

GROTON DUNSTABLE REGIONAL SCHOOL COMMITTEE
High School Library
Business Meeting Minutes
May 4, 2005 Approved as amended May 18, 2005

PRESENT:

Ms Cindy Barrett
Ms Judy Converse
Ms Karen Lofgren
Mr. Chuck McKinney, Vice-Chair
Ms Patricia Murray, 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
Ms Joan Endicott, Director of Pupil Personnel

STAFF, PRESS, OTHERS: J. Kulesz, Groton Herald; P. Comtois, Groton Landmark;
S. Prendergast, D. Robinson, See attached sign-in sheet

CALL TO ORDER

The GDRSC Meeting was called to order at 7:15 p.m. by the chair, A. Vervaeke.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Dr. Jennings announced this is Teacher Appreciation Week and thanked the PTA's, PTO's, students and student councils for the activities honoring the teachers.

Dr. Jennings announced the Prescott play Magic in Me will be performed at the Performing Arts Center on Friday at 7:00 p.m. and at 4:00 p.m. on Saturday.

Dr. Jennings announced the middle school will have an orientation for incoming fifth graders on May 5th at 7:00 p.m. at the Performing Arts Center.

Dr. Jennings congratulated Jennifer Marino on the birth of her baby boy.

Dr. Jennings announced high school science teacher Melissa Holt has received a scholarship to attend a seminar this summer on molecular biology.

Dr. Jennings announced the Community Action Team is holding its first annual yard sale on May 14th.

J. Converse thanked the GDEF for their fundraiser last weekend. The play, Don't Dress for Dinner, was a lot of fun and she looks forward to hearing from them about their next grant cycle.

K. Lofgren announced the SPED Parent Advisory Council will meet at the high school 7:00 p.m. on May 10th. A presentation by the Federation For Children With Special Needs on Turning Three will follow at 7:30 p.m.

C. Barrett announced she, Dr. Jennings and Ms Endicott attended the Merrimac Education Collaborative thank you dinner last Thursday. She found it very informative and stated everyone is very excited about the work they are doing.

Dr. Rubel announced Susan Daugherty and Amy Snyder have received a grant to go to Hawaii this summer to study Southeast Asian culture and developing interdisciplinary curriculum.

K. Lofgren announced a rally will be held at the State House on May 10th at 11:30 a.m. This is the opportunity for parents, educators, legislators and community leaders to lobby Governor Romney and the state legislators for adequate state funding to meet educational needs of students everywhere.

A. Vervaeke announced the State Democratic Convention is going to be in Lowell and they are looking for school committee members to sit on a panel with a state representative who are willing to talk about the impact of Chapter 70 cuts and freezes on their own district programs. He suggested members check the MASC list-serve for more information.

REPORTS FROM SUB-COMMITTEES

Budget and Finance - P. Murray reported they have not met but anticipates they will be meeting within the next two weeks.

Personnel and Negotiations - C. McKinney reported they will be meeting at 11:00 a.m. at Tarbell on May 11th.

Policy - J. Converse reported they will be meeting at Tarbell on May 11th at 1:00 p.m.

Communications - C. McKinney reported they will be meeting at Tarbell on May 11th at 9:30 a.m.

Naming - J. Converse reported they met yesterday and reviewed the thirty-nine suggestions they received. They will meet at 1:00 p.m. on May 31st.

Building - S. Prendergast reported they received their permanent Certificate of Occupancy for MSN last Friday. Parents had raised concerns about the safety of the building prior to the issuance of the certificate. He thanked the Building Inspector and Fire Chief for working with them. The problem arose when the file sub-bidder became insolvent in the middle of the project and some of the work was not done. There were twenty-two items that needed to be done and most were completed during the February school vacation. Six automatic fire dampers were not installed in the HVA system and they, in addition to four others, were installed last week. With the exception of the electrical rooms, which are rated rooms, the building is completely sprinkled. The Building Inspector and Fire Chief found the building safe in September when they issued a temporary Certificate of Occupancy. A. Vervaeke asked that any concerns or rumors people would like answered be sent to Public Comments at www.gdrsd.org.

S. Prendergast reported the documents to alter the high school water treatment plant to add polyphosphate to alleviate the problem of lead leaching out of the brass have been filed with DEP and they expect a response within three weeks. There is a high probability this will work but they do not have complete assurance.

