

GROTON-DUNSTABLE REGIONAL SCHOOL COMMITTEE  
High School Library  
Business Meeting Minutes  
October 6, 2004  
Approved 10/20/04

PRESENT:

Ms Judy Converse  
Ms Karen Lofgren  
Mr. Chuck McKinney, Vice-Chair  
Ms Patricia Murray  
Ms Jeanne Niemoller, Secretary  
Mr. Alan Vervaeke, Chair

ABSENT:

Mr. Frank O'Connell

ADMINISTRATION:

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

Student Advisors:

Erica Schroeder and Mike Fredrickson

STAFF, PRESS, OTHERS: A. Ravens, Lowell Sun; J. Kulesz, Groton Herald;  
P. J. Patierno, P. Maynard, B. Morgan-White, D. Black, D. Liliedahl, L.  
Starburn,  
J. Bessolo, A. Fischer, L. Murphy

CALL TO ORDER

The GDRSC Meeting was called to order at 7:10 p.m. by the chair, A.  
Vervaeke.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Dr. Jennings announced the Groton Dunstable Educational Foundation will be  
having their Reach for the Stars preview auction at Kilbridge's Antiques this  
Friday evening.

Dr. Jennings announced the Middle School Open House will begin at 6:30  
p.m. on October 14th.

Dr. Jennings announced there will be an SBA forum held at Westford  
Academy on October 12th.

Dr. Jennings announced they have sent their October 1st report to the state  
and current enrollment stands at 2913 students. She noted they are within

the range of class sizes they were shooting for and they have thirty-two students here on School Choice.

C. Young announced the latest tests of the high school water indicated dissolved carbon dioxide which can react with brass. DEP is looking at this and he had asked that water samples be taken at the end of the water filtration system before it goes into the building. Test results came back today and he has been told the lead levels are high as they come through the filtration process. It appears something is happening between the well and the mechanisms in the well house and attention will be focused on this area.

E. Schroeder announced the high school Chamber Chorus will be singing at the auction Friday night.

E. Schroeder announced there will be a demonstration of the drug searching capabilities of NEMLEC's canine unit on Friday for the freshmen and sophomores.

M. Fredrickson announced Homecoming events start next week. There will be a Tailgate Thursday evening before the girls' varsity soccer game. There will be a football game on Friday night and a semi-formal dance Saturday night following the boys' soccer game. He stated they could use a few more parent volunteers on Thursday evening.

M. Fredrickson introduced senior sport captains Laura Starburn (cross country), Jenna Bessolo (cheerleading), Alex Fischer (boys' soccer team) and Laurel Murphy (girls' soccer team). The captain's read a prepared statement, thanking the Committee for lowering the user fees which makes it easier for students to become involved with sports.

C. McKinney announced there will be a joint meeting with the school administrators on Wednesday, October 13th at 7:00 p.m. in the MSN conference room to discuss budget goals and priorities. J. Niemoller stated this meeting is a result of their off-site meeting in August and appreciates the administrators taking the time to attend.

C. McKinney distributed copies of the Open Meeting Law Guidelines to Committee members.

A. Vervaeke thanked several people for the time they spent this summer discussing possible names for the middle school buildings. He stated that last December the Committee adopted a policy (FF) specifically written for the naming of schools and it has a three part process for the naming of buildings as long as it does not include a memorial. He read the process and stated the naming subcommittee was never assigned or appointed by the chair per policies FF and BDB. He stated the members were appointed by the Superintendent, the two summer meetings were not posted as required under the Open Meeting Law and minutes were not brought forward until

after the fact. He stated names of quality individuals and families have now come forward but he feels the process was tainted. He does not believe the School Committee made enough effort to engage the communities nor that there was sufficient representation on the subcommittee from either community. He does not believe the policies have been followed or that the process was done right.

Unless a Committee member can show him a clear, viable policy-based reason why they should accept the results of the "naming subcommittee", A. Vervaeke stated he will follow policy and create a valid naming subcommittee, in a time frame deemed appropriate by the School Committee, and asked the current community members to maintain their involvement.

C. Young stated they opened bids last week for the demolition of the farm house (aka Smith 2 site) and for the cleanup of the Smith 1 site as required by their agreement with Conservation. The gentleman who grew up in the farm house is interested in seeing if the house can be preserved and this may be an opportunity that is beneficial to the town.

