

BEDFORD SCHOOL COMMITTEE MINUTES OF

February 23, 2010

1. Call to Order

At 7:30 p.m., Mr. Pierce called to order, the meeting of the Bedford School Committee. Other members present included Ms. Bickford, Ms. Seibert, Ms. O’Gara and Mr. Hafer. Ms. Anne Dickinson Meltz, student representative, was also present.

2. Comments From Public

None

3. Presentation: Preschool Program

Ms. Judy Mirel, Early Childhood Coordinator, and Ms. Jayme Szymczak, Preschool Teacher/Coordinator updated the School Committee on the Integrated Preschool Program at the High School.

Ms. Mirel explained that the Bedford High School Integrated Preschool is an inclusive program that serves children aged 3-5 with varying abilities. The staff consists of a variety of specialists who meet the needs of both typically developing students as well as special education students. The school follows Massachusetts guidelines for preschool curriculum. Best of all, the children learn from one another. The program is an extension of Bedford Public Schools.

Ms. Mirel explained that the program began two years ago. It evolved from the Bedford High School Preschool. The program was developed to serve preschoolers in town, to limit transportation costs for preschoolers who need special education services to out-of-town programs such as the LABBB in Burlington, and to limit out-of-district placements.

Currently, the program accommodates 15 children. The program is a special education program and therefore must have 51% of the population as regular developing students. Therefore, enrollment is closely monitored.

Ms. Jayme Szymczak introduced herself to the School Committee. She also showed a video of a typical day at the preschool.

Ms. Szymczak explained that students in the Integrated Preschool develop at their own pace. She said comprehensive services are available for all of the students that attend. There is an OFC Licensed Special Education teacher, an Occupational Therapist, a Speech/Language Therapist, and a Physical Therapist on staff. The services are integrated and transdisciplinary. Daily activities include both structured and playtime activities.

Ms. Szymczak explained that there is a great relationship with the two CASE preschools across the hall. Often students rotate in and out the different classrooms.

Ms. Szymczak said that 75 high school students help at the Preschool. High School students enrolled in the CASE Internship and the Early Childhood/Development courses

(as a major or a minor) help in the classroom. She feels that this opportunity has a positive impact on the students' career planning.

Ms. Szymczak said that the Integrated Preschool follows the Massachusetts guidelines for Preschool learning. She further explained that there are ongoing/multi-modal assessments and that the goal is to have the children prepared and ready for kindergarten.

Looking to the future, Ms. Szymczak would like to refine the program by developing systematic data collection and to align the preschool goals to have a seamless transition to Davis School kindergarten. Also, the Preschool would like to expand (and Ms. Taymor will bring this recommendation to the School Committee at a later date.)

Ms. Taymor, Director of Special Education, thanked Ms. Mirel and Ms. Szymczak for their presentation and for their dedication to the Preschool. She said the program needs to expand and she would like to do so in the fall of 2011. Currently, the LABBB Preschool in Burlington is the only other option. It is supported only by Bedford and Burlington. The cost to send a Bedford child to this program is approximately \$26,300. Ms. Taymor pointed out that there are currently 28 children in Early Intervention and that many will be ready to move into the LABBB or Integrated Preschool program, so there is plenty of need in the community. Ms. Taymor also indicated that LABBB would like to stop the preschool program in Burlington.

Ms. Taymor explained that since the program is a special education program and receives several special education grants, it must adhere to certain guidelines. Therefore, the program is not a first come, first serve program. It really needs to maintain the 51% regular developing to 49% special education ratio.

Ms. O'Gara thanked everyone for the presentation. She said she especially appreciates hearing about the relationship with the CASE classrooms. She asked Ms. Szymczak about her thoughts on the curriculum.

Ms Szymczak said that the curriculum was very comprehensive and a little lofty but she uses the curriculum as a guideline. Overall, it does meet the needs of developmentally needy students.

Ms. Bickford also enjoyed the presentation. She said it was great to see the results of this program after all of the discussions and analysis done two years ago. She asked why there is such a rise in special education needs for this age group. Ms. Taymor said there is no one cause. It is partly the ability to diagnose as well as the rise in autism. She also explained that the number of premature babies has risen and they often present with developmental delays.

Ms. Mirel said that she thinks as the economic level of the town has risen, people in town are more educated and savvy and know their rights about special education. They pursue intervention. Ms. Mirel said there is a constant parade of children with needs from Early Intervention and some will grow out of it and others will require intervention.

