

GROTON-DUNSTABLE REGIONAL SCHOOL COMMITTEE
High School Library
Business Meeting Minutes
November 17, 2004

PRESENT:

Ms Judy Converse
Ms Karen Lofgren
Mr. Chuck McKinney, Vice-Chair
Ms Patricia Murray, Interim Secretary
Mr. Frank O'Connell
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:

Mike Fredrickson

STAFF, PRESS, OTHERS: J. Myers, Lowell Sun; J. Kulesz, Groton Herald;
P. Comtois, Groton Landmark; J. Mitchell, P. Maynard, A. Steed, A. Carey, B. Lavin,
C. Dulaney, C. Greenfield, P. Jacques, D. Mullins, K. Schott, J. Woods, T. Girouard,
A. Hughes

CALL TO ORDER

The GDRSC Meeting was called to order at 7:08 p.m. by the chair, A. Vervaeke.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

M. Fredrickson announced the girls varsity soccer team played in Chicopee this evening but lost 2:1. On Sunday, they won the Central Mass Championship and this is the farthest they have gone in the school's history. He congratulated them on having a great season.

M. Fredrickson announced next week is the annual Spirit Week and each day will have a different theme. Monday will be Color Day, Tuesday will be Retro-Day with students dressing up in 70's and 80's outfits and Wednesday will be New England Sports Day and the annual Powder Puff football game.

M. Fredrickson introduced Tim Girouard and Andy Hughes. Tim Girouard announced Nicholas Nickleby will be presented Friday night at 7:00 p.m. and on Saturday at 2:00 p.m. and 7:00 p.m. in the Black Box Theater. Tickets are \$5.00 for students and seniors and \$8.00 for others. The play is an adaptation of the novel by Charles Dickens.

Dr. Jennings announced the dedication of the middle school will be tomorrow night from 5:30 to 6:30 p.m. It is also an Open House with demonstrations being held in the more technologically equipped classrooms. Tomorrow is a half day and parent/teacher conferences will be held at the middle school and high school.

P. Murray announced they are seeking a School Committee member to fill the vacant Groton seat and letters of interest may be sent to the Board of Selectmen. The School Committee will meet with the BOS at 7:00 p.m. on November 29th to elect the new member.

C. McKinney congratulated the Groton Dunstable choir and Chamber Chorus for their fabulous performance last night.

REPORTS FROM SUB-COMMITTEES

Budget and Finance - F. O'Connell reported they met briefly Monday night and will be meeting at 6:00 p.m. on Tuesday, followed by a joint meeting with the town boards at 7:00 p.m.

Personnel and Negotiations - C. McKinney reported Unit D contract negotiations have been completed and are going through legal review. It is expected the contract will be ready for the Committee's ratification in December. Interviews for the Treasurer's position have been scheduled for November 29th at Tarbell and they will be interviewing the five attorney firms on November 30th and December 1st. School Committee members have been given a list of criteria. It was agreed the School Committee will accept one finalist recommendation for each position from the sub-committee.

Policy - J. Converse reported they held a public hearing Monday night in the Black Box Theater to discuss the proposed dress policy. It was pretty well attended and the high school Leadership Team was well represented. They will be meeting in December for more discussion. The hearing on Drug and Alcohol Prevention is scheduled for December 6th from 7:00 to 9:00 p.m. in the Black Box Theater. There will be a complete description of how things are currently done in the schools with respect to education, enforcement and support and administrators, as well as both police chiefs, will attend. An independent moderator will be there to provide Committee members the opportunity to listen to what is being said.

Communications - C. McKinney reported they met on November 10th. With the Committee's permission, they would like to make use of the town's website to announce School Committee meetings, public hearing and the like. P. Murray has volunteered to take care of the logistics. The use of information packets going home with students, the high school website and the cable access channels were also discussed as other ways to announce these events. They also discussed releasing the agenda so people are aware of what will be discussed.

With respect to the Naming Committee issue, the sub-committee wants to urge the School Committee to provide a better summary of the next steps that will take place with regard to naming the buildings. They would also like a list of who is on the Naming Committee and Memorial Committee, whether or not the School Committee is seeking additional membership on one or both of these committees, who they should contact, when the appointments would take place and who would make the appointments. They feel the use of a flowchart documenting the timeline and decisions should be developed.

