

**Bedford School Committee
Minutes of
Open Meeting
December 17, 2012**

Call to Order:

A meeting of the Bedford School Committee was called to order by Chairwoman Bickford at 7:43 A.M. Members present were, Ms. O’Gara, Ms. Seibert and Mr. Pierce. Also present were Jon Sills, Superintendent of Schools, Claire Jackson, Assistant Superintendent of Schools, David Coelho, Director of Finance of the Schools and Representative elect Ken Gordon.

Discussion of Educational Legislative and Policy Matters:

Ms Bickford started the discussion by saying that Mr. Gordon was brought up-to-date on the Hanscom funding in a meeting that he had with the Strategic Communications Task Force so unless there was something else someone wanted to add then we should move into the discussion of other educational legislative and policy matters.

The first item Mr. Sills brought up was the Interstate Compact. Massachusetts has signed on to join the Interstate Compact, which will allow a transferring student who has passed an MCAS like exam in another State to receive credit for MCAS in Massachusetts. However, at this point the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, (DESE), has not given it’s final approval. This will be very beneficial for our Hanscom students.

The next item Mr. Sills mentioned was the significant impact that the displaced families are having on the administration and the budget. He mentioned that last year we incurred approximately \$32,000 in costs for services for displaced families. This year we are on a run rate to incur \$180,000 in costs. Most of the cost is transportation. The parents of the school age children can request that the children be transported back to their home district or they can enroll them in Bedford. We will receive reimbursement for these costs in the year after they are incurred and those funds will be deposited in the Town’s accounts. These reimbursements however were recently signal for a 9c cut by the Governor to help offset the decline in current tax revenue.

A follow on item for the displaced families was that nearly half of the children have English Language Learner deficiencies. Ms. Jackson mentioned that we do receive a Title III grant of \$12,000 but that is little help when we need to translate all handbooks and documents into the native language of the parents. We received a quote to do this and the price was \$184,000. We could use more assistance from DESE to meet this need. Also some of these children have had a significant disruption in their schooling, which creates an increase in special needs.

Ms. Bickford mentioned that for years we as a district have been developing quality in-district special education programs as a means to retain the students in our district as opposed to sending them to a more costly alternative of a collaborative or out-of-district

placement. The circuit breaker formula allows a reimbursement for out-of-district special education costs if they exceed four times the foundation budget, or roughly \$40,000 and a reimbursement for in-district special education costs if they exceed three times the foundation budget, or \$30,000. A problem with the statute is that DESE is not interpreting the in-district reimbursement this way and that the reimbursement rate, although statutorily set at 75%, has been all over the place. One year it was 42%, another it was 68%, recently it has been about 72%. We also discussed that special education transportation, a significant and growing cost in special education budgets since 2004, has not been considered in the circuit breaker reimbursement.

Another topic was the Educational Collaboratives of which we belong to three, LABBB, CASE and EDCO. In the new regulations impacting collaboratives there is a requirement that caps the amount of reserves that a collaborative can maintain as 20% of the tuitions. Excluded from the tuitions are any grants and donations. With a cap of 20% and the exclusion of these items from the base it may limit the ability of the collaboratives to expand its programs. In addition, certain collaboratives provide disabled adult services which generally are not available anywhere else. There has been some discussion in the legislature to restrict collaboratives from offering these services.

Educator evaluations were another topic that was mentioned. Mr. Sills stated that he would prefer that the evaluation ratings be used as internal data as opposed to releasing or posting this data in a public domain.

Ms Seibert left the meeting.

Ms. Bickford stated that we are impacted by the reimbursement that the Town is required to make for Charters and School Choice. Although we do not have many instances of students going these routes, we do not see a savings in the school budget that is equivalent to the amount that we are paying for these tuitions.

We are one of the districts that the legislature promised a few years ago to get our State Aid funding up to at least 17.5%. Mr. Coelho stated that in the intervening years we have become a 20.5% district, however our reimbursement rate is only at the 15% level.

We are a METCO district and the funding we receive from the State pays the basic transportation costs and a few other items. In the State Budget this is an item that is constantly under attack.

The Federal and State Government have recently enacted new School Lunch Requirements much of which appears to be a reaction to the obesity problem that has been identified in the American youth population. The problem we are running into is that by law we need to supply a lunch program, however, with certain menu limitations and portion sizes the students are not buying lunches or are throwing them away. The impact on the School budget is that we may find ourselves with a program that is no longer self-sustaining and needs a bailout from the School Budget.

There was a mention of additional mandates that have been legislatively added to the burden of Public Schools in which there was limited or no funding attached with the mandate. One of the items mentioned was the new concussion regulations. Ms. O’Gara suggested that if mandates are to be handed down that they accompanied with funding.

Motion to Adjourn:

Ms. O’Gara made the following motion

Moved: That the School Committee adjourn at 8:53am.

Motion seconded by Mr. Pierce

Roll Call Vote

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

Motion Approved: 3-0

School Committee Secretary

Date