P. Murray asked when they will get the bids for the windows at Prescott. S. Prendergast said later this month and C. Young said he had a pre-bid conference today. Twelve prospective bidders have taken out specs so far. They hope to complete the work over the summer. S. Prendergast said they have agreed with the Groton HDC that they will install aluminum clad wooden windows by Pella. If the low bidder submits an alternative window, they will have to go back and get HDC's approval. He stated the architect found some other things that desperately need to be done so the scope of the project has been expanded somewhat and the initial funding may be less than the low bid.

MINUTES

None

QUESTIONS/COMMENTS

N. Bugbee stated she knows the Committee will be discussing the budget tonight and will be considering increasing class size. She volunteers in the elementary classrooms and has seen what teachers struggle with

when there are twenty-five plus students. She urged the Committee to keep class size down for all the students and the teacher's morale.

N. Bugbee asked for an update on the bus/epipen issue. Dr. Jennings said they anticipate taking legal action this week and it will be made public. Individualized notes will be sent to students who are currently affected.

PRESENTATIONS/DISCUSSION

FY06 Proposed Budget

Dr. Jennings distributed copies of a memo regarding the recommended \$800,000 in budget cuts. It provides information on potential athletic fee increases, projected elementary class size by grade, technology purchases remaining in the budget request, per pupil expenditure levels and administration supervision and evaluation responsibilities. A memo with recommended budget cuts beyond \$800,000 was also distributed.

K. Lofgren asked if the two elementary teaching positions are new or existing teachers.

Dr. Jennings said it is a reduction of one proposed position and another position cut from the budget because they were under enrolled this year.

P. Murray asked if the computer purchases line up with the most recent budget.

C. Young and Ms Morgan-White worked on this and Dr. Jennings said some of the computer purchases were part of the strategic plan. The strategic plan was cut 15%.

C. Young said the \$28,250 is what exists after the cut and not what was originally proposed.

Since it adds up to quite a bit of money, C. Barrett asked Mr. Young to comment on the new and replacement equipment listed in many of the site budgets. C. Young said the schools are given an allotment and the decisions on how to allocate it are made by the principals. He stated it is generally related to implementing plans or replacement strategies that change from year to year.

Dr. Jennings said they are seeking the Committee's approval of the recommended \$800,000 in cuts. This needs to be done before they can begin discussing another \$580,000 that needs to be cut or funded elsewhere. She stated the state has not taken any official action. There is some discussion about freeing up some additional money for regional transportation but it has not been decided that Groton Dunstable would receive it. They will know what the Senate budget is on May 18th.

When the athletic fees were increased a couple of years ago, J. Converse recalled that it did not affect the number of students they thought it might. She asked Mr. Robinson if he still felt that way and if funds would be available to help individuals that want to participate but might not be able to afford the higher fees. A. Vervaeke asked if there is a limitation per student or per family.

D. Robinson stated the maximum family fee is four times the individual amount and he intends to have a similar family maximum. The \$225 user fee in FY04, although significantly higher than any they had before, did not significantly affect the number of users although there was a slight increase in the number of students asking for waivers. He stated they have never turned anyone away for financial reasons.

A. Vervaeke asked about modifying the limitations and setting a \$500 per athlete maximum. He asked if the family limitations kick in a lot and D. Robinson said it does in the spring. There are probably twenty-five to thirty families who would reach the maximum and not pay a user fee in the spring.

C. McKinney stated he is prepared to accept the administration's first \$800,000 recommendations with the suggestion that the sports and late bus attempt to be held at their current full levels, based on implementing and/or increasing user fees.

J. Converse would like clarification on what the per pupil expenditure actually means on a day to day basis. At the high school level, Principal Dillon said text books, professional development, supplies, new and

replacement equipment and student activities represent 75% of the operating budget. Consistently reducing the per pupil expenditure means students are using the equipment and textbooks longer than they would like them to. He stated it covers increases of sections of classes and they want to continue to fund the student clubs and organizations. He stated it is the essentials to run a classroom.

P. Murray recalls FY04 was when they had the lowest PPE number and asked where they are in comparison to that.

With the elimination of one teacher at Florence Roche, K. Lofgren asked what grade this will affect. Dr. Jennings said the elementary principals met yesterday and the class sizes would effectively be the same at all grade levels across all schools because they would take new students and put them where class size had not reached the maximum. They would probably have to take four third grade students from Florence Roche and ask them to move to Prescott or Swallow Union to keep class sizes even. Thirty more elementary students were projected for next year and Dr. Jennings stated they have all ready enrolled twenty-nine first graders.