He stated the School Committee needs to agree on how they will act on the names from the Naming and Memorial Committees. They also encourage the Naming Committee to consider holding public hearings to drive greater participation and input.

With respect to the superintendent search, they request an agenda item be added to provide an update of their progress at each School Committee meeting.

C. McKinney reported school "Good News" is a constant objective and urged members to report on some of the "good news" from the individual schools. P. Murray has volunteered to manage the web content on the School Committee site, keeping the calendar updated and making it more user friendly.

Building - C. Young reported they are in the process of closing out the high school project and are working to finish the punch list items at MSN. They expect these items to be completed

before the first of the year. He stated they may possibly start seeing SBAB reimbursement on MSS prior to the end of the fiscal year and noted they all ready receive funding on the high school. If the MSN project is completed by the spring, there is a good possibility they could see that funding as well.

With respect to the Smith site, A. Vervaeke reported he spoke with Mr. Prendergast today. Mr. Smith has been asked if he would be interested in funding something on-going to renovate and maintain the site. The idea of setting up a committee to take a look at all the steps that would be necessary, including taking the land out of conservation, renovation costs etc, has been approached. Mr. Smith has set up an initial fund of \$10,000 to help them get started.

C. Young stated they were given an extension on the bids to clean up the site and take down the farmhouse and he would like a definite answer by the December 1st meeting so they can either tell the contractor it is "a go" or reject all bids.

MINUTES

J. CONVERSE MOVED TO APPROVE THE BUSINESS MEETING MINUTES OF NOVEMBER 3, 2004. SECONDED BY C. MCKINNEY
SO VOTED IN FAVOR UNANIMOUSLY

J. CONVERSE MOVED TO APPROVE THE EXECUTIVE SESSION MINUTES OF NOVEMBER 3, 2004. SECONDED BY P. MURRAY
SO VOTED IN FAVOR UNANIMOUSLY

C. MCKINNEY MOVED TO APPROVE THE BUSINESS MEETING MINUTES OF NOVEMBER 4, 2004. SECONDED BY P. MURRAY
SO VOTED IN FAVOR UNANIMOUSLY

QUESTIONS/COMMENTS

K. Lofgren stated the middle school started off the year with the theme of "Giving The Shirts Off Their Backs". All middle schoolers were given a tee shirt with the school logo as part of their community service awareness project. Their team names are Independence, Responsibility, Compassion and Respect.

While it was nice to see many high school students at the public hearing, P. Murray said she was disappointed more parents did come attend. To those who felt they could not come forward to speak on camera, she stated they can comment on Public Comments.

A. Vervaeke stated 40B proposals have been big in both towns recently and he encouraged the various boards in both towns to look at the affect these will have on the school district. He said they need to make sure they have solid, long term planning to do whatever is necessary to prevent explosive population and tax growth in either town.

Dr. Jennings has approached the planning boards about getting projection information back and having a voice in these conversations so they can continue to provide a quality education.

C. MCKINNEY MOVED TO SUSPEND THE RULES TO MOVE THE VOTE ON THE BASKETBALL FIELD TRIP TO THIS PART OF THE AGENDA.

SECONDED BY P. MURRAY

SO VOTED IN FAVOR UNANIMOUSLY BY ROLLCALL

C. MCKINNEY MOVED THE SCHOOL COMMITTEE VOTE TO APPROVE THE HIGH SCHOOL BASKETBALL PROPOSED FIELD TRIP ON DECEMBER 3RD, 4TH AND 5TH, 2004. SECONDED BY P. MURRAY

Coach Woods stated they have taken this trip for the last eleven years. C. McKinney reviewed the information received in their packets which includes a permission slip, room assignments, chaperones and the itinerary.

SO VOTED IN FAVOR UNANIMOUSLY

PRESENTATIONS/DISCUSSION

Superintendent Search Firms

C. McKinney distributed copies of the Superintendent Search Update as well as a raw data compilation. The Committee interviewed four firms on November 4th - MASC, NESDEC, FMS and MEC. Mr. McKinney reviewed the timeline, search firm selection criteria and the scoring process used by Committee members. He stated all four firms are well qualified.

With respect to the criteria scoring, NESDEC (New England School Development Council) and FMS (Future Management Systems) came out relatively close. Committee members also used the exercise known as "Spend a Dollar". NESDEC came out first, followed closely by FMS. Members agreed they would discuss the top two firms.

J. Converse stated she contacted five references, all school committee members, for FMS. She heard that they are very professional, always available, very organized and all the references spoke positively about the firm listening to what the committee wanted and tailored the search to meet those needs. Some of the references mentioned the firm was very helpful in dealing with the confidentiality issues around a pool of candidates who need to remain anonymous until they become finalists. J. Converse personally likes the fact that FMS can find a pool of candidates that is "out of the box", people who may not be working specifically in education but still have the exact skills that could transfer into that role. She stated she feels very positively about FMS.

A. Vervaeke stated he contacted references for NESDEC and spoke with three school committee members, two from regional school districts. They stated they felt NESDEC had more experience with regional school districts and they made sure they got a strong sense of the differences between the communities. They felt the pool of candidates was more than sufficient and the work done by the focus groups, constant communication, as well as the training after the new superintendent was hired, was impressive. He stated he received all positive feedback. While he likes FMS, A. Vervaeke stated he is leaning more toward NESDEC.

P. Murray liked that NESDEC spent time talking about the regional school district piece and they feel they can pull candidates from out of state. They also provided examples of how they brought in superintendents from out of state who have stayed at least eight years.

K. Lofgren stated NESDEC is her top choice and likes their philosophy of engaging the communities. She was uncomfortable with the aggressiveness of FMS and feels they were more process oriented rather than being focused on the district. J. Converse said she is high on both of these firms and feels FMS deals well with regional school districts. If the Committee chooses to hire NESDEC, she wants to pursue the idea of using a retreat after the superintendent is hired.

C. McKinney stated he was equally split on these firms and feels the strongest asset from FMS is that they can generate a candidate pool of people who are content and energized in their jobs but would be happier and more energetic in a different position. He likes that NESDEC handles the applicants all the way through, pretty much guaranteeing they will get off to a good start with a new superintendent.

K. Lofgren called the references for MEC and she received glowing reports from a current school committee member that used them three and a half years ago. She noted that what he said MEC offered was very different from what was presented to this Committee.

Prescott School Council

Principal Betty Lavin introduced members of the School Council.

Kathy Schott stated the kindergarten teachers feel welcomed at Prescott and are happy with their new classrooms. One of the second grade classes is working with one of kindergarten classes doing "sharing". The kindergartners are adjusting very well. She read a book created by the forty-four kindergartners and presented it to the Committee. B. Lavin said there is a renewed sense of energy in the building. Buddies are evolving and the fourth graders are very protective of the kindergartners.

Diane Mullins thanked the Committee, Mr. Young, Dr. Jennings and Steve Byrne for supporting the new playground and providing them with \$15,000. A committee was formed last spring and they came up with a wish list. Playground vendors were researched and the list was pared down to two. Dr. Play gave them the most for the money and she noted \$4500 went into surfacing to make the area safe under the equipment that existed. An additional \$6000 was raised through fund raising. In July there was a volunteer build for two days and she stated the playground looks great and the kids love it. She stated Becky Werner was a co-chair and saw the process through from start to finish.

Pam Jacques said they celebrating birthdays at Prescott in healthier ways and have asked students not to bring in cupcakes for classroom celebrations. This is being done because of concerns about the increasing rate of obesity and Type II diabetes in children and each year there are more children with food allergies who cannot take part in the celebrations. They do believe birthdays are special and should be recognized and they celebrate by announcing the child's name over the intercom and having the child go to Ms Lavin's office to adopt a stuffed penguin for the day. Other students have donated their favorite book to the library and brought in pencils for the class. She stated the teachers and the students love these new ideas. B. Lavin said they are hoping to extend the idea of healthy snacks as they celebrate the different holidays. She stated she has heard from twenty parents and only two feel this initiative is depriving their children of a special celebration.

Part of keeping kids healthy and keeping with one of their goals, is the idea of building in some exercise and healthy habits. Carole Greenfield said they would like to put in a walking trail around the grounds and have informally talked with the Boy Scouts about having them create a trail around the playground as a troop project. The idea is for the kids to walk or run around the periphery of the playground. They have put in for a grant to get pedometers for the kids so they can measure how far they are going.

B. Lavin said they are hoping the kids can use their math skills to figure out how far they are going when taking a field trip and showing it through a map to give the kids a frame of reference.

B. Lavin stated there are concerns with the facilities and they are attempting to formulate their concerns in the form of a goal. She met with Mr. Young and Mr. Byrne this morning to go over some of the issues and Mr. Young sees what they are seeing and this will help him develop a three to five year capital improvement plan. Concerns include the windows, lack of screens, the roof, air flow, heat regulation, the boiler, the need for custom made radiator covers, painting, carpeting, asbestos abatement, doors and lack of electrical outlets. C. Greenfield said they will work proactively with the town's Preservation Committee when it is formed.

Alberta Steed said she has volunteered at Prescott for over ten years and because of their caring environment, she became a foster parent to sixteen kids.

P. Murray said she was concerned her daughter would be devastated about the birthday

celebrations but found she was thrilled with what they are doing. B. Lavin said the school nurse was the instigator of this as she felt they needed to look at this and they hope to extend the thinking to healthy snacks beyond birthdays.

J. Converse asked if they applied to GDEF for a grant and was told they did apply for one from them. They applied to Finish Line for the pedometers.

P. Murray said they hear the concerns about the building and stated Mr. Young and Dr. Jennings are working on a capital plan. C. Young said it is nice to hear positive feedback about the new kindergarten classrooms. He also complimented the playground committee for their great job. He knows there are some thoughts about additional pieces of equipment and stated they will keep this in mind.

B. Lavin invited members to visit Prescott to see the great things going on there.

Vision Plan and Budget Implications

Dr. Jennings stated in the fall they reviewed how the first two years of the Vision Plan went and how they want the next three years to proceed. Their Vision Statement, created ten years ago, is "Together a Promise to Excel" . Their three goals are:

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

Dr. Jennings stated they needed a Mission Statement to put between their Vision Statement and their goals. At their last two meetings, they worked out their central mission and she stated student learning is their core mission. Dr. Jennings stated they do not have technology as one of the goals. The group feels technology should be an accelerator for the goals of student learning and as an aside, technology consultant has been added to each of the Action Teams goals.

Dr. Jennings stated they asked what they can do Pre-K through 12 to achieve a measurable student learning goal in the next three years and how they can build a budget to support it. Their mission to unite the three goals is: "By 2007, all students in the GDRSD will make academic progress in ALL subject areas and Will meet or exceed established academic standards in English/Language Arts and Math." Strategic Action Plans would be designed to achieve this and School Improvement Plans will also have at least one of their goals related to the Mission Statement.

Dr. Jennings reviewed ways they can assess students individually over the next three years. In addition to MCAS scores, they have TERC math assessments, DRA reading assessments, core assignment assessments, senior portfolio's and Grade 8 writing and math assessments. She noted the new Student Information Management System can track student scores over time to see if they are improving.

In FY06 and FY07, student development will be directed with regular and SPED together and regular and SPED staff will work together, along with technology, to achieve some of the mission. They will be looking at how the facilities, including the PTYC, can support student learning. Dr. Jennings stated the Action Teams are currently writing their Action Plans. She reviewed the budget time line and noted Dunstable is hosting the Joint Financial Committee next Tuesday. She stated they will be presenting student development, staff development and facilities according to a two year plan. The focus of the December 15th School Committee meeting will be to discuss draft budgets with the Administrative Council. Dr. Jennings stated that if they can combine the strategic planning with the budget work, they will be able to create a strong impetus for the district for two years and have the money to support it.

As the School Committee liaison to the Action Committee, J. Converse said it has been a fascinating process. She stated this has made the three district goals line up under something tangible and she wants to be sure the money they need is going to be there.

K. Lofgren asked for a definition of academic and asked if this is specifically the curriculum frameworks. Dr. Jennings said she showed the assessments they currently have going and some areas, such as Physical and Behavioral Health, will need to create some. They currently have a grant to give fitness testing in all grade levels.