#### REPORTS FROM SUB-COMMITTEES

Budget and Finance - P. Murray reported they met with representatives from Groton and Dunstable last evening to discuss budgets and will be meeting with them again on November 23rd. Everyone shared what their surplus is and what they planned to do with it. They are going to be working with the towns to see if 40B developments will change enrollment projections.

Personnel - K. Lofgren reported they discussed the treasurer's position and search firms for the Superintendent's search. They have some people to contact for the treasurer's position and will interview on October 20th. A. Vervaeke stated four search firms have responded. K. Lofgren stated they also discussed the School Committee attorney.

C. McKinney reported they will take action on Unit C's contract this evening and Unit D is progressing.

Policy - J. Converse reported they will be meeting on October 13th at 1:00 p.m. at Tarbell.

Communications - K. Lofgren reported they will be meeting at 10:30 a.m. on October 13th.

#### MINUTES

J. CONVERSE MOVED TO APPROVE THE BUSINESS MEETING MINUTES OF JULY 7, 2004. SECONDED BY C. MCKINNEY

J. Converse requested the self evaluation be attached to the minutes and

that the minutes be signed by Ms Murray.

J. CONVERSE MOVED TO APPROVE THE AMENDMENTS TO THE BUSINESS MEETING MINUTES OF JULY 7, 2004. SECONDED BY C. MCKINNEY  
SO VOTED

In Favor: P. Murray, C. McKinney, A. Vervaeke, J. Converse, K. Lofgren  
Abstention: J. Niemoller

J. CONVERSE MOVED TO APPROVE THE BUSINESS MEETING MINUTES OF JULY 7, 2004, AS AMENDED. SECONDED BY C. MCKINNEY  
SO VOTED

In Favor: P. Murray, C. McKinney, A. Vervaeke, J. Converse, K. Lofgren  
Abstention: J. Niemoller

J. CONVERSE MOVED TO APPROVE THE EXECUTIVE SESSION MINUTES OF JULY 7, 2004 WITH THE ADDITION OF THE SIGNATURE OF THE PERSON WHO WROTE THEM. SECONDED BY C. MCKINNEY  
SO VOTED AS AMENDED

In Favor: P. Murray, C. McKinney, A. Vervaeke, J. Converse, K. Lofgren  
Abstention: J. Niemoller

#### QUESTIONS/COMMENTS

Mr. Black read a letter from Donald Smith who, ninety-five years ago, was born in the farm house now located on school property. Mr. Smith would like his boyhood home restored to its original condition and he is willing to bear the financial burden. He feels the finished product would be a living history site, teaching generations to come about farm life of the past and historical preservation.

C. McKinney asked if they are under a time frame to act on the demolition bids and

C. Young said they are active for thirty days. Ross Associates is doing reference checks on the bidders and will make a recommendation to the Building Committee within a week's time. He stated Ross has been informed of the interest to restore the building and if the Committee chose to do that, they would reject the bids and re-bid the portion that would include the foundation and cleanup at the Smith 1 site and cleaning the debris in the house and in the area. It would be the responsibility of the Building Committee to form a subcommittee to see if it is viable to pursue this generous offer.

K. Lofgren requested the October 13th meeting with the administrators be held in the high school library and be video taped. From a communications point of view, she feels the communities need to see their entire budget process. Dr. Jennings stated the administrators want this to be an informal meeting at another site, have it open but not televised and treated more like a workshop.

With respect to the car that careened out of control at the elementary school in Stoneham, A. Vervaeke asked that their pickup and drop off policies be reviewed to be sure something like that does not happen here.

#### PRESENTATIONS/DISCUSSION

##### New Groton Dunstable Website

Barbara Morgan-White thanked the members of the website action team for their dedication as well as the site-based editors and approvers who put the information on the site. Parent volunteer Dan Liliedahl created the web application and format and he was presented with a token of appreciation. He stated this was a team effort and thanked everyone involved.

The main page ([www.gdrsd.org](http://www.gdrsd.org)) has current district news and the main menu represents other departments and components of the district, along with the district calendar. The individual school sites were shown. Ms Morgan-White noted they are still gathering data.

She stated Carol Bradford did a fabulous job with the imaging.

J. Niemoller asked who will be changing the data and checking for content and spelling in each site area and Ms Morgan-White said there are editors for each building and they approve the content. The information is passed on to the approvers to check for spelling and format. There is an approver for the elementary schools, one for the middle school and one for the high school.

