

**BEDFORD SCHOOL COMMITTEE
MINUTES OF
February 15, 2011**

Bedford High School - Large Instruction Room

1. Call to Order

At 7:35 p.m., Mr. Hafer called to order the meeting of the Bedford School Committee. Other members present included Ms. Seibert, Ms. O’Gara, Mr. Pierce, and Ms. Bickford. Ashley Nagy, student representative was also in attendance

2. Comments From Public

None

3. Personnel Report

Dr. LaCroix reported on informational item as follows:

Resignation:

Kimberly Jones – Elementary Teacher – Lane School

4. English Program Review Final Report

Ms. Mary Lou Salle, Program Administrator, introduced the following coordinators in the audience who served on the English Program Review:

Pat Stephens 8th grade English

Linda McGraw 7th grade English

Linda Volpicelli K-5 English Coordinator

Karen Russell – Chair (Lexington High School English teacher)

Ms. Salle thanked the entire team for their hard work and dedication to the program review and was very pleased with the commendations. Other members of the visiting team included Lynda Steinberg, Weston Public Schools, Jean Thuma, Concord Public Schools, Allison Benabdallah, Framingham Public Schools, Elizabeth Riemer, Weston Public Schools and Elizabeth Crowell, Lexington Public Schools.

Ms. Karen Russell presented the highlights of the English Language Arts Program Review. She began by reminding everyone that last November the Visiting Team spent three days in Bedford working closely with the system’s administrators, ELA teachers, support staff, students and parents. The team read all materials prepared by the department, observed classroom instruction and reviewed student work. She immediately noted that the English department had very clear expectations and that communication was an obvious strength of Bedford Public Schools. She also commented that the overall classroom climate in all levels was engaging and respectful.

Literacy 6-12

Ms. Russell noted the following commendations:

- Collaboration among teachers
- Well defined purpose with challenging texts
- Accessible high interest literature and materials
- Oral skills are valued and developed

Recommendations:

- Identify key reading strategies and post throughout the school
- Design a summer reading program
- Continue to diversify literary offerings
- Articulate learning goals at each grade level
- Teach concept of source citation
- Develop clear sequence including oral presentation skills
- Be more consistent with reinforcement of the MLA format

Writing Instruction K-5

Ms. Russell commended the elementary schools regarding the focused learning goals and the excellent use of traditional classroom resources and teacher made materials. The Visiting Team was also impressed with the skillful integration of technology.

Recommendations include:

- Develop specific grade level learning goals
- Establish routines that invite student to develop ideas with more supporting detail (for example, use a writing journal/notebook as opposed to a single piece of paper)
- Ensure that writing workshops occur 3 times per week for 45 minutes
- Davis should develop a more cohesive writing program that has strong links between kindergarten, Grade 1 and Grade 2
- Allot more time for the K-5 ELA Coordinator to equalize presence at Davis

Writing Instruction 6-8

Ms. Russell commended the middle school for the great partnership that exists with the two Team teachers at every grade level. She also noted the high student engagement and the respect for the student voice.

Recommendations for 6-8 include:

- Increase consistency in rubrics and grading
- More opportunity to collaborate and review student work
- Align to the Common Core

Writing Instruction 9-12

Ms. Russell said that the Visiting Team commended the High School teachers for incorporating a wide variety of writing strategies and activities. They also thought the writing portfolios held a variety of work samples.

Recommendations for 9-12 include:

- Develop consistency in the number and type of writing assignments at each grade level
- Use rubrics, checklists and focus areas for correction to further scaffold the writing process

The ELA Visiting Team Report also reviewed assessments and rubrics. The report commended the English Language Art team for efforts used to meet the needs of all learners. Ms. Russell said that there are consistent high expectations at each grade level. She was especially impressed with the multiple programs at the secondary level (METCO, EXCEL, Skills Center, Special Education, Writing Lab and reading support).

Some recommendations for doing even a better job of meeting the needs of all learners include:

- Develop greater consistency in expectations for higher order thinking in Level 4 instruction and assessments at the high school
- Continue efforts to encourage and increase racial diversity in the higher level courses
- Provide more flexible time at the middle school so teachers have more opportunity for individual help and for teachers to meet with special needs support staff

Ms. Russell noted that the Visiting Team reviewed the professional development of Bedford's ELA team. A few recommendations included aligning clear learning goals with the Common Core, finding more ways for teachers to collaborate about writing and to work on scope and sequencing of presentation skills.

Ms. Russell said the Visiting Team walked away from their visit to Bedford with an impression that Bedford teachers have an extraordinary level of dedication and commitment and show a true sense of collaboration. She was impressed with the high morale and goodwill.

Ms. Salle spoke after Ms. Russell and said that she sees a few big areas of focus and will put the following in the department's action plans:

- Improve higher order thinking skills K-12
- Strengthen grade level teamwork in order to achieve more consistency in expectations and assessments
- Vertical Team articulation
- More tiered instruction
- Tracking the individual

Mr. Hafer thanked Ms. Russell for her review and thanked the entire team for such a comprehensive review and report.

Mr. Pierce also thanked the team and said it is clear how helpful the curriculum review process is.

Mr. Pierce said that the report indicated that the Kindergarten team should look at Concord Public Schools or other nearby Kindergarten programs for ideas on benchmarking. He wondered if Bedford was not doing something that was being done by the other school districts. Ms. Salle said no, that was not the case, but feels that it is good idea to view different programs.

Ms. Taymore said that Common Core standards have recently been released. She said that the many of the Visiting Team recommendations will be incorporated into meeting the Common Core Standards. Ms. Taymore noted that she believes that the new standards will accelerate the curriculum at the K-2 level.

Mr. Pierce said he is concerned that elementary teachers feel that there are too many curriculum initiatives going on simultaneously.

Ms. Salle said one concern is that Program Reviews hit elementary teachers differently since they do indeed need to be part of all the subject area reviews.

Ms. O'Gara said that today, Research Skills are very different and students really do need to learn research and citation skills. She appreciates hearing that this issue will be addressed.

Ms. O’Gara noted that the report clearly points out how it is important to have level 4 consistency as well as consistency in higher order thinking.

Ms. Bickford thanked Ms. Russell and the team for the time and effort put into the curriculum review and report.

Ms. Bickford asked if the Reading curriculum review would happen at a later date. Dr. LaCroix said yes, that the ELA team decided early on that Reading needed to be done separately and will be done in the next two years.

Ms. Bickford said that Bedford has always decided, after much discussion, to not require a summer reading program in fear that it will turn reading into a negative experience. Ms. Russell said that Lexington has not found the perfect summer reading program either. Right now, Lexington Public Schools are trying to develop a community aspect to it.

Ms. Bickford said that the problem with writing portfolios is that parents never see the feedback on the writing pieces. Ms. Salle agreed.

Ms. Russell commented that the scale of technology and communication at the high school and middle school is impressive. She was truly able to see how technology benefits teaching and learning. She saw how the technology creates creativity.

Ms. Seibert said that it sounds like aligning to the Common Core will be a big adjustment. Ms. Salle said yes but believes many of the changes, such as a focus on nonfiction, will be beneficial.

Ms. Seibert said it was interesting to read about the desire to bring theater into the ELA curriculum. Ms. Salle said she did not bring this up because she did not want this piece to take over the review. She believes drama will help with oral skills but she also recognizes that there are no financial resources to add this. The ELA department will try to enhance what they already have.

Ms. Seibert asked Ms. Salle if the consistent early release day schedule will help teachers collaborate. Ms. Salle said yes, it will definitely allow more continuity.

Mr. Hafer said that “consistency” is the common theme in the recommendations. He asked how the team determined that this was a problem in only three days review. Ms. Salle and Ms. Russell said it was obvious when they reviewed the writing portfolios and there were many observations made during the district’s self assessment.