Ms. Bickford asked if there is space at the high school for an expanded Preschool. Ms. Taymor said yes.

Ms. Seibert said the program sounds like the ideal program. She asked if the demands of today's school are the "cause" of some of these developmental delay diagnoses. Ms. Taymor said no, that these delays would eventually show up.

Mr. Hafer asked who is responsible for overseeing the high school students. Ms. Szymczak said she was responsible for them once they come into the preschool and that organizing and keeping track of 75 students rotating in and out is quite challenging.

Mr. Hafer asked how the tuition compares to other nearby programs. Ms. Taymor said it is in the middle of the pack. She also explained that the rates recently increased by five percent after a discussion with Mr. Coelho.

Mr. Hafer asked if Ms. Mirel works with any of the other town preschools/daycares. Ms. Mirel said yes, she holds regular meetings to explain kindergarten readiness and expectations.

Mr. Pierce said it was good to hear about a highly successful and cost effective program. He asked why it is held at the High School.

Ms. Mirel said that the High School began offering a nursery school as a lab for the High School students. The Integrated Preschool has evolved from this and still offers a lab for the High School students to learn.

4. Presentation: English Language Learners Program (ELL)

Dr. Laurie Zucker-Conde, ELL Coordinator, gave an update on the district's ELL program. She explained that Bedford is categorized as a low incidence program. However, the town is experiencing a growth in the ELL population. All school districts, despite the number of ELL students, must adhere to ELL regulations.

Dr. Zucker-Conde explained the growth in Bedford. In 2003, there were 27 ELL students. This year, there are 50 ELL students speaking 18 languages enrolled at all four schools. Davis School has the largest number of ELL students.

In Bedford, Chinese is the most frequent language background (23 students). Some other backgrounds in town include:

Armenian 1
Farsi 1
French 1
Gujarati 1
Hebrew 1
Vietnamese 2
Russian 4
Japanese 6
Korean 3
Spanish 4

Dr. Zucker-Conde explained that ELL students face a variety of challenges. They have to learn new traditions while maintaining and learning about home cultures and family values. The goal of the ELL program is to teach the children to value what they know

already and to learn how to read, write and understand grade level content. Often, the students have to learn to hear sounds that are different phonology. They also must learn social skills too.

All ELL students in Bedford are immersed in regular classrooms from the first day of school. ELL students are categorized at different proficiency levels. These levels are based on fluency, grammar and vocabulary and are determined the ELL Coordinator or tutors. ELL tutors help the students inside their classrooms though sometimes, the students are pulled out for individual or small group work. All in all, the ELL approach is that one size does not fit all.

Dr. Zucker –Conde described the needs of the ELL students at each school. At Davis School, ELL students learn side by side with all the other students. Teachers and peers are a great help. At Lane School, learning becomes more challenging. Socially, the ELL students may seem to be doing fine but they tend to need more academic support at this level. In the middle and high schools students still need academic support as specific language issues (not special education related) often arise. College bound ELL students need specialized support too.

ELL tutors work with teachers and various levels of ELL training is available for classroom teachers. However, it is very time consuming. Several teachers in Bedford have gone through ELL training.

Bedford's ELL program is building a legally compliant program by

- Dividing an ESL position among schools to better serve student needs
- Training teachers to work with ELL students
- Improving parent communication about student progress
- Improving translation of required documents (Dr. Zucker-Conde thanked Lexington Public Schools for helping in this area.)

Ms. O'Gara asked Dr. Zucker-Conde if the state gives any support with legal compliance. Dr. Zucker-Conde said not yet. Today, each district is responsible to have documentation available in native languages. The State does not have resources to help.

Ms. O'Gara said it would be important for Bedford to find ways to advocate for support.

Ms. O'Gara asked if teachers volunteered to take the ELL training. Dr. Zucker-Conde said yes, but it is somewhat limited due to the fact that substitute coverage is need. For example, Category 1 & 2 training requires a full five days out of the classroom.

Ms. O'Gara asked if the ELL students are clustered together. Dr. Zucker-Conde said they are somewhat spread out at Davis, but never isolated.

Dr. Zucker-Conde pointed out that it is important for younger children to develop orally in the native language. This makes them better prepared to learn in English.

Ms. O'Gara asked how ELL students are doing on MCAS exams. Dr. Zucker-Conde said they are doing well most likely due to all the preparation help available.