With respect to the May 3rd memo regarding building improvements, A. Vervaeke would like the Committee to take a stand to support all \$155,000 of scheduled building maintenance. He stated they have put off routine maintenance year after year and there are now "rumblings" in the towns about them not doing the maintenance within the operating budget. He feels they need to do every item on the list. It was noted the building improvement cuts should have been in the "beyond \$800,000" memo.

C. Barrett asked if the April 6th memo referred to a new middle school teacher and Dr. Jennings said this was for projected growth. The teams will grow beyond 25:1. C. Barrett asked what the average class size is for this year and Principal Raucci said it is 25:1 and slightly under at grade 5. C. Barrett asked how the reduction will affect next year's proposed ratio and B. Raucci said grade 5 would be 25:1, grade 6 would be 27:1, grade 7 would be 26:1 and grade 8 would be 25.5:1. C. Barrett said the projected enrollment for next year was 970 and asked if it has been increased to 990. B. Raucci said this is what she used to create next year's budget. Enrollment currently exceeds 970. Dr. Jennings will review the budget figures with Ms Raucci. It is the consensus of the Committee to approve the recommended \$800,000 budget cuts.

Dr. Jennings stated they are \$300,000+ out of balance and after re-doing the assessments, Dunstable will need to vote an additional \$63,000. If this does not happen, approximately \$288,000 will be missing from the budget and they will need to cut up to an additional \$590,000. She reviewed further equitable reduction considerations:

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| 1. Strategic Plan Capital/Repair reductions | \$ 83,000 |
| 2. Increase of class size by two students | \$214,000 |
| 3. Elimination of classroom/building aides | \$264,000 |

Dr. Jennings stated anything beyond the \$800,000 reductions cuts into the core program and essential services.

K. Lofgren clarified they are not increasing pre-K which is set by the state. She asked how many SPED aides there are and was told twenty-nine but they are not included in the cuts. There will be four kindergarten positions covering ten kindergarten classrooms.

P. Murray stated she is not willing to take these cuts and they need to discuss whether an amendment will be made on Dunstable's town meeting floor to increase their assessment by \$63,000 so they will receive the full assessment from Groton and not lose \$280,000 in funding. C. McKinney said the Committee voted on the local assessments and they are operating under the obligation to seek them.

A. Vervaeke said they will come to town meeting requesting sufficient funds but noted Dunstable does not feel they have anything to spare. He stated they are still looking at \$302,000 in cuts even if they receive the additional assessment. He asked if they could consider making a pledge at town meeting that if they can get the \$280,000 from Dunstable and Groton, they could give it back or lower the assessments if they get additional revenues from the state, up to and including that amount. He feels this may make Dunstable's

decision a bit easier. P. Murray said she would not support this as he is saying they can live with the \$302,000 gap. A. Vervaeke asked if there are places they can trim \$302,000. He stated these cuts will cause incredible pain in the district for many years.

C. Barrett said they had discussed whether they could not fill the two assistant principal positions. Dr. Jennings said they do not usually reduce the budget by people that are leaving as this creates inequity. The administrator supervision and evaluation responsibilities were reviewed.

C. McKinney asked what timetable they are on before making decisions about this information. Dr. Jennings stated the next cuts will be difficult and complicated. They must tell teachers by June 15th if they are not being invited back but she does not believe the proposed cuts will affect current teachers.

J. Converse agrees the cuts are unacceptable and encouraged them to find other ways to fund them by going to Dunstable's town meeting, pursuing a joint town meeting or using E&D. She does not feel they can sit on \$900,000 and watch these changes take place. If they were to reduce the salary reserve and found they needed more money than was left there, she asked if E&D can fund items in the budget at any time. C. Young said yes. She asked if any of the potential changes would affect the high school accreditation.

J. Dillon said he cannot say any one item would jeopardize their accreditation but they do have a five year report due in February 2006 and they need to respond to items that deal with curriculum recommendations and integration of technology. Increasing class sizes would jeopardize some curriculum opportunities. It would probably have an impact in four years.

With respect to Mr. Vervaeke's earlier comment, C. Young said last year they received the revenue numbers from the state the day after Dunstable's town meeting and they were slightly higher than projected. Due to many lobbying efforts, the Senate may try to generate some more funds. If they knew those numbers today, they would put them in the budget and generate the assessments accordingly. A. Vervaeke's suggestion may be an alternative to consider. A. Vervaeke said Mr. St Jean told him Dunstable feels their back is against the wall but A. Vervaeke feels Dunstable holds all the cards. He would like the Committee to consider continuing discussions with Dunstable.