P. Murray asked who is managing the website for access to School Committee notices and information. Ms Morgan-White said Michael Grant is the network administrator.

A. Vervaeke asked if there are homework sites for individual teachers and he was advised they eventually want to move in this direction but they do not have the resources at this time. He asked if daily sports news and scores are posted and Ms Morgan-White said this would depend on the information given to the editors. C. McKinney stated there is a positive infrastructure in place that will have a positive outcome for parents and staff.

J. Niemoller feels this is something the community should applaud and thanked them for getting the structure of the website in place. She also would like the Committee to understand the resources behind it and what holes might be there so it can be properly maintained.

##### Strategic Planning Process

Dr. Jennings stated a five year strategic plan centered on long-term district goals was established by the School Committee three years ago. For the past two years, they established action teams around those goals and have required that staff and school goals be based on the larger goals.

The Vision Planning Group reconvened to discuss how the vision plan is working, if changes need to be made and if the goals are still applicable. They met with their original consultant and have some recommendations.

Last year, eight action teams were driving the five goals. It is being recommended that they focus on three goals for the next three years.

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.

The consultant recommended the action teams should be planning teams rather than the teams that do the work. They would write action plans to achieve the goal and they would be accountable to the central strategic planning group. Possible action plans were discussed at the workshop.

J. Converse is the School Committee liaison to the Action Team planning process and stated she would like to be a part of the team's initial meeting. C. McKinney asked how they envision interaction with the School Committee and Dr. Jennings said there is time on agendas for action teams to report to the Committee.

J. Niemoller asked the process by which ideas for action plans arise and how the School Committee could interject their thoughts. Dr. Jennings stated members were invited to be part of this planning process and some ideas are all ready here. The consultant reminded them that action plans should be about something that is not typical.

J. Converse felt strongly that a new elementary school should remain at the "top of the pile" and stated it is now a goal that will intimately involve the School Committee.

J. Converse requested the Committee vote on these goals at their October 20th meeting.

## Policy

### Dress Standards - JICA

Committee members had received a draft of this policy in their packets. J. Converse said the policy came as a recommendation from their attorney. She noted general laws are what direct him to use the words that were used. Members were also provided with information on what is being used currently at the schools. Discussions with administrators show that dress standards are not a big problem in the schools and students respond to the expectations that are in place.

C. McKinney said there are two items before the Committee - the draft policy for the Policy Book and the placement of the guidelines - should they continue to be a document distributed by the high school administration or a guideline placed in the student handbook? He noted the high school all ready has a guideline in place that sets a specific standard. K. Lofgren noted they

received a copy of the dress code guidelines from the current student handbooks and stated she has only seen a high school handbook. Dr. Jennings said these would qualify as exhibits. She stated the elementary handbook has not been published in a year or two. J. Converse stated by law, the high school handbook has to be submitted to the Department of Education. The School Committee annually reviews and approves the high school handbook. J. Niemoller said the policy needs the statement that the guidelines will be published in the student handbooks. J. Converse stated the subcommittee is looking for feedback as to whether a public hearing should be held.

A. Vervaeke feels it is important to have a blanket policy that affects all levels of education. He has heard from several parents that they would welcome a dress standards policy and feels a public hearing would be in the best interest of everyone.

P. Murray commented that the high school guidelines are more relaxed than those at the middle school level. She read the draft policy for the benefit of the public. K. Lofgren said she would be uncomfortable with a blanket policy that has an assumption that it will be in all the handbooks. Dr. Jennings said it is the responsibility of the administrators to follow through with any policies the Committee makes.

If the Committee is in agreement to move the current "memo form" guidelines to something in the handbooks, C. McKinney said the subcommittee would discuss the language for stating that guidelines would be published in the handbooks. He feels putting the guidelines in the handbook makes it more readily available.

Principal Dillon stated the guidelines were developed by a group of students and staff who were part of the handbook review committee. They were established over a two year period and it was a solid process. He noted the dress guidelines/dress code provides an education forum around first amendment rights and ethics and morals. He stated the guidelines were not published under policy since guidelines give the opportunity for discussion between an administrator and student and parent and student. Based on data, he stated this is a non-issue at the high school and the dress code guidelines they use have not disrupted the educational process.

E. Schroeder feels high school students are aware of the guidelines and she has not seen many problems. While occasionally you may see someone with their shirt turned inside out, M. Fredrickson stated he was more aware of issues at the middle school, particularly with eighth grade girls.

