

GROTON-DUNSTABLE REGIONAL SCHOOL COMMITTEE
High School Library
Business Meeting Minutes
April 26, 2006 Approved May 17, 2006

PRESENT:

Ms Cindy Barrett, Secretary
Ms Berta Erickson
Mr. Paul Fitzgerald
Ms Karen Lofgren
Mr. Chuck McKinney, Chair
Mr. Frank O'Connell, Vice- Chair
Mr. Alan Vervaeke

ADMINISTRATION:

Dr. Alan Genovese, Superintendent
Mr. Craig Young, Business Manager
Dr. Susan Rubel, Director of Curriculum/Staff Development
Ms Joan Endicott, Director of Pupil Personnel

STAFF, PRESS, OTHERS: Lowell Sun; J. Kulesz, Groton Herald;
P. Comtois, Groton Landmark; K. Icenogle, Dunstable News; N. Rockwell,
B. Raucci, R. Vickery, M. Hennelly, S. Daugherty, See attached sign-in sheet

CALL TO ORDER

C. McKinney announced the GDRSC Meeting was called to order at 6:30 p.m. and the Committee voted to adjourn to executive session for the purpose of exploring negotiation strategies for non-bargaining personnel and approval/release of executive session minutes. The meeting reconvened in open session at 7:13 p.m., with no plans to return to executive session, and was called to order by the chair, C. McKinney.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

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

K. Lofgren announced the Resolution for Adequate PreK-12 Public Education Funding the Committee adopted on April 5th has circulated through every governmental boards in both towns and the Boards of Selectmen and FinComs have adopted it. A note has been received from Deborah Niswonger, from the Massachusetts Association of Regional Schools, and she will be distributing it to the MASS.

C. Young announced the Groton Friends of Trees has donated a tree to replace the one that died in front of the middle school. It will be planted on Arbor Day which is being celebrated at the school on the morning of May 6th. The event is sponsored by the Friends of Trees and the Groton Garden Club.

Dr. Genovese thanked Groton residents for approving the school budget at town meeting and he looks forward to it passing in Dunstable. He distributed a copy of the handout that will be available at town meeting. He also distributed copies of News and Notes for April 10th to April 16th to Committee members.

REPORTS FROM SUB-COMMITTEES

Budget and Finance - F. O'Connell reported they will be meeting at Tarbell on May 16th at 6:00 p.m.

Building Committee - C. Young reported updated quotes have been received for the gym wall crash pads and these should be up within a month.

Policy - K. Lofgren reported they met last night and worked on the Advertising and Partnerships policy and an Executive Minutes Release policy. They will meet at Tarbell on May 23rd at 7:00 p.m.

Naming Committee - B. Erickson reported they are meeting at MSN tomorrow at 1:00 p.m. to discuss the results from the coffees that were held. They will discuss where they go from here.

Report of Business Administrator -

Mass Building Authority Update - C. Young reported they will be submitting their defense of eligible costs to SBA tomorrow. A copy is available at Tarbell. This action will result in them getting a date to justify why they feel SBA should honor the additional costs. Any member wishing to participate in the discussion may attend. C. Young will notify the chair of the date and he, in turn, will notify Committee members.

C. McKinney suggested having town officials involved in the discussions as well.

C. Young said while SBA has guidelines they have to follow, they are very supportive.

Report on the Day on the Hill - K. Lofgren reported she was disappointed the audience was not allowed to speak during the open session. Mike Gilbert has asked that their Resolution be submitted to the MASC for consideration by the delegate assembly. Attendees received a handout on the House amendments and she noted some of the message they have been trying to send has been heard. They spent a lot of time with Representative Hargraves. C. Barrett has been working on e-mailing the Resolution to all the representatives and senators and a copy of their addresses was distributed to members.

A. Vervaeke reported Representative Haddad, from Somerset, had said she had a three year plan to get back to fully funding regional transportation and this is the first year of that plan. They are also attempting to help non-regional school districts pay for transportation. There is a 50/50 Five Year Plan which would attempt to get 50% state funding and 50% local funding. There is also a push to hold back on the rollback of the state income tax.