Ms. O'Gara asked if teachers are able to tell the difference between an ELL problem and a learning disability. Dr. Zucker-Conde said that as we develop an ELL program, we will become more refined with determining this difference and the needs of each student.

Ms. Bickford asked if Dr. Zucker-Conde was familiar with a lot of different languages. She answered "no" and explained that she uses a lot of resources to learn about the languages.

Ms. Bickford asked if more resources would be necessary as the large number of ELL students at Davis move through the system. Dr. Zucker-Conde said resources will have to shift and possibly grow, but students will exit the ELL program too.

Ms. Bickford suggested that the newly designed Bedford Public Schools website, which is currently in development, be friendly to the ELL families.

Ms. Seibert asked if there are resources to help with determining SPED eligibility with an ELL student. (i.e. a Japanese tester). Dr. Zucker-Conde said yes.

Ms. Seibert asked if there were any family support resources. Dr. Zucker-Conde said not yet but she would like to begin collecting this information and developing networks.

Ms. Seibert commented that she cannot believe the DESE does not provide more integration assistance to families.

Dr. LaCroix said EDCO is looking into translation services. She also expects that DESE will be ready to support ELL compliance especially in the areas of creating online databases. It just is not there yet.

Mr. Hafer said he is surprised at the number of different primary languages spoken by children in town.

He asked how Dr. Zucker-Conde schedules pull out groups. Dr. Zucker-Conde said she tries to pull out during non-instructional time but it is very hard in general to schedule.

Mr. Pierce asked how ELL students are identified. Dr. Zucker-Conde said that the Home Language Survey, given at the time of registration, will indicate if any other language is spoken at home. If it is, then the student must be assessed. Students are then offered ELL services and parents can decline. However, the district is obligated to teach them English and to administer a proficiency test. Dr. Zucker-Conde said it is also important to find those students who do not indicate another language is spoken at home but are indeed having trouble with English.

Mr. Pierce asked how long ELL students are monitored. Dr. Zucker-Conde said two years.

Ms. Ann Dickinson Meltz asked if an ELL student at the high school could drop ELL tutoring in order to take another elective. Dr. Zucker-Conde said ideally, this student would have to place out of ELL with an exam.

A parent in the audience spoke. He said he appreciated the Community and the School's ELL services. He also appreciates the ELL Progress Reports . He would like to be able to work with the teachers to develop goals for each child and to help them move up the proficiency levels.

Dr. Zucker-Conde said that she would try to develop goals. She also suggested that the best homework a parent can do with the ELL student is to talk and read and to ask lots of questions. Focus on oral practice.

5. Mid-Year Report on Goals and Objectives

Dr. LaCroix gave a brief overview of the goals at midyear. She presented a sample of the goals organized by the six strategic goals of the district (Governance and Leadership, Curriculum and Instruction, Assessment and Evaluation, Human Resources and Professional Development, Student Academic Support and Finance and Administration)

I. Governance and Leadership

A. Communications among and between staff

- Leadership and support of Davis School Principal and ELL Coordinator
- Focus areas for Special Education Director including specialized training for SPED team.
- Improving transition practices
- The new high school guidance counselor has built positive relationships with Hanscom families
- Meet the needs of the ELL students – working on a K-8 curriculum guide.
- Established a Superintendent's Blog.
- Established a district wide Equity Committee to support achievement gap work.

B. Communications between schools and home

- Assessment portal for Aspen is open
- At JGMS, an online signup and database has been created for volunteers ("Volnet")
- A website redesign is in the beginning stages
- Classroom blogs are becoming very popular
- Davis School offered a Reading presentation for parents
- An Elementary School Math Program was presented for Boston/METCO parents.

C. Communications between school and community

- Publishing curriculum documents on the website

II. Curriculum and Instruction

A. Continue to establish high expectations for academic excellence.

- Use RTI strategies.
- Lane School is tracking individual progress. The goal is to get better at data collection.
- Introduce RTI to the Middle School.
- Lane School continues to develop ways to use technology to enhance student's global awareness.
- Work on defining writing expectations and practices is underway in grades K-5.
- JGMS has a variety of instructional initiatives underway including posting curriculum documents and maps.
- Davis and Lane schools are reviewing and revising science units and practices.
- Davis and Lane schools will be evaluating handwriting programs for grades K-5.

- Purchased the Kurzweil Software/Licensing to help struggling students with reading.
- Instructional Technology Specialists are updating technology matrices.
- BHS continues to integrate learning expectations into the high school curriculum.

B. Maintain a balanced, comprehensive K-12 curriculum.

- Mandarin Language Committee presented recommendations.
- Graduation Requirements Committee will present a proposal to the School Committee.

III. Assessment and Evaluations

A. Assess student achievement on local, state and national assessment measures.

- Davis and Lane have three term report cards.
- JGMS is developing common assessments for each subject area at each grade level.
- BHS continues to expand classroom support for students who struggle academically.
- Collaboration with LABBB districts to hire and direct the work of a new Data Analyst.

B. Program Evaluation

- Continue with program review process in Science , Foreign Language and Social Studies and English (self study underway). Also participated in the NEASC review and will be evaluating the effectiveness of in-house Special Education programs.

IV. Human Resources and Professional Development

A. Recruit competent, motivated teachers.

- 97% of teachers are highly qualified status.
- Lots of Special Education training has occurred.
- All staff listened to a speaker on school building security.
- Expanded ELL training.

V. Student Academic Support

A. Prevent bullying.

- BHS initiatives include School Atmosphere Committee, Principal's Advisory Council, and Peer Leadership.
- JGMS continues with the Accept the Challenge Program.
- JGMS has a parent/staff anti-bullying committee.
- Continue to work with the School Resource Officer.

VI. Finance and Asset Management

A. Maintain annual budgets that reflect mission and values.

- Enrollment study presented to School Committee in December.
- A Space Utilization Study will be presented in April.
- The district received \$150,000 grant to upgrade HVAC controls at Lane School.

B. Address declining BHS Building

- The BHS renovation is complete.
- Working with MSBA for reimbursements.

C. Maximize Federal and State financial resources to support Hanscom enrollment.

- Work continues on both the State and Federal levels.

School Committee members thanked Dr. LaCroix for her report and for being on track while always looking forward.

6. Budget Hearing

As required by law, the School Committee held an Open Budget Hearing for the FY'11 Operating Budget. The hearing officially opened at 10:30 p.m.

Dr. LaCroix reported that \$31,968,135 was approved as the FY'11 school operating budget request. This amount was approved by the School Committee and was supported by the town Finance Committee.

Overall, this request is an increase of 2.78% over FY'10.

Dr. LaCroix reported that the gradual increase in enrollment is expected to continue.

Dr. LaCroix presented the budget change from FY'10 to FY'11 in terms of cost centers as follows:

Regular Education	+4.71%
Special Education	-.05%
Facilities	-1.71%

She also explained the FY'10 to FY'11 increase by schools as follows:

High School	8.06%
Middle School	5.40%
Lane School	1.61%
Davis School	1.57%
System	-2.60%

Finally, Dr. LaCroix reviewed the staffing changes from FY'10 to FY'11.

Professional Staff	240.9 to 241.7
Para Professionals	119.2 to 113.1

School Committee and audience members did not have any questions.

The Budget Hearing officially closed at 10:40 p.m.

7. Superintendent's Report

Dr. LaCroix reported that Bedford Public Schools received the \$150,000 energy efficiency grant. She thanked Richard Jones and resident Brenda Kelly (who also serves on the Town's Energy Task Force) for applying for this grant. As a result, Lane School will have an HVAC upgrade. \$20,000 of local money will be required.

8. Liaison Reports

None

9. Minutes

Ms. Bickford made the following motion:

MOVED: That the School Committee approve the minutes of the September 29, 2009 School Committee Executive Session meeting as amended.

MOTION APPROVED: 5-0

Ms. Bickford made the following motion:

MOVED: That the School Committee approve the minutes of the October 29, 2009 School Committee meeting as amended.

MOTION SECONDED by Ms. O’Gara
MOTION APPROVED: 5-0

Ms. Seibert made the following motion:

MOVED: That the School Committee approve the minutes of the November 17, 2009 School Committee meeting as amended.

MOTION SECONDED by Ms. Bickford
MOTION APPROVED: 5-0

10. Future Agenda

School Committee asked for Richard Jones to present the energy report.

There will only be one School Committee meeting in March due to Town Meeting.

11. Adjournment

Ms O’Gara made the following motion:

MOVED: Motion to adjourn at 10:55 p.m.

MOTION SECONDED by Ms. Bickford
MOTION APPROVED: 5-0

Roll Call Vote:

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

School Committee Secretary

Date

BEDFORD SCHOOL COMMITTEE

**EXECUTIVE SEESION
MINUTES OF**

February 23, 2010