

BEDFORD SCHOOL COMMITTEE
MINUTES OF
December 4, 2012
Bedford High School - Large Instruction Room

1. Call to Order

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

2. Comments from the Public

None

3. Presentation: English Language Learner’s Program

Dr. Susan Rozen updated on the English Language Learner’s Program (ELL) in grades K-12. She began by defining who ELL students are, in accordance to Massachusetts’s general law:

“Students who have difficulty performing ordinary class work in English due to problems handling the English Language”

Dr. Rozen explained that Chapter 71A states that public schools in Massachusetts have done an inadequate job with ELL students and we have a moral obligation and constitutional duty to provide all Massachusetts students with skills to be productive members of society. Therefore, it is resolved that all children in Massachusetts public schools shall be taught English as rapidly and effectively as possible.

The current trend is that one out of five students in Massachusetts’s schools will be an ELL student and most are low-income students who have high drop out rates.

Bedford has ELL students who speak 25 different languages. The school district is required to translate official documents and notices into the students’ and parents’ native language, but the cost is prohibitive to do this and it is very hard to find translators.

Bedford’s students range from high functioning with families working at high-tech companies to low functioning students from war torn countries with impoverished backgrounds. The numbers in Bedford schools are:

Davis 57 students
Lane 23 students
JGMS 15 students
BHS 5 students

The changing demographics of Bedford students are resulting in MCAS scores with fewer advanced and proficient scores and more failures or needs improvement scores.

Massachusetts will have new state ELL regulations that include:

- All teachers will need ELL certification and renewal.
- New WIDA standards for ELL students – aligned to Common Core and designed to advance the academic language development and academic achievement of all ELL students.
- New WIDA assessments will be rolled out as well – proficiency and screening types.

Some of the biggest challenges Bedford faces include:

- Class size
- Increasing ELL population and changing demographics
- Cost of translations and translators
- Mandated roll out of new curriculum (RETELL) and standards (WIDA)
- Ensuring all teachers and appropriate administrators acquire training for certification/recertification.
- Students with little to no English skills.
- Students with interrupted formal education.
- No funding from the State or Federal governments.

Dr. Rozen explained that the current ELL team includes herself, Dr. Jackson, Lisa Campana (Davis School), Laura Villarroel (Lane School), and Anne Neimi (JGMS, BHS, Lane). She explained that last year, the focus was on the DESE Comprehensive Program Review and developing a curriculum and providing training for new ESL teachers.

This year, the focus has been on designing the curriculum based on WIDA standards and implementing the new assessments. Also supporting and training the classroom teachers and increasing instructional supports for the students have been key initiatives.

Next year, Dr. Rozen plans on implementing the curriculum program review changes and facilitating the training of classroom teachers in use of WIDA standards.

Ms. Seibert asked Dr. Rozen if there was any data that WIDA and RETELL work. Is there any data from other states? Dr. Rozen said no, that there is no data but she trusts Bedford to do a good job and will do all it can to help students learn.

Ms. Bickford asked Dr. Rozen to give an example of some of the new standards. Dr. Rozen agreed to email her some information.

Ms. Seibert asked why we are embarking on these changes – another mandate without any support. Dr. Rozen said Bedford is doing this because we are failing this population of students and we need to try to see if the new WIDA standards help.

Mr. Sills added that it is a national awareness that schools are failing this population. This is Massachusetts's response to the problem. Bedford is facing a growing and more complex ELL population and we need to do something more than we have in the past.

Mr. Hafer said that the presentation and the information are “astounding”. He has mixed feelings as he digests the information. The number of students and the number of different languages presents a very complex problem.

Mr. Hafer said he sees a challenge in the classroom. How can the teacher address the growing ELL needs and the rest of the class at the same time? He already hears that resources are thin and that the middle students are not getting resources they need. Dr. Rozen disagreed that students are not getting what they need in Bedford.

Mr. Hafer asked if there are any other successful models besides immersion. Dr. Rozen did not know.

Mr. Pierce said that this presentation really shines a light on an area (ELL) that he is not fully aware of. He wonders, like Mr. Hafer, if there are other ways to address the ELL issue and does it really make sense to use immersion at all grade levels.

Dr. Jackson said she feels strongly that Massachusetts is doing the right thing for the growing ELL population. She feels there is a need for a political body to help with the message that Massachusetts schools want to embrace the new ELL state standards but we need help with funding and data collection to ensure the new curriculum works. To date, Bedford only receives \$12,000 from the state. She recently received a quote of \$350,000 for translation of documents required by the state, quite a lot more than the \$12,000.

Ms. Bickford reminded the School Committee that the law was passed in 2001 because too many students were coming out of school and not speaking English. "Bedford has to follow the standards."

Ms. O'Gara thanked Dr. Rozen for the presentation and said that she is perfect for the job given her reading background and ability to inspire staff.

Ms. O'Gara cannot figure out why the state can't coordinate the translation of all the documents and forms so all districts can access them. She also finds the fact that teachers now need ELL/SEI endorsