

BEDFORD SCHOOL COMMITTEE
MINUTES OF
January 4, 2011

Bedford High School - Auditorium

1. Call to Order

At 7:30 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. Miss Emma Currier, student representative, was also in attendance.

2. Comments From Pubic

Mr. Hafer thanked all of the people in attendance for coming and for supporting Bedford Public Schools. Mr. Hafer than clarified the budget process. He explained that any “cuts” that have been discussed are just proposed at this point in time. The School Administration proposes a budget to the School Committee and the town’s Finance Committee issues guidelines. All residents vote on the final budget at the annual Town Meeting in March.

Mr. Hafer explained that on November 30, 2010, Dr. LaCroix presented a “Maintenance of Services” budget. At that meeting, the School Committee asked Dr. LaCroix to develop a level funded budget that is \$1.6 million less than the Maintenance of Services’ budget. After this presentation, the Finance Committee guidelines were issued and recommended that the Schools prepare a budget that is \$2.1 million less than the “Maintenance of Services” budget. Mr. Hafer explained that the Finance Committee uses several financial assumptions and models to reach a financial guideline. This year’s guideline is based on the fact that over the last few years, the Town has seen declining local revenue, declining State aid and increasing healthcare costs. The guideline issued is to prevent an overall budget deficit for the town.

At the December 14th School Committee meeting, Dr. LaCroix detailed the \$200,000 in proposed athletic and extracurricular cuts that were presented in the level funded budget on Dec. 7th. Tonight, she will present further reductions in order to reach the full \$2.1 million reduction recommended by the Town’s guidelines.

After tonight, the School Committee will look at all of the proposals and will make decisions. A vote on the budget will likely occur on January 18th.

Mr. Hafer reviewed the rules for public comment tonight. He asked that each person speaking identify themselves, limit comments to two minutes, and to follow appropriate public meeting decorum. He reminded everyone that School Committee meetings are not an opportunity for open debate.

Mr. Jim Lespasio spoke and acknowledged that the Town is in a tough financial situation. He would like to know however, how much of the school budget is dedicated to supporting non-Bedford residents. He would also like to see the growth areas in the budget over the last 10 year so he can understand what is driving the increases.

Ms. Irene Gravina spoke about her fears that the proposed extracurricular cuts will impact the special education students. She said that often, these children excel in areas outside of academics. She would like the School Committee to avoid cutting areas that allow students to express

themselves outside of academics. She strongly believes that the extracurricular will help both regular and special education students succeed in Bedford.

Mr. Hafer said that he recognizes that these proposed cuts will affect all students.

Ms. Katherine Higgins spoke and said she was here tonight representing the BHS Ski team. She thanked the School Committee for everything they do to help the children of Bedford. She explained that the Ski Team is a co-ed, multi-grade team that is becoming very competitive. She also knows that a lot of middle school students have an interest in joining the team in the future. Ms. Higgins described the Ski Team as a unique opportunity and that it helps kids stay on the right path. She hopes that the School Committee keeps it as an extracurricular option.

Ms. Sally Waters, Senior at BHS, also spoke in support of the Ski Team. She has been on the team for four years and has seen it increase in popularity. She said the team fosters inter-grade relations and that it is a beneficial experience far beyond the sport itself.

Don Koundakjian spoke to support the BHS Hockey program. He said that it is a great program and is growing in participation. He said that a widespread of grades play on the hockey team and like the Ski team, it fosters strong inter-grade relations. Mr. Koundakjian also noted that now that Bedford has a rink in town, the games are becoming more of a community event. Also, hockey is a lifestyle for many and can bring opportunities in college. He asked that the School Committee keep the program going.

Suzanne Johnson commended the School Committee for their hard work over the years. She is pleased that the town has been able to avoid fees. However, she feels that the School Committee should institute fees for athletics and/or extracurricular activities if it means keeping the programs. She would like fees to be seriously considered and feels that the residents would be able to find a way to help those families who cannot afford them. Sports and extracurricular activities keep students engaged. She noted that payment is currently required for certain activities such as field trips.