P. Murray is concerned about where revenues will be and how they will support the goals. C. McKinney asked if this concept can be introduced at the Joint Financial Committee meeting next week to plant the seed. He feels it will help them understand how they came up with the budget numbers. A. Vervaeke stated they will need to tie it directly to long term capital plans and revenue projections. C. Young stated they are viewing the budget as an outcome based document versus an input based document as it communicates more effectively to the communities what the budget is about. He feels people relate better to the effort and outcomes that come out of a budget rather than to the number of things that go into a budget. Dr. Rubel said this process is forcing them to collaborate more closely between building level budgets and the central office budget and feels they will be using their money more wisely.

State and Local Revenue Projections

C. Young distributed copies of a draft of General Fund revenue budget estimates for FY06. Typically the budget process does not try to estimate revenues until the Governor's budget is generated in February but they talked with the Joint Financial Committee about looking at revenue sources early on. He feels it is a fair assumption that state contributions will not likely increase by very much and noted no new funding formula is in place. He reviewed the estimates and if town growth is around 3% and if they increase the assessments by 2 1/2%, it looks as though they can generate about \$645,000, or another 2% increase from current funding. Revenue estimates total \$30,916,512. He noted SPED reimbursements, estimated at \$500,000 for FY06, are placed in a special revenue fund to directly offset SPED tuitions.

C. Young stated they would typically look at a six to eight percent increase in funding in a given year. A six percent increase would be slightly more than \$1.5M in additional dollars and an eight percent increase would be slightly more than \$2M in additional dollars. If his funding estimate is correct, they will probably have a shortfall of about \$1M. He stated they have enrollment growth projected at 3 1/2%, ever increasing health insurance costs and teacher contracts as well as operational costs of the facilities. He noted this will be a starting point for discussion with the Joint Financial Committee. With state funding showing little or no growth, he stated all the increases get passed along to the local taxpayers. He said the issue is how they can avoid finding themselves in a Prop 2 1/2 debacle and if there is a way to respond to the shortfall in funding. He stated the economy is picking up and they will start seeing a rise in the cost of services.

K. Lofgren asked if Medicaid reimbursements get paid directly to the towns or the district and C. Young advised they get paid to the district as they are suppose to offset the costs of educating SPED students.

P. Murray asked why the building project interest income will be zero and C. Young said if they have completed the building projects, the borrowed money will have been paid out and there will not be any left to invest.

C. McKinney noted the increased assessments to the towns appears to be about 5%.

C. Young said they assumed a 3% new growth and a 2 1/2% threshold. C. McKinney assumes the assessments would fall in approximately the same percentage categories of the total town budget and C. Young said he would hope so. With respect to Chapter 70 funding, C. Young

stated towns cannot continue to "tread water". Dr. Jennings stated the issue of timing is facing them again because they do not have a formula change and they have to layoff people in June and open schools in September.

ACTION ITEMS

VOTE: Superintendent Search Consultant

Members continued earlier discussion about NESDEC and FMS. While he liked both firms, A. Vervaeke feels NESDEC offers a well rounded approach. K. Lofgren likes their approach to holding the focus groups and P. Murray said she also likes NESDEC.

J. Converse said while she likes the aggressive approach of FMS, she is happy with both choices and will support a motion for NESDEC.

C. MCKINNEY MOVED THE GROTON DUNSTABLE REGIONAL SCHOOL DISTRICT ACQUIRE THE SERVICES OF NEW ENGLAND SCHOOL DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL FOR THE PURPOSES OF THE SUPERINTENDENT SEARCH BASED ON THEIR PROPOSAL RECEIVED ON SEPTEMBER 15, 2004 AND THAT THE COMMITTEE WOULD EXPEND APPROXIMATELY \$11,520, PLUS FIXED COSTS OF APPROXIMATELY \$3500, TO DO SO. SECONDED BY J. CONVERSE

A. Vervaeke noted they will have to spend money on advertising etc and money is available for this. K. Lofgren stated NESDEC offered to assist in the development of a budget for additional items.

SO VOTED IN FAVOR UNANIMOUSLY BY ROLLCALL

A. Vervaeke will contact NESDEC tomorrow morning. Gary Baker will be their consultant. A. Vervaeke will also contact the firms that were not chosen.

QUESTIONS/COMMENTS

None

ADJOURNMENT:

C. MCKINNEY MOVED TO ADJOURN THE MEETING AT 9:42 P.M.

SECONDED BY J. CONVERSE

SO VOTED IN FAVOR UNANIMOUSLY

Respectfully submitted,

Susan H. Smith
Recording Secretary