Dr. Genovese asked if there was discussion of the money that would be saved by not doing the rollback, being dedicated to education. K. Lofgren said there are some senators

and representatives that feel no rollback is needed as the money is there all ready and it just needs to be reallocated. A. Vervaeke said they hope to bring \$300M out of the rainy day fund and re-inject it into educational funding.

Report of the Chair

Representative for Custodial Negotiations - C. McKinney reported B. Erickson will be part of the team for the custodial contract negotiations.

C. McKinney reminded members they will soon be working toward providing an evaluation for Dr. Genovese. It is hoped this will be by the second meeting in May.

Report of the Superintendent - No report

MINUTES

C. BARRETT MOVED TO APPROVE THE BUSINESS MEETING MINUTES OF APRIL 5, 2006. SECONDED BY P. FITZGERALD

In Favor: C. Barrett, K. Lofgren, P. Fitzgerald, B. Erickson

Abstention: A. Vervaeke, F. O'Connell, C. McKinney

C. BARRETT MOVED TO APPROVE THE BUSINESS MEETING MINUTES OF APRIL 12, 2006. SECONDED BY P. FITZGERALD
SO VOTED IN FAVOR UNANIMOUSLY

C. BARRETT MOVED TO APPROVE THE EXECUTIVE SESSION MINUTES OF JANUARY 4, 2006. SECONDED BY A. VERVAEKE
SO VOTED IN FAVOR UNANIMOUSLY

C. BARRETT MOVED TO APPROVE THE EXECUTIVE SESSION MINUTES OF JANUARY 18, 2006. SECONDED BY P. FITZGERALD
SO VOTED IN FAVOR UNANIMOUSLY

C. BARRETT MOVED TO APPROVE THE EXECUTIVE SESSION MINUTES OF FEBRUARY 15, 2006. SECONDED BY A. VERVAEKE
SO VOTED IN FAVOR UNANIMOUSLY

C. BARRETT MOVED TO APPROVE THE EXECUTIVE SESSION MINUTES OF FEBRUARY 1, 2006. SECONDED BY P. FITZGERALD
In Favor: C. Barrett, K. Lofgren, P. Fitzgerald, B. Erickson, A. Vervaeke, C. McKinney
Abstention: F. O'Connell

QUESTIONS/COMMENTS

None

PRESENTATIONS/DISCUSSION

Middle School Configuration Review

Principal Raucci said they are here for a two year checkup on how they are doing as a middle school. There are many middle school voices in this presentation and she introduced the represented group that will be presenting. B. Raucci said the staff has done a lot of reflecting of their practices, particularly in the past several months, now that they are in their second year of the new configuration.

After the renovation of the old high school, the School Committee made the decision to have one middle school in the district and the fifth grade was brought into the mix. She does not believe that decision was made on philosophy but was based on space and with two buildings, there was plenty of room to do that. Their intention from the start was to maintain the integrity of their successful middle school and they viewed their facilities as one. With that in mind, they planned a program for students that would give them the best of the best, using all the facilities. She stated they wanted to maintain a strong sense of community, a strong sense of collegiality among the teachers, a strong school spirit and a strong focus on learning. Having the fifth grade join their community made all of this better.

B. Raucci said she was part of the 2001-2002 design team that worked diligently to make the old high school great for middle school students and staff. In 2002 the eighth grade had to move to the new high school for a year and she noted this was stressful having students in two separate buildings. She stated many people did not like the way things transpired when the fifth graders moved into the two buildings but acknowledged the transition team worked very hard. She stated they are now a dynamic and thriving learning community and while it has not been perfect, the staff consistently looks for ways to educate the whole child and find creative ways to bring out the best in each of them. They thrive to have a safe and nourishing environment.

B. Raucci said the difficult part has been having two buildings with thirty yards of asphalt between them. They configured it to have three grades in each building, with grades 5,6 and 7, and their team time, in MSS and grades 6, 7 and 8 in MSN. Each building belongs to all four grades for their integrated arts program. She acknowledged all the students are not happy on a daily basis but they are striving to achieve that. She reviewed the items they will be discussing.

