dr. Genovese has identified a number of initiatives to get the district to a better place and it is foolish not to give him the necessary tools to bring the district forward. He noted the state funding will likely get worse and it is not sound budgeting to start cutting things. Even with the override, they are not where they should be. He stated they need to get people to understand the schools need this budget to move forward for the reasons stated. As they move forward, he feels they will need to take a creative look at how they are providing education.

K. Lofgren said this is not a surprise and she does not like the possible cuts at all. She stated they need to advocate for the budget and allow the towns to make the choice of supporting it or not and they cannot wait for the state to figure out the formula is not working for a lot of districts. She said they need to support this budget.

B. Erickson said they all want to support the budget but they need to look at the reality of what the towns are going to do. If they set the bar too high, she feels they will end up with nothing. She feels they need to take the tone from the joint meeting and make it clear where the money is going. She said they have to have the 7 ½ % override just to maintain what they have now. She said explaining the maintenance of the buildings is the best way to go and is ultimately a savings for the taxpayer. Since she believes in Dr. Genovese's philosophy that they need to raise the bar, she feels they need another guidance counselor at the high school and the math program, especially at the middle school, needs a lot of help. Rather than hiring different math specialists, she feels they should hire one that is an expert in the TERC program and let that person supervise what is going on. She suggested the budget be presented in different ways in order to make it fly.

C. Barrett believes they need an override and that they need to reset the bar. She believes they need more than 7 ½% because she does not believe a level services budget will help them as it does not reset the bar at all. She asked what the timeline is as they go along and stated it is up to the Administrative Council to make recommendations for any possible cuts. Dr. Genovese said the Committee needs to vote to request an override question be placed on both town warrants and respective ballots. If a different number needs to be used, the Committee would have one more meeting.

When they are talking about an override, and especially a large one, F. Buzan said it is important to tell people where they are going in a financial sense and they need to give them a sense of why a larger percentage needs to go to education, how it is justified and what they will do, at some point, to keep it from being an endless increase. He said education is starting to price itself out and at the college level, they will see technology starting to take over with more computerized training replacing or supplementing teachers. He said they really need to look at how they are using technology to not only teach the kids but also to pay for itself. Incorporating this into their vision will help make it easier for them to sell the budget and the technology program and help them educate the kids. Dr. Genovese said a lot of colleges are on the cutting edge of doing this.

C. McKinney said "just look at the high school" and he can back it up with data that they rival some private schools at 3 to 4 times the cost and there is a bargain in what is being provided in the public education system. He stated the teachers agreed to understand where the district's cost structures were without agreeing to work

with no increase and noted the only person who agreed to no increase is Dr. Genovese.

He said they can make some moves but it is the fundamental structure that is not going to be changed in a single district.

Dr. Funch stated people ask why they have the small AP courses since they cost so much money. He said they have constraints on the way they provide education and colleges have expectations and you cannot take something out that is going to impact students. There are a lot of things they cannot change overnight but they do need to look at efficiencies. He said if it was easy, some district would have figured it out and they would all be calling them. He acknowledged it will be harder to ask for budget increases year after year and the solution is to get the state to provide more. He reminded everyone that Massachusetts ranks 41st in the country in terms of overall aid to education from state and local sources and Massachusetts requires the local governments to provide more of that total cost than most other states. He said they have to resist caving in on the idea that they can really do it with less money every year.

REPORTS FROM SUB-COMMITTEES

Legislative Liaison - K. Lofgren reported the Resolution was tabled at the Delegate Assembly last year. All the co-sponsors have come forward and shown support. She has been meeting with Chelmsford and Tyngsboro every week, for about six weeks, trying to put together an idea on how to restructure the Resolution. The original Resolution was for Adequate Funding for Pre-K-12 Public Education and was all inclusive. It has now been broken down into three different resolutions and was refined to Adequate, Equitable and Predictable and they are planning to submit it to MASC by June 1st. The Committee will need to vote on it in May. She met with the SPED sub-committee of MASC on March 8th and reported they are not terribly supportive of incorporating the SPED transportation into the circuit breaker. They believe doing so would send a signal to districts to encourage out-of-district placements. While she does not agree because there are still tuitions to pay, she said she, Chelmsford and Tyngsboro will take this up. She announced the Day on the Hill is May 1st and encouraged members to attend. She stated any increase they got last year was done in the governor's budget cycle and until they can get the resolution in and get the ideas to the legislation, they will never be able to count on it year to year.

Policy Subcommittee - K. Lofgren reported they met last night and they looked at the bullying policy and at drafting ideas for policy IJOA - Field Trips. With respect to collecting additional fees to cover liability, they do not believe that would be appropriately handled in a policy. Dr. Genovese advised them this can most likely be taken care of by switching to a new insurance carrier who would provide a more comprehensive plan. A generic line was inserted that states the expenses of these trips are to be borne by the participants and not by the district. This applies to overseas travel. Their current liability policy covers trips to Canada and any American territory. They are scheduled to meet on April 24th but this might need to be changed. B. Erickson will provide an update on the Advertising Policy and they have minor revisions to Policy GBAE, Nepotism and Policy GBEA, Staff Ethics, Conflict of Interest.

Budget and Finance - F. O'Connell reported they will be meeting at 6:30 p.m. on April 10th at Tarbell.