J. Niemoller feels the draft policy needs some additional statements added and would like a public forum held for feedback. K. Lofgren asked how the elementary school would be represented. S. Rubel stated there is an elementary handbook but it has not been updated in a number of years and they need to find the capacity to do this.

J. Converse said they need to know the policy can be enforced and will stand up legally.

It is the consensus that the subcommittee needs to hold a public hearing on this policy and with the exception of Ms Converse, members would like a statement added that the guidelines be published in the handbooks.

#### Drug Free Schools

Committee members had received a draft of this policy in their packets. J. Converse said

she will support this policy with the removal of the following line from paragraph four: "To this end, the school committee members authorizes the use of unannounced drug and alcohol detection programs including, but not limited to, canine searches of school buildings and grounds." She stated this has been a source of tremendous concern to members of the public and administration and she does not personally believe unannounced drug and alcohol detection programs and canine searches are the way to best affect efforts to keep drugs and alcohol off school property at all times. She feels the statement goes beyond what the School Committee could and should include in policy and oversteps their bounds of setting a goal and then expecting the administration to come up with the tools and process to make that goal happen.

C. McKinney noted this is a discussion draft policy and it has not had any legal review. It was built on a draft done by the previous policy subcommittee members. They are trying to make a statement that it is not all about drug searches but about trying to put a system in place that helps educate and build awareness but also has rules and parameters of appropriate behavior.

P. Murray would like to see a public forum. She stated she spoke with principals in two different districts about policies they have in place and they told her searches are left up to the discretion of the principal and superintendent and they are comfortable with that.

J. Niemoller suggested the draft policy be reviewed by MASC and that legal counsel review it before a public forum is held. She would also like representatives from other communities to come and discuss policies they have in place.

A. Vervaeke stated the Committee voted in December 2003 to encourage the use of detection programs and canine searches and feels removing the statement does not provide stability. He suggested changing the word authorizes to encourages. He stated they have only received seven negative responses regarding the use of searches. J. Converse said she wants to see strong evidence that canine searches are the most effective and reliable way to go. J. Niemoller asked that a copy of the Memorandum of Understanding they have with the police department be given to Committee members.

C. McKinney said they need to discuss the frequency they would have the superintendent conduct an assessment of the entire environmental assessment practices. Dr. Jennings said every three years she has to assure the Committee that they have scanned all their buildings in all areas for safety and security. She suggested three years since administratively, it takes a large amount of time to do it in a comprehensive way. It also requires a lot of focus from the public.

A. Vervaeke, J. Niemoller and K. Lofgren stated they would like the italicized sentence to stay and P. Murray would like it to end after the words drug and alcohol detection programs.

It was agreed a public hearing will be held, with at least four weeks notice being given, so there is adequate time to publicize the location, date and time.

#### Superintendent Search Proposals

A. Vervaeke stated the Committee has received proposals from MASC and NESDEC and they are waiting for two more. He suggested members begin developing a list of questions to ask perspective candidates. He said they need to start thinking about salary ranges and after the consultant is chosen, whether they have focus groups in the communities.

C. McKinney noted salary ranges for six superintendent positions in Massachusetts range from \$100,000 to \$150,000 plus benefits for a three year contract. He asked how they will narrow the process to select a consultant. By their next meeting, A. Vervaeke hopes each of them will have reviewed all four proposals and he encouraged members to pick their top two. Following a decision, the two candidates will be invited in to give a presentation.

C. Young said they first need to establish their selection criteria so the same items are focused on during review. He stated a reference check is also important.

P. Murray noted last night Peter Cunningham asked if they had discussed doing their own search and said members who worked on the search for Dr. Jennings are willing to give their input.

As a personnel member, J. Niemoller will work with Dr. Rubel to develop criteria to evaluate the proposals. S. Rubel said it would be helpful for members to consider what a search firm can do for them that they could not have without a search firm. She stated this will help them develop the criteria. K. Lofgren said she would not be comfortable doing the search on their own.

If the Committee chooses to hire a consultant, C. McKinney noted they could vote on December 1st, which is a month behind the original time line they

discussed.

It was agreed the Committee will meet at 9:00 p.m. on October 13th, following their meeting with administrative council, to review the proposed criteria. This would allow them to vote on the two finalists on October 20th. Interviews could be held on November 10th and a selection and vote could be made on November 17th. A. Vervaeke noted this assumes they are going outside their own pool of expertise.