Fine Arts coordinator S. Daugherty said three years ago, the superintendent, the director of curriculum, the middle school principal and curriculum coordinators discussed what really rounds out the education of the middle school child. With educating the whole child in mind, they made the decision that students would take part in foreign language, physical education and wellness, visual art and a performing art at every grade level. The schedule is designed so each grade level is in IA at the same time and allows for a mix of students from all the different teams to be in the same IA classes. The current configuration allows them to best use all the facilities in both buildings at their maximum potential.

Seventh grade teacher Amy Snyder said the IA schedule allows teams of teachers to have common planning time. This is a consistent block of time every day that grade level

teachers have in common and is used to share and plan strategies, meet with parents and develop cross-curricula programs. She stated one of the most impressive things about the culture of the faculty is that they consistently reflect on their practice.

A. Snyder stated that when sixth and seventh grade staff looked at the grade level split between buildings, they agreed common planning time is their core. They have become more thoughtful and more planned with the exchange of their shared material. They also concluded that their collegiality does not hinge on being under one roof and the common planning time allows them to function effectively as a grade level no matter what building they are in.

R. Vickery said part of the silver lining is the Life Skills program, which is a big part of their school. With the well equipped additional space, she stated these students are flourishing and are a real asset to the school.

B. Raucci said the addition of the fifth grade students has been fun and fantastic and they love having them in the school. They are appropriately together in the south building and they try to keep their day very young and "fifth-grade" like they were accustomed to. Ten teachers came in from three separate elementary schools and their work helped make the transition of the fifth grade into the middle school really successful. Having the fifth grade in the middle school makes it a much younger school from the eighth grade down.

B. Raucci said the first year she had the fifth grade integrated arts in the middle of the day but since this meant too much movement for them, their IA schedule is now at the end of the day so they only moved once and then go straight to their buses. R. Vickery said there are communal areas for each grade to congregate, with fifth grade going to the MSS cafeteria and eighth grade going to the MSN cafeteria. Since the sixth and seventh graders are split between the two buildings, they have the opportunity to go to either one. Dismissal time is also staggered. They changed the way they use the I-Pass system and it is now a smooth and safe operation. She noted it allows them to schedule 956 students quickly and easily.

B. Raucci said ConnectED has helped with communications and was very helpful on their Washington, DC trip. Their website is also very solid.

B. Raucci said both office staffs meet each Friday morning and they have standardized practices. MSN was missing a place for teachers to congregate and a staff room has been created.

They received a lot of feedback last year with respect to orienting fourth grade parents into the school and a committee was formed to look at ways to meet the needs of fifth grade students, and new students coming in over the summer, as well as their parents. Their traditional orientation meeting will be held on the 9th to cover the "big picture" of the middle school. Two coffees will be held on August 24th to answer any last minute questions parents may have. School will start on August 30th for the fifth graders to get acclimated to the school and the day will end with an ice cream social with parents. Open House has been moved up and will be October 5th.

B. Raucci said this configuration has been incredibly challenging. R. Vickery explained how lunch time is provided. There are two fifth grade lunch periods in MSS, with four teams eating at one and six teams eating at the other. The sixth and seventh graders eat in their home buildings but as of fourth quarter, they can sign up to go to the non-home building to eat with friends. Scheduling has also been challenging with students moving between buildings but schedules are planned so there is not too much movement. They are now moving teachers rather than the SPED students.

With the growth, B. Raucci said it is too crowded to assemble as a whole school and they have been assembling two grades at a time. They will now have (2) five through eight assemblies so they will have a whole school feel. The MSPO group generously purchased an outside sound system so when the weather is nice, the entire school can assemble together. A major challenge has been the technology inequities between the two buildings.

Guidance counselor Mark Hennelly said the current configuration limits another transition. Middle school is a time of tremendous change for the students with more rigorous academic expectations, they are entering puberty and they are beginning to discover their own identity. More importantly, they are learning to develop successful social relationships with their peers. Putting these factors together and then asking them to transition can be a difficult process. He noted a configuration of 5/6 and 7/8 would be another transition and the staff feels avoiding this third transition provides kids with the additional stability which is invaluable.

Physical space can seriously impact discipline and social interactions that occur between adolescents. M. Hennelly said this was evident when they were packed into one building and the eighth grade was at the high school. There was a noticeable and well documented spike in disciplinary issues during that school year. Their philosophy is prevention and they are constantly analyzing student behavior and trying to understand it for what it is. He noted discipline issues are usually a form of communication and there is usually an underlying issue that needs to be looked at. He stated they use the opportunity as a teachable moment for both the student and the staff.