F. O'Connell said the unknowns will still make discussions difficult at town meeting. Even if the \$63,000/\$280,000 brought them flush with the budget number, he would be on board to return anything beyond that but they still have a \$300,000 gap. He feels taking this out of E&D will make next year's discussion impossible.

C. Barrett suggested they agree "no new computers" as listed in the memo. Dr. Jennings said that may put the strategic plan out of balance.

C. McKinney suggested they table discussion since they do not have enough information to make a substantive consensus on where the \$300,000 will come from. Members agreed there are a lot of unanswered questions.

F. O'CONNELL MOVED TO REDUCE THE SALARY RESERVE BY \$100,000.
SECONDED BY P. MURRAY
SO VOTED BY ROLLCALL

While they may need to take that step, C. McKinney said he cannot support the motion as he would like time to consider the entire \$300,000. C. Barrett believes they do need to cut \$300,000 but also believes they need more time. Dr. Jennings said the administration did not work on a \$300,000 plan and encouraged members to avoid creating individual plans but let administration know their ideas. F. O'Connell said this number is based on looking at the budget since the fall and on recent conversations.

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

C. Young said the administration will bring back information on \$200,000 in cuts.
C. Barrett suggested the administration look at computers and equipment in each site plan. A. Vervaeke asked they keep the maintenance list with the exception of the middle school security cameras, eliminate the certified librarian and use an additional \$50,000 to \$75,000 from E&D.

English Language Learners Policy: Second Reading

Based on discussion at the last Committee meeting, Dr. Rubel suggested the policy name be changed to the English Learner Education Policy and the title of the program description has been changed to be consistent. The word "educational" in the first sentence of the policy would be changed to "English Learner" and " and Procedures" in the last paragraph would be changed to "Description".

Since they are having their Coordinated Program Review beginning on May 18th, Dr. Rubel suggested it would make sense for the Committee to wait to vote on this policy until they receive feedback from the CPR.

Superintendent Evaluation: State of the District

Since this is her last evaluation, Dr. Jennings thought she would give an evaluation of their district. When she became the superintendent in 1994, focus groups were held with faculty, administrators and curriculum leaders as well as a workshop with the School Committee. In 1994, the top five things the focus groups wanted to keep were the collegiality of staff, staff development opportunities, the middle school concept, low class size and curriculum half-days. They wanted to stop shared staff among buildings, large classes, the lack of curriculum coordination, decline in educational funding and undue parent influence on policy and grading.

In 1994 they wanted to start maintaining the physical plan, develop a technology plan for the future, communicate the positives of the school system, continue the work on the teacher evaluation system and develop a K-12 curriculum and evaluation of it. The School Committee looked at long-term goals and wanted to define the school culture. They started vision planning in 1995 and this resulted in the vision statement "Together a Promise to Excel". Since that time, two five year strategic plans have been designed.

The second goal was to improve facilities and an addition was put on Swallow Union, Boutwell came on board, renovations were done at all the schools, an addition was put on MSS, a new high school was built and the old high school was renovated to MSN. They are presently remodeling Prescott.

The third goal was to establish professional standards and this was done through the creation of an evaluation system negotiated for all Unit A staff. An evaluation system, based on state professional standards, was also set up for administrators.

The fourth goal was to assure financial support and the district achieved foundation level funding by 2001 and maintains funding at this level.

Goal five was to empower the school community and many forums have been created for decision making, particularly through school councils and student government.

Goal six was to reach out to the larger community and the community has been included in a variety of task forces and community support groups such as GDAY, the PAC Board, the PTYC Board and GDEF were created. The joint budget planning began six years ago and has continued in earnest.

The seventh goal was to review curriculum and instruction and all curriculum has been aligned with state standards and instructional practices in regular and special education have been diversified. MCAS scores and other assessments have been improving.

Goal 8 was to plan for space utilization and grade configuration and beginning last year, they now have three configurations: K-4, 5-8 and 9-12.

The final goal was to review, revise and publish school policies and a new policy book was developed over three years and is updated annually.

Dr. Jennings said she was happy to work on these district goals. Her short term goals for this year are:

1. Keep the district focus on the main mission of the strategic plan, which is student learning. Dr. Jennings said even during these difficult budget times, she is working to keep a part of the strategic plan before the Committee so the district can move forward.
2. Support teams of faculty, administrators and parents who move the mission forward. Dr. Jennings said this is her job and feels she has done so.
3. Create a smooth transition to a new administration. Dr. Jennings said she has worked behind the scenes to discuss how they can have a smooth transition in June and through the summer.