Report of Director of Business & Finance - "No Override" Town Assessments - As reported earlier, T. Sheehan said the town assessment figure of \$194,937 for Dunstable is correct.

Prescott Air Quality Update - T. Sheehan reported they received a report last Friday from the Center for Environmental Health, a division of Public Health. The long and short term recommendations were shared with parents who came to a meeting at Prescott last Monday. This report is very consistent with the report from the mechanical engineer who performed a survey of all the mechanical systems as well as the informal report from the two architects who came in shortly thereafter. Some of the action items can be taken care of administratively by Principal Lavin, others within the capability and funding sources of the maintenance department and others will require a long range study and long term commitment of financial resources and will be brought to the attention of the Facilities Task Force III at their first meeting tomorrow night. The report will

be shared with Budget and Finance and then with the Committee.

Report of the Chair - Reschedule School Committee Agenda Items - School Committee Goals, High School-Looking at Student Work, Conversation with HS School Council - In addition to these topics, C. McKinney reported they also need to schedule School Improvement Plans.

April 25th, May 2nd and May 16th - Two School Improvement Plans at each meeting

June 6th - High School - Looking at Student Work and Conversation with High School School Council. The Foreign Language Review was changed to Foreign Language Spotlight

June 20th - School Committee Goals

With respect to the Celebrate the Arts presentation on April 4th, Dr. Rubel said Ms Daugherty does not have a clear understanding of the Committee's expectations. As liaison, F. Buzan said he is hoping for a presentation on the offerings at the different levels and Dr. Genovese said showing student work would be nice.

Communications Research Team - C. McKinney distributed a copy of the charge for the Communications Research Team and stated he used Policy BDF, Advisory Committees, as the guiding principle. This will be an advisory committee with the commitment time being about 6 months. There will be 5 members (+/-) consisting of any mix of School Committee members (no more than 3 because of quorum issues), parents, school staff and/or residents of Groton and Dunstable. The committee's assignment will be to assess current communications methodology for effectiveness and recommend improvements, review recent communication survey data and known best practices to recommend new tools and practices to improve communication and estimate the approximate scope of work required to implement the recommendations.

The committee will provide an initial report to the School Committee no later than May 31st and a final report no later than September 30th. It will be the School Committee's responsibility to release the reports to the press. Groton resident Jon Boroshok has a background in journalism and communications and has offered to serve on the committee.

F. O'Connell said they talked about their position on the budget and what they would like to see passed but what they do not have is a plan. The magnitude of an override will be potentially substantial and he suggested they find some people interested in working with the Committee to start communicating the budget as soon as possible. C. McKinney agreed and said the research team was put together to specifically address concerns raised in the community. He said he would rather put together a separate charge for people to work on a budget communication plan and it is his personal opinion that the School Committee has to carry that flag right now. A vote to create the team will be added to Action Items.

In terms of a plan, Dr. Genovese it is education and getting a meeting that brings all the stakeholders together and making it clear to people the initiatives put in place to save money now. They also need to hear questions about what people do not understand and suggested this get off the ground as quickly as possible.

Report of the Superintendent

High School Principal Transition - Dr. Genovese reported there will be several days in April and May, and a few in June, where the principal will be working some of his time in Melrose and filling his obligations at Groton Dunstable. He expects he will have the cooperation of the superintendent in a transition from wherever that district is and said this is not uncommon when someone has dual obligations. Principal Dillon will be available by phone when he is not in the district.

High School Principal Search - Dr. Genovese reported the high school search team did an incredible job.

Facilities Task Force III - Dr. Genovese reported they will be meeting at the high school tomorrow night at 6:30 p.m.

QUESTIONS/COMMENTS

None

ACTION ITEMS

VOTE: Override Request

C. BARRETT MOVED THE GROTON DUNSTABLE REGIONAL SCHOOL COMMITTEE REQUEST THE TOWNS OF GROTON AND DUNSTABLE PLACE AN OVERRIDE QUESTION ON THE ANNUAL TOWN MEETING WARRANT AND SUBSEQUENT BALLOT. SECONDED BY K. LOFGREN

SO VOTED IN FAVOR UNANIMOUSLY BY ROLL CALL

C. BARRETT MOVED THE GROTON DUNSTABLE REGIONAL SCHOOL COMMITTEE ESTABLISH A COMMUNICATIONS RESEARCH TEAM AS OUTLINED IN THE MEMO DATED MARCH 21,2007. SECONDED BY K. LOFGREN

SO VOTED IN FAVOR UNANIMOUSLY

ADJOURNMENT

AT 11:40 P.M. , C. BARRETT MOVED THEY HAVE A CONTINUATION OF EXECUTIVE SESSION FOR UNION AND NON-UNION NEGOTIATIONS. SECONDED BY F. BUZAN

C. Barrett amended the motion to read:

AT 11:40 P.M., C. BARRETT MOVED THEY HAVE A CONTINUATION OF EXECUTIVE SESSION FOR UNION AND NON-UNION NEGOTIATIONS, NOT TO RETURN TO OPEN SESSION.

SECONDED BY F. BUZAN

SO VOTED IN FAVOR UNANIMOUSLY

Respectfully submitted,

Susan H. Smith
Recording Secretary

With attachments