#### Budget Timeline FY2006

C. Young reviewed the budget schedule and noted that this year, the School Committee will be meeting with administrators to discuss budget goals and priorities. There is a Curriculum Council meeting on October 25th and meetings will be held with school councils in November. The preliminary budget request will be presented to the School Committee on January 5th. At the joint financial committee meeting last night, C. Young said there was discussion about making "early assumptions" so they see where they are going.

C. McKinney requested using one color scheme per budget revision, making it easier to swap out data. P. Murray would like to see SPED costs separated out. C. Young said the document will show the entire gross budget and the funding sources. Full expenditures for education would be included as well as general fund revenues, special revenue fund revenues and grant revenues that apply across the board.

#### Stabilization Fund

At the joint budget task force meeting last evening, A. Vervaeke stated Dunstable Selectman Bob Nelson said Dunstable Selectmen and the FinCom have come to a consensus that they are not in favor of a stabilization fund. He did not get this impression from School Committee members or the town of Groton. If this is what the Committee wants, they will vote at their next meeting.

A letter from Richard Marley, Jr. of Ropes & Gray LLP, was distributed. C. Young explained the pros and cons of a stabilization fund. It is a financial tool for regional school districts, and cities and towns, to provide another way to put away smaller sums money for capital improvements. He stated it takes the unpredictability out of the tax rate, avoiding a large spike or decrease in the rate. He would see a stabilization fund as being a great advantage to communities that are growing. Designer fees for an elementary school, items in a five year capital plan and items in the \$100,000 - \$200,000 range could be paid for from a stabilization fund.

A down side of a stabilization fund is that taxpayers may feel they have lost control of the money and that it should not be budgeted for over time. If handled in the proper fashion,  
C. Young feels it has a role in growing communities.

J. Converse asked the difference between the E&D fund and a stabilization fund.

C. Young stated E&D is the fund balance at the end of the year that is certified by the Department of Revenue. Regional school districts can hold up to five percent of their budget, which is about \$1.5M for Groton Dunstable. Having a substantial E&D balance helps you budget more conservatively because you can take a risk and the money can be used to pay for unanticipated costs. A stabilization fund is designed for capital projects and requires a two thirds vote of the members. The towns can call a meeting to decide if they will allow the district to spend the money. Money going into a stabilization fund is done through the budgeting process and he is not sure if money in an E&D fund can be transferred into a stabilization fund.

J. Converse asked if money left from the building funds could go into a stabilization fund and C. Young said any bond proceeds can only be used for the purposes for which the money was borrowed.

P. Murray noted it will take several years to grow the money. She has not been able to find any district that has a stabilization fund and feels the timing is off since they now have a surplus. She would like to show the towns that they are doing the right thing as she feels a perception "out there". She stated Dunstable said this would be another five percent the district could tuck away and the towns could not touch it. K. Lofgren agrees with a perception being "out there" and feels this is being rushed. J. Converse said the towns would have more control over a stabilization fund and feels the idea that the School Committee squirrels money away is crazy.

Dr. Jennings suggested they could give a five year capital plan to the towns and have them put money into stabilization funds for capital items. A. Vervaeke reminded members that the towns wanted "all the money" the last time the Committee asked for a stabilization fund and he asked if the towns could guarantee the money would be there when needed. J. Niemoller would like to know why Dunstable is opposed to establishing a stabilization fund and questioned if it is because the money could be used for an elementary school in Groton. C. McKinney feels there are other ways to achieve their goals without this financial tool and does not feel they risk anything by putting this aside.

#### ACTION ITEMS

VOTE: Unit C Contract

C. MCKINNEY MOVED THE GROTON DUNSTABLE REGIONAL SCHOOL DISTRICT APPROVE THE UNIT C CONTRACT AS NEGOTIATED BY THE NEGOTIATIONS TEAM. SECONDED BY P. MURRAY  
SO VOTED IN FAVOR UNANIMOUSLY

#### QUESTIONS/COMMENTS

J. Converse stated she does not believe the chair has the authority to

dissolve an ad-hoc committee and would like discussion on this to be held at their next meeting.

A. Vervaeke responded that the committee does not exist if it is not legal.

ADJOURNMENT

J. CONVERSE MOVED TO ADJOURN THE MEETING AT 10:40 P.M.

SECONDED BY J. NIEMOLLER

SO VOTED IN FAVOR UNANIMOUSLY

Respectfully submitted,

Susan H. Smith  
Recording Secretary