Mr. Hafer said that the School Committee has discussed fees in the past and will put them on the table again for discussion.

Elizabeth McClung spoke about the downside of instituting fees. She is a teacher in a nearby town and has seen how divisive fees that supplement extracurricular activities and athletics can be to a town. In this town, residents have been reluctant to support any overrides because they are content that "their" programs are protected. Ms. McClung would rather see an override vote rather than fees.

Brian Bartkus said that the proposed cuts are unacceptable and that many residents feel this way. He is here tonight to support the hockey program, the ski program and the golf team. These sports are co-ed and are open to all grade levels. He said the sports in general prevent bullying by fostering bonds. He does not believe that athletics and after school activities are "extracurricular" but are indeed essential activities for our town. He would rather discuss fees rather than eliminations.

Carol Grainger spoke about how her sons found school very challenging and that it was the extracurricular activities that kept them engaged in school. She said that sports and activities

build character and leadership skills and often open up college opportunities.

Deb Picciuto explained that both of her children were very active in sports and successful in academics. She reminded everyone that Bedford has recently received high accolades about their overall programs (Boston Magazine Top 10 Schools and one of the 100 Best Communities are two examples.) Ms. Picciuto also feels that the Middle School sports programs help these young students avoid risky behavior and help win the fight against obesity. Ms. Picciuto suggested that the community as a whole get involved to solve this budget problem. She fears that fees will be burdensome for families and will drastically effect participation. She recommends forming smaller brainstorming sessions to figure out a way out of the fiscal problems.

Janet Chang reminded the Committee that it is important to keep the science and math teams too. Many students shine in these teams too and it is very important to their well-being.

Valerie Rushanan said that she was involved in sports, studying foreign languages, etc. and feels that these experiences really helped her. She is pleased that there are not a lot of academic cuts being considered but feels that this problem needs a long term solution. For example, can online academics help?

William Wyatt said that despite the fact that the Schools are 65% of the town budget, it may not be fair for the schools to absorb 65% of the budget deficit. This assumes that the residents feel that the Schools are equally as important as all of the other departments, but this may not be true at all. (applause in the audience)

No further comments were made. Mr. Hafer decided to move the Budget Discussion to the next item on the agenda since so many residents were in attendance.

3. FY'12 Budget Discussion

Before Dr. LaCroix began the budget discussion, she thanked the residents for coming. She said she is always impressed by the resident's dedication to education in Bedford. She said, "We will work through this problem with the School Committee and the counterparts in town. We have a good working relationship with town officials and we will solve this problem."

Dr. LaCroix summarized the budget process to date as follows:

FY'12 Maintenance of Services	\$33,608,820	5.13% increase over FY'11
FY'12 Level Funded Budget	\$31,968,135	0% (1,640,685 less than Maintenance of Services budget)

Dr. LaCroix explained that the Maintenance of Services budget was 24,066,491 for salaries and \$9,542,329 for non-salary items. She reminded the audience that people make up a school system and therefore, salaries are the main portion of the budget. She also noted that the non-salary items include non-negotiable special education expenses.

Dr. LaCroix then explained that an additional \$526,621 of reductions is needed in order to meet the Finance Committee budget guideline.

Dr. LaCroix's presentation showed a summary of reductions made to date to achieve the level funded budget. These reductions include \$1,314,694 in salaries which is a total of 20.7 positions in the schools. It also includes reductions in staff /non salary items in Central Office,

Technology, Special Education, and Facilities. Dr. LaCroix said that these changes will affect the way the schools are next year. They will be noticeable.

Dr. LaCroix said that this would be the second year in a row for cuts in computer replacements. She feels that the Town needs to develop a technology plan in order to keep current with technology. Dr. LaCroix also complimented Mr. Richard Jones, Director of Facilities, for his ability to save money in utilities as savings in this area has allowed the School Committee to meet budget requirements in the past.