R. Vickery said the staff takes time to outline behavioral expectations at the beginning of the year and again after school vacations. Students also sign a bus contract so there are no surprises. They plan for movement throughout the day and they have recess and take breaks. This is incorporated into the program and dissipates a lot of the behavior problems. Their levels are low and every grade level has less than 10% of their students being reported on behavioral referrals.

B. Raucci said throughout the construction and change, they are still very focused on education. They are adopting a new math program and they are learning how to look at literacy strategies differently across the middle school. Next year's budget will maintain class size of 25:1 with the addition of a sixth grade teacher and an eighth grade teacher.

She noted there is still additional space in MSN. They will maintain having 450 students in the south building and 650 in MSN next year.

B. Raucci said they have a dedicated staff. A. Snyder said middle school spirit has always been initiated and cultivated in teams and not across grade levels. Their team oriented spirit is healthy and carries over into the school wide initiative. They are proud of the contributions to the community outreach programs they are involved with such as Project Mitten, Relay for Life and the Peter J. Solas Elementary School in Louisiana.

S. Daugherty said there is a diverse selection of athletics and before and after school activities that include the Craft Club, the Investors Club, Bookmakers and Dreams Club and the Gardening Club.

A. Snyder said they feel they have a strong academic program and the staff is very rich in their professional development, especially keeping pace with current instructional trends. They have spent a lot of time aligning their curriculum with the Frameworks and are working to develop benchmarks and standards within each discipline to further promote academic strength.

B. Raucci said they have a very collegial staff and the paraprofessionals are often the glue to many of the successes. She noted they have 100% volunteerism outside of the classroom and that is why they have strong morale among the students and strong school spirit. A. Snyder said they are middle school teachers, deeply rooted in their teaming and committed to creating opportunities for students in smaller learning environments.

M. Hennelly said they communicate very well with one another. There is meeting time between the guidance counselors and the administration every Monday morning to identify kids who are struggling and to brainstorm solutions to assist those students. Guidance counselors also meet regularly with the teachers. He stated social and emotional guidance is a critical part of teaching the whole child.

S. Daugherty said discipline issues are handled in a consistent, timely and educational appropriate manner. Discipline is seen as an opportunity to learn and not as a punitive measure.

B. Raucci thanked the Groton and Dunstable residents for the beautiful buildings and stated the custodians keep them really clean. Having the second nurse has worked out well and she acknowledged both nurses are professional and competent.

S. Daugherty said they have a great IA program and when students leave the middle school, they will have had four years exposure to a foreign language, participated in chorus, played instruments in the band, created their own play, drawn, sculpted and learned communication skills.

B. Raucci said the staff is proud to be a small part of the children's lives; they love their school and are passionate about the school. While they know everything has not been

perfect with the two building situation, they are committed to continuing to work on it as one community. Now that the construction is over and the implementation of a new situation has settled down, they are poised to move into the future with appropriate academic goals in place.

P. Fitzgerald said their excitement and passion are evident and the teachers should be very proud. With respect to their SIP, he said he will be looking for some sort of gifted program planning, strengthening the foreign language and getting the math program boosted up. With respect to discipline, he has heard that elementary students can lose recess if they misbehave in class while at the middle school, students are rewarded with recess and said this does not seem right to some people. B. Raucci said this is part of the district health initiative. Recess is considered part of the needs of this developmental age and activity is provided in certain spaces during the day.

Recess will start to wane as you move to 7th and 8th grade yet teachers and students may be outside because they have done a long period of testing or working on a project. She said recess should never be used as a punishment or a reward, it is part of the school day. Their punishment/reward system is clearly written in their student handbook. She noted the child that is misbehaving is often the child needing recess the most.

K. Lofgren said her daughter needs movement and outside time and it has been a big stance of hers as a parent that recess not be used as her form of punishment. Her eighth grade daughter has thrived at the school and loves the mixed-up integrated arts. Her incoming 5th grader wants to know if she gets recess and was told yes. B. Raucci said the middle school administration will visit each fourth grade classroom and bring former students with them. The student government has suggested they be 8th graders since that is who they felt they would be afraid of. They will also bring the fourth grade students to the middle school. An after school club, led by Ms Jones, is making a film about middle school life for the fourth graders.

K. Lofgren said she has come to realize eighth graders are not the "big, bad people" she thought and are actually mature and good role models for the fifth graders. She asked if there are plans to have very structured, guided fifth/eighth grade activities.

B. Raucci said the older students are definitely a source of strength and there are a lot of teachers that will connect students.

A. Vervaeke said his fifth grade daughter has enjoyed the socials and participating in the play Dear Edwina, Jr. He has heard that no call goes home when a child does not make it to school. B. Raucci said the IPass system has allowed them to electronically enter when a student walks in and the secretary in each school begins to make calls immediately.

Their goal is to have the calls completed by 9:00 a.m. She said they can send biography sheets home again to make sure they have proper numbers or move toward the IPass automated system to make the call. Noting that his daughter is petite, he is also concerned about the "backpack load" and B. Raucci said she will bring this back for discussion.

C. Barrett asked if the (2) five to eight assemblies are mixed up every time with different groups of students and B. Raucci said that is their goal. C. Barrett asked how the middle school is a "younger school". B. Raucci said it is not a number thing or a data thing. They do not have a lot of the typical risky behavior issues going on and the eighth graders have risen to the occasion to be good role models.

R. Vickery feels you have to live it to see it. Having the sixth graders with the seventh and eighth graders in the north building keeps the older students young as they are aware they are role models and the seventh graders in the south building are aware the fifth graders are there and they take on the role. When the sixth and seventh grades were together while the eighth grade was at the high school, the students tried to be older but this does not happen as readily with the younger children there. C. Barrett asked why there was a spike in behavioral issues that year. R. Vickery said it was because they were closer together, the space was cramped and students were sharing facilities.

B. Raucci said there also was not enough difference in age. She stated the three grade dynamic makes an enormous difference. C. Barrett said it was more crowded when they had six, seven and eighth in MSS and does not feel the spike was due to it being cramped. R. Vickery said it was a contributing factor as are the players that mature and change every year. B. Raucci said one of the reasons they do not want to be in a 5/6 and 7/8 middle school is not so much 5th and 6th grades and the transition they would add to their education, but it is the combination of 7th and 8th graders together. C. Barrett asked if the blending could be achieved if they had the core academic classes, 5 and 6 in MSS and 7 and 8 in MSN, and the IA's between them.

B. Raucci said they examined that and while the configuration they are in may sound awkward, they have a healthy mix of space. They really want to be one school and want the children and teachers to use both facilities equitably as much as they can. She stated this has been difficult but the three grade configuration has contributed to their success.

C. Barrett said the information that has been assembled is great but feels they need to poll the parents of the middle school students. She thinks they need to have a survey that would ask parents how they think it is going. B. Raucci said this has been considered but at this point in time, knowing this is still new and internally they have not been able to communicate with everybody the things they see that are invisible to the public, they wanted to get those communications out first. She said they do not have a lot of data or trends yet as two years is really young in this configuration. C. Barrett agreed it is young as a school system but for the student, it is half their middle school life. She would like the information collected from parents and noted it could be used as building blocks and incorporated with the data from the teachers. B. Raucci agreed parent opinion is, and will be, important as they continue to plan. She noted this is not perfect but they will strive to make it the best they possibly can.

F. O'Connell said his daughter is flourishing in the Life Skills program and the placement of the classroom has made it inherently part of the fabric of the middle school and has created a great deal of acceptance. The groups of less challenged children that have embraced these kids is also heartwarming and likely a great learning opportunity and

rewarding experience for them as well. B. Raucci said they are a huge part of their school and are placed at the heart of their school.

B. Erickson said she was on the middle school council a few years ago and had a different exposure than the one just described but the core to all this is the staff. She asked what was meant by the 100% volunteerism and B. Raucci said it is the number of teachers that give of themselves before and after school.