A. Vervaeke asked what Boutwell was prior to becoming the Early Childhood Center.

Dr. Jennings said it was originally a school and was sold to a private company. NEBS then bought it and then the district purchased it.

Quarterly Report

C. Young reviewed the quarterly financial report ending March 31, 2005. He stated the district remains in a very strong financial position. It is estimated revenues for FY05 will be above the revenue budget. SPED tuitions and ABA services are expected to exceed their approved budgets but Circuit Breaker reimbursement will mitigate some of the impact. Salary accounts are within budget with the exception of teacher substitutes due to numerous maternity leaves. Heating and electrical costs are high at the high school and MSN. He noted an additional bus was added in January to improve service for Swallow Union students.

The Revolving Funds are operating within budget as are all building projects. Grants are also proceeding normally and are monitored monthly.

P. Murray asked if the Circuit Breaker will cover the SPED overruns and C. Young said no and reminded the Committee they decided not to put a contingency in the budget.

C. McKinney asked about the water treatment plans. C. Young said the first solution will cost about \$10,000 but the second alternative is much more costly.

C. Barrett asked what happens to the money that is in the available balance column and C. Young said this becomes E&D.

ACTION ITEMS

VOTE: Superintendent Contract - Dr. Alan Genovese

C. McKinney distributed a copy of the Superintendent contract for Dr. Alan Genovese. He noted it is a page shorter than before due to reformatting. He reviewed the document and stated it is a three year contract, beginning on or about July 15th. He will receive a yearly salary of \$135,000 for 2005 - 2008. The Committee will pay sixty-five percent of his health insurance premium and contribute up to \$1800 towards the purchase of life and/or disability insurance policies per fiscal year. He will receive fifteen sick days annually, five personal days per year and twenty-five vacation days. Work related travel will be reimbursed, dues and associated costs of membership will be paid and \$2000 will be provided for professional development. There is also a section on Discharge and Resignation.

J. Converse noted the evaluation date is June 1st and suggested May 15th be used when it is rewritten so current school committee members can complete the evaluation before the committee may change due to the elections.

P. MURRAY MOVED THE GROTON DUNSTABLE REGIONAL SCHOOL DISTRICT RATIFY THE CONTRACT SET BEFORE US FOR DR. ALAN GENOVESE, FAXED ON MAY 3, 2005. SECONDED BY K. LOFGREN
SO VOTED IN FAVOR UNANIMOUSLY BY ROLLCALL

VOTE: School Choice

Dr. Jennings reviewed a chart showing the number of School Choice students who have been attending the district and the number of students going out. She noted the number of students choosing to go outside the district has been going down since 1998 and this translates into satisfied citizens and also helps their budget. She recommends they continue to be a district of choice with the caveat that class sizes will not increase beyond those established by the School Committee.

Should the Committee vote to accept the recommendation to increase class size,

A. Vervaeke stated this would also affect school choice since it would set a new standard.

C. MCKINNEY MOVED THE GROTON DUNSTABLE REGIONAL SCHOOL DISTRICT PARTICIPATE IN SCHOOL CHOICE FOR FY2006, LIMITED IN SUCH A WAY TO NOT AFFECT CLASS SIZE. SECONDED BY J. CONVERSE
SO VOTED IN FAVOR UNANIMOUSLY BY ROLLCALL

QUESTIONS/COMMENTS

A. Vervaeke stated this is Ms Converse's last meeting and noted there is no one more passionate about and dedicated to the education of the students. Her caring has always been there and she has always been professional. He thanked her for always striving to do what she feels is the best for the district.

A. Vervaeke said this is the last meeting of his first term and his second term will begin on May 18th. He thanked the Committee for the honor and privilege of allowing him be chairman this year and for their patience, understanding and sometimes their criticism, to allow him to grow as a committee person. He stated he does this because it is a passion for him and he wants to make a difference.

C. Barrett asked when the MS configuration will be discussed and Dr. Jennings said it is on the May 18th agenda.

A. Vervaeke stated Dr. Genovese will be at Dunstable's town meeting Monday night.

ADJOURNMENT:

J. CONVERSE MOVED TO ADJOURN TO EXECUTIVE SESSION AT 9:48 P.M. FOR THE PURPOSE OF CONTRACT NEGOTIATIONS, NOT TO RETURN TO OPEN SESSION. SECONDED BY C. MCKINNEY
SO VOTED IN FAVOR UNANIMOUSLY BY ROLLCALL

Respectfully submitted,

Susan H. Smith
Recording Secretary