Dr. LaCroix explained that on December 14th, \$200,000 reductions to the extracurricular and athletic programs were articulated.

Tonight, she is going to articulate \$526,621 in additional cuts in order to meet Finance Committee Guidelines.

Reductions proposed are as follows:

School Committee Reserve Funds	\$30,000
Facilities – custodian leave coverage	\$30,000
Technology .5 computer Technician	
Special Education (4) School based secretarial positions (.5 each)	

Davis School

Science and Social Studies Curriculum Coordinators

Library Educational Assistant

.4 PE Teacher (1st and 2nd graders will have PE only once a week)

.4 Reading Specialist (RTI and tiered instruction will be difficult to implement)

Lane School

Science and Social Studies Curriculum Coordinators

1 French Teacher (The Foreign Language program would change to Spanish only and be available only to 4th and 5th graders. Amount of class time would be reduced too)

Middle School

.5 Academic Intervention

.4 Adjustment Counselor

4 Curriculum Coordinators

.6 Reading

BHS

.4 English – class sizes would be over recommended limits

.2 PE – class sizes would be over recommended limits

.2 Science increase class sizes

.2 Social Studies increase in class sizes

.1 art – reduction in electives.

.2 Adjustment counselor

.1 music reduction in electives

.2 FAMCO reduction in electives

.3 Teaching Assistant in learning centers

.2 Tech Ed

.2 Assistant Principal – cause significant workload increases for Principal and other Assistant Principal

Dr. LaCroix also noted that many of these proposed changes may affect the ability to fully schedule students and/or meet the 990 learning hour requirement. All students may not be able to meet graduation requirements as a result.

These proposed cuts brings the total of lost positions to 35.3

The next steps for the budget process are:

January 11, 2011 School Committee meeting starts at 8:30 (after Town Caucus) and budget discussions will continue.

January 18th School Committee will vote on a budget to present to Finance Committee

January 20th School Committee will present the budget to the Finance Committee

January – March discussions will continue with town Finance Committee

March – Annual Town Meeting vote

Dr. LaCroix thought it would be appropriate to end this part of the discussion by reading the mission statement of the Bedford Public Schools.

“The school community will provide a safe, respectful, and inclusive environment in which the intellectual, social, ethical and emotional growth of all learners will flourish.”

Before Dr. LaCroix asked the School Committee for comments/questions, she allowed a representative of the Middle School girls Basketball Team to speak. Kristin Bullock explained that sports have taught her and her teammates important skills other than basketball. She said being on the team inspires each girl to get better not only in basketball but in all areas. She asked the School Committee to consider fees rather than eliminating programs and she feels that teams can hold fundraisers to help those who cannot afford to pay them.

Emma Currier, Student Representative to the School Committee, said that the extracurricular activities really help students make connections and students really appreciate all the choices. She said that some of the large classes make learning more difficult because it is harder to participate and harder to get one-on-one time with the teacher.

Mr. Pierce is upset that the gains we have made the last few years are being eliminated and not happy that the State has walked away from its obligations especially in Special Education.

Mr. Pierce asked Mr. Coelho for some additional information/explanations on the budget drivers especially those areas that make the budget so volatile.

Mr. Pierce also asked to see a list of all costs associated with the proposed cuts in extracurricular and athletics.

Mr. Pierce asked if the cuts have been prioritized by Administration. Dr. LaCroix said not yet, but they would be for the next meeting so that the School Committee can make some decisions.

Mr. Pierce asked Dr. LaCroix to try to forecast the effects of the cuts at Davis School on special education costs. Dr. LaCroix agreed to look into this.

Mr. Pierce also asked Dr. LaCroix to quantify the problem at the high school with regards to some students not meeting graduation requirements and/or the 990 learning hour requirement.

Mr. Pierce also commented that it is a tough decision to reduce PE at Davis.

Ms. O’Gara said she is concerned that the headway we have made with in-house special education programs will stop. She is concerned that cuts in RTI and tiered instruction will tip more regular education students into special education.

Ms. O’Gara is sorry to see French go away at Lane and fears it may affect its future at the High School.

Ms. O’Gara also said that cutting into maintenance of new buildings is worrisome.

Ms. Bickford said that she does not have any particular questions at this time. She truly understands the impact of all these cuts in her heart. She did comment that the Town has been very fortunate to not face this financial crisis until now. Many nearby towns experienced this several years ago. Bedford is a well-managed town and the School Committee works well with the town finance committees. She said that for the last 8 or 9 years, we have been chipping away at the school budget. To make a big cut now, the only thing left to do is to cut staff. However, she feels that the School Committee and the residents need to speak up on behalf of the students and to tell the Finance Committee that we need to keep an education system that resident’s value... maybe this means we cannot meet the financial guideline.

Ms. Bickford thanked everyone for coming to the meeting tonight. She said that the support she sees tonight validates what residents want and expect of the Bedford Public Schools. “Thank you for your show of support.”

Ms. Seibert commented that the schools need to support the students from the beginning – at Davis School – all the way through the High School. She said that it “does not feel right to go backwards”. Ms. Seibert agrees that long term solutions are needed and noted that conversations on this fact have begun (i.e. fiscal planning)

Ms. Seibert said that fees may support some of the programs but in the long run they are costly. She agrees to talk further about fees.

Mr. Hafer said that this is his fourth year on the School Committee and he would like to add programs and not reduce. He is thankful that we have been able to maintain but agrees that this year is especially difficult. He thinks that the school department is taking a bigger hit than other town departments.

Mr. Hafer asked for more information on the Lane School foreign language program. He would like to understand the philosophy behind the program. Understanding the goals of the program, will help him decide whether the proposed changes make sense.

He reminded the audience that there will be an Public Open Budget Hearing on February 15, 2011.

4. Personnel Report

Dr. LaCroix made the following personnel announcements:

Resignations:

Bethany Larsen	Teaching Assistant/Replacement Guidance Counselor	Lane School
Carolyn Fournier	Teaching Assistant	Middle School

Appointments:

Andrea Griecci	Teaching Assistant	Lane School
Amy Dillen	Long Term Sub Guidance Counselor	Lane School
Lindsey Sherman	Long Term Sub Music Teacher	Davis School
Elizabeth Sloane	Long Term Sub Grade 6 Social Studies	Middle School
Justin Newton	Long Term Sub PE Teacher	Middle School

4. Presentation: Proposal for Change in Start Times 2011-2012

Dr. LaCroix asked the School Committee to consider a proposal to change the start times for school next year. She asked the School Committee to listen to the proposal and to let her know if they agreed with the concept. If it is positive, she will move forward and discuss the proposal with the Teacher's Association. Dr. LaCroix explained that she is working under a short time line because soon it will be time to approve the School Calendar for 2011-2012.

Dr. LaCroix began her presentation with a review of the 2005 Late Start Committee's Findings and a summary of Jesse Dickinson Meltz's research findings.

In 2005, the Late Start Committee was unable to implement a change in start times. The Committee looked at ways to delay the opening of the High School since there was significant evidence that teenagers need more sleep and that it is not possible for them to simply go to bed earlier. At this time, an assumption was made the schools would keep the four separate bus routes. The Late Start Committee concluded that to make this a viable option, transportation costs would increase by 40%. The study group recognized that this was not a feasible option at the time.

A few weeks ago, Jesse Dickinson Meltz (a member of BHS class of 2012) presented updated research on changing the start times. He confirmed evidence that teenagers need more sleep and that even a small amount more would be beneficial.

As a result of Mr. Dickinson Meltz's research and a desire to create more teacher collaboration time, Dr. LaCroix developed a new proposal for a change in start times. This proposal reduces the number of bus runs to three – the middle school and high school bus runs will be combined. As a result, the following change is proposed and does not create any new costs:

	<u>Proposed Start</u>	<u>Proposed End</u>
BHS	7:50	2:39
Middle	7:45	2:24
Lane	8:44	3:05
Davis	9:10	3:30

Dr. LaCroix also proposed having an early release day on every Wednesday. The early release days would be longer, but would allow sufficient time for teachers to meet on a regular basis.

Proposed Early Release day schedule:

<u>Proposed Start</u>	<u>Proposed End</u>
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BHS	7:50	1:10
Middle	7:45	1:00
Lane	8:44	1:30
Davis	9:10	2:00

Dr. LaCroix presented comments from colleagues from towns that have a combined middle and high school bus runs. All were positive.

Dr. LaCroix asked parents to give her input on the proposed changes by emailing her directly or by contacting the parent teacher organizations or the Principals.

Ms. Emma Currier said that the early release day every week makes a lot of sense as does the later start time. She would not like to get out too much later than proposed because it is hard to fit in activities, work and homework.

Mr. Pierce said that he supports the proposal and its desired accomplishments. However, he wonders what students will do on the weekly early release days. Ideally, he would like to see an “escape clause” included in case the change does not work out positively. He also asked if the High School could start late and finish at the regular time.

Ms. O’Gara said she is convinced that a ½ hour later start time at the high school will help. She is not too concerned about combining the middle and high school bus runs. She also thinks having an early release day every week is much easier for families to plan. She is concerned that Davis students are getting home very late in the afternoon.

Ms. Bickford thanked Mr. Dickinson Meltz for his impressive work. She asked if Bedford Charter has been involved at all in the conversations. Dr. LaCroix said yes.

Ms. Bickford also recommended Dr. LaCroix to contact Kids Club so they could be prepared for the additional early release days. She also asked Dr. LaCroix to formalize collecting parent feedback. Dr. LaCroix said that the Principals will help do this.

Ms. Bickford asked if shared faculty would be negatively affected. Dr. LaCroix said no.

Ms. Seibert said that she was part of the 2005 Late Start Committee and she is so pleased to see a possible solution. She thinks consolidating the bus routes is efficient.

Mr. Hafer said that the proposal seems very beneficial. He hears from parents however, that more early release days will be stressful but he hopes the later release times and regularly scheduled days will make it more bearable.

Mr. Hafer is concerned that travel time between the middle school and high school may end up being more time consuming due to traffic.

Dr. LaCroix agreed to start discussing this issue with the Teacher Association and to tweak the times, especially the later Davis release. She will bring a final proposal to the School Committee to consider at a later date.

5. Presentation: 2011-2012 School Calendar

The School Committee decided to hold off on discussing the School Calendar at this time.

6. Superintendent's Report

Dr. LaCroix informed the School Committee that earlier today, she submitted the Statement of Interest on the Davis School renovations/additions to the MSBA.

7. Liaison Reports

None

8. Transfer of Renovation Funds for Foreign Language Lab

This item will be discussed at the next School Committee meeting.

9. Approval of Minutes

Ms. O'Gara made the following motion:

MOVED: That the School Committee approve the minutes of the December 14, 2010 School Committee meeting as amended.

MOTION SECONDED by Mr. Pierce

MOTION APPROVED: 5-0

Ms. O'Gara made the following motion:

MOVED: That the School Committee approve the minutes of the December 7, 2010 School Committee meeting as amended.

MOTION SECONDED by Ms. Seibert

MOTION APPROVED: 5-0

10. Future Agenda

Budget discussions.

11. Adjournment

Ms. Bickford made the following motion:

MOVED: Motion to adjourn at 10:30 to Executive Session for the purpose of contract negotiation, not to reopen..

MOTION SECONDED by Ms. Seibert

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

January 4, 2011

Exhibits/Documents

- **Finance Committee Guideline Budget for FY 2012**
- **Proposal for Change in Start Times: 2011-2012**
- **Draft of Minutes from the December 14, 2011 School Committee meeting**
- **Draft of Minutes from the December 7, 2011 School Committee meeting**

Bedford School Committee

**Executive Session Minutes
January 4, 2011**