B. Erickson asked if there is any literature written about the type of configuration they have and how common it is or if it is a trend they formulated because they had the extra space. B. Raucci said there were core pieces of the middle school that were very successful when it was just in the south building and they wanted to hang on to these. They were given the task of two buildings, one school and the configuration is different. They need two facilities to drive the program they have and there all types of ingredients that are part of it. She said they are one school. B. Erickson said she was doubtful about the fifth graders being part of it but after hearing tonight's presentation, it sounds as though that component may be helping to make it. B. Raucci said the fifth grade teaching staff made a smooth transition into the school and made it work.

Dr. Rubel said there are many districts that have different configurations for their middle schools, and most of the time those decisions are made because of their facility rather than for educational reasons. She stated no matter what model or configuration you have, the people within the buildings work to make it work for the students.

Superintendent Self-Assessment

Dr. Genovese distributed copies of his mid-year self-assessment. He revisited each of his goals and updated how he is doing as of April 26th. He looks at this as serving two purposes - how is he doing and is he making a difference in the district? This also provides members with feedback to ask the same questions. He asked members to use this data when they ask themselves the question of whether he is making a difference in the various categories.

ACTION ITEMS

None

QUESTIONS/COMMENTS

A. Vervaeke said he attended Groton's town meeting Monday night and thanked Bob Gosselin for recognizing his service to the School Committee. He felt humbled and appreciates the applause he received from the town. C. McKinney said the applause was warranted.

J. O'Hara said she has a child at Florence Roche and a child at the middle school. With respect to the presentation tonight, she said they heard a lot of self accolades by the staff, which are probably well warranted, but she also heard comments like "it has been difficult" and "we are trying to work things out". She feels a survey of the parents may

help them overcome some of the difficulties they are having and at the same time, find things they think are difficulties really are not.

P. Maynard said she agreed with all the wonderful things presented and her child has had a phenomenal year. She noted the staff is a large part of their lives since they are with them for a good portion of their lives. She stated the issue of grade configuration has been an emotional one and personally, she would like K-6. She remains a strong supporter of a 5/6 - 7/8 configuration mostly because of logistics, common sense and safety. She said the same wonderful environment they heard about can only be enhanced with this configuration. She noted they do need to remember they are all here striving for the best possible education for the children.

PJ Patierno said nothing was said about how the middle school configuration benefits the students. They heard a lot about the teachers, team teaching and common planning time but they did not hear much about the students. Since it has been two years, she thought there would be a lot of improvement and she feels many of Ms Raucci's questions can be answered by having 5/6 and 7/8 in separate schools. She feels this would work better for the students and does not yet see any benefits by having them separated in the different schools. Ms Patierno said she has not figured out what a success is but feels the children there now are being sacrificed. She hopes this can be looked at again.

Dr. Genovese reminded members Dunstable's town meeting is May 8th. The Committee meets next Wednesday and Swallow Union and Prescott will present their School Improvement Plans.

A. Vervaeke said the Building Committee dinner is May 11th at Gibbett Hill. That same night is the block scheduling public hearing and he asked for information ahead of time. He would also like to know how well it is being advertised since he gets questions from parents of 7th and 8th graders who are preparing to transition into the high school. A Connect Ed call can be made to middle and high school parents but it was noted this does not help parents who do not currently have their children in the middle school and an effort needs to be made to reach them as well.

ADJOURNMENT:

A. VERVAEKE MOVED TO ADJOURN THE MEETING AT 9:13 P.M.

SECONDED BY P. FITZGERALD

SO VOTED IN FAVOR UNANIMOUSLY

Respectfully submitted,

Susan H. Smith
Recording Secretary

With attachment

SpedPAC

SpedPAC has written two grants, one to fund their lecture series. They have a very ambitious lecture series for the upcoming year. The other grant was to the GDEF to fund resources on SPED and disabilities at the schools. Thanks go to Sarah Campbell for help in wiring these grants.

Russell Hoyt, Director of Boutwell preschool, with his brother Rick, will present inspiring discussion on what it is like living with a sibling with a disability on Wednesday, May 10th at 7:00 p.m. in the Black Box Theater.

Thanks go to Ms Endicott and Dr. Genovese for working with the PAC so well this year and putting a lot of time and effort into issues that have been brought up. They are also helping the PAC develop a survey on special education services. They hope to get it out in the fall.

Nancy Bugbee and another officer attended a central PAC Regional meeting and Ms Bugbee learned they have a great working relationship with the administration.