Mr. Hafer asked what will be done to improve consistency. Ms. Salle said the key will be to have more time to review student work together and to develop common assessments.

Mr. Pierce said a rubric would be necessary for oral presentation skills too. He also noted that oral presentation skills often come out of group work. Ms. Salle agreed and said that Bedford can do a better job at teaching skills to be successful in working in groups.

5. Presentation: 2011-2012 School Calendar

Dr. LaCroix presented the proposed school calendar for the 2011-2012 school year. The calendar is different than the past because it incorporates changes to the start times of each school and an early release schedule for every Wednesday.

Dr. LaCroix reminded the School Committee that in 2005, the Late Start Committee concluded that evidence exists that shows high school students do better in academic achievement with a later start time. The Committee at that time did not look at changing bus routes. As a result, the Committee concluded that it would be too expensive to make the change to a later start time for the high school.

Recently, student Jesse Dickinson-Meltz did a presentation to the School Councils and to the School Committee that presented solid evidence that high school students will do better academically if they start later in the morning. Spurred by this presentation, Dr. LaCroix and the Administrative Team analyzed the issue. Dr. LaCroix also tried to figure out how to add additional collaboration time for the teachers which is very important due to a move towards more data driven decision making.

Dr. LaCroix presented a 2011-2012 school calendar proposal with the following start and end times:

	Start	Dismissal
High School	7:50	2:29
Middle School	7:45	2:21
Lane School	8:44	2:55
Davis School	9:09	3:20

Also, the proposal includes an early release on every Wednesday at the following times:

High School	1:00
Middle School	12:45
Lane School	1:25
Davis School	1:50

Dr. LaCroix said that to make this work, the middle and high school bus runs would be combined. Also, she will work with Bedford Charter to develop new, more efficient bus routes especially for Davis School. She will also work with the Recreation Department and other community groups to develop more Wednesday after school options. BEA approval is also required.

Dr. LaCroix pointed out that the first day of school and vacations follow the same pattern as in the past.

Mr. Pierce did not have any questions and felt the parent survey results provided a lot of information and support for these changes.

Ms. O’Gara did not have questions and thanked Mr. Dickinson-Meltz for bringing this issue to the School Committee’s attention.

Ms. Bickford said that she is concerned that five minutes is not enough time for the bus to drop off the middle school students and then to travel to the high school especially based on traffic patterns in the area before and after school. Dr. LaCroix said an option would be to drop the High School students off at the middle school and have them walk to the high school via the path.

Ms. Bickford said that she is encouraged to hear that Bedford Charter will be updating the bus routes. She recommends that they do this as soon as possible so they can test them when school is in session rather than the quiet summer months.

Ms. Bickford said that an every Wednesday early release will benefit students because teachers will have the time and the continuity to collaborate. She believes families will quickly get used to it.

Ms. Bickford made the following motion:

MOVED: That the School Committee approve the Bedford Public School 2011-2012 calendar as presented.

MOTION SECONDED by Mr. Pierce

MOTION APPROVED: 5-0

6. Open Budget Hearing for FY12

The formal Open Budget hearing opened at 9:20 p.m.

Dr. LaCroix explained that the School Committee, at a previous meeting, voted a budget number that is different than what the Finance Committee has approved for the Town warrant. However, she said some financial assumptions are still fluid and that the School Committee may still vote a different budget number before Town Meeting.

To date, the School Committee voted the FY'12 operating school budget to be \$32, 828,380.

The breakdown of \$32,828,380 is as follows:

Regular Education	\$20,962,756	3.04% increase over FY'11
Special Education	\$ 9,445,522	3.73% increase over FY'11
Facilities	\$ 2,420,102	-3.86% increase over FY'11

Dr. LaCroix said that she is hopeful that the state reimbursement for Special Education (Circuit Breaker) will go up. This budget used a 38% reimbursement rate and Dr. LaCroix is encouraged that it will be significantly higher.

Dr. LaCroix asked for public comments.

Mr. Steele said that he is concerned with an increase in the budget for school administration. He said year after year, it looks like Administration is increasing at a higher rate than the other categories. He noted that corporate America is cutting down in Administration and wonders why the Schools are not doing the same.

Dr. LaCroix said that last year, the Director of Curriculum position was eliminated. She also noted that five years ago, the Director of Technology position was also eliminated. She said today, one position covers Special Education, Technology and Curriculum. Dr. LaCroix also noted that several other positions in the central administrative office have been retooled.

Dr. LaCroix noted that Lane School did add a .5 Assistant Principal position but this was required due to the special education programs recently brought in-house.

Ms. Bickford said that it was important to look at administrative personnel and that the schools have been reducing personnel in administration for a number of years. She believes that administration is pretty lean.

Mr. Steel said that he is happy to hear that the School Committee has looked at these numbers because the large administration number really stands out.

The Open Budget Hearing for FY' 12 closed at 9:40 p.m.

7. Gift Donation

Mr. Coelho asked the School Committee to accept a generous donation from resident Michelle Puntillo. Ms. Puntillo donated the following items:

1 HP Office Jet J5780 printer

1 Lexmark X6150 printer

Mr. Lord, Network Administrator, said that these items were in good working condition.

Ms. O'Gara made the following motion:

MOVED: That the School Committee approve the following equipment donation to the computer department from Michelle Puntillo:

1 HP Office Jet J5780 printer

1 Lexmark X6150 printer

MOTION SECONDED by Ms. Bickford

MOTION APPROVED: 5-0

The School Committee thanked Ms. Puntillo for her generosity.

8. Superintendent's Report

Dr. LaCroix thanked everyone for their feedback on the proposed change to the start time. She noted that the month of January has been very stressful given the fact that we have not had a full week of school due to the amount of snow days. She hopes that there will not be any more.

Dr. LaCroix also thanked the Lane School, High School and other community partners who helped relocate the Lane School students to the High School the other day due to heavy smoke from a nearby fire (which turned out to be a terrible tragedy). She also thanked the Chelmsford Fire Department for inspecting the Lane School and giving the all clear for the students to return after lunch. Dr. LaCroix said that this event was a good test of our crisis planning. She said the Crisis Team has been debriefed and have learned how to do some things better.

9. Liaison Reports

Ms. Seibert reported that there will not be an article on the Turf project on the Town Warrant. She also reminded people of a Youth and Family Services talk on computer addiction.

Mr. Hafer said that the Energy Task Force's Stretch Code will be on the Town Warrant. He said that the Energy Task Force will present to the School Committee in March to update them on the development of the town energy policy.

10. Minutes

Ms. Bickford made the following motion:

MOVED: That the School Committee approve the minutes of the January 11, 2011 School Committee meeting as amended.

MOTION SECONDED by Mr. Pierce
MOTION APPROVED: 5-0

11. Future Agenda

Next School Committee meeting is March 8th.

12. Adjournment

Ms Bickford made the following motion:

MOVED: Motion to adjourn to Executive Session at 9:58 p.m. for purposes of contract negotiations, not to reopen.

MOTION SECONDED by Ms. O’Gara

MOTION APPROVED: 5-0

Roll Call Vote:

Mr. Hafer	Yes
Ms. Seibert	Yes
Mr. Pierce	Yes
Ms. Bickford	Yes
Ms. O’Gara	Yes

School Committee Secretary

Date

BEDFORD SCHOOL COMMITTEE

February 15, 2011

Exhibits/Documents

- **ELA Visiting Team Presentation to the School Committee**
- **English Language Arts Program Review Visiting Team Report**
- **Bedford Public School Open Budget Hearing FY12 Budget request presentation**
- **Memo dated February 11, 2011 from David Coelho regarding Equipment Donations for School Committee Acceptance**

Bedford School Committee

**Executive Session Minutes
February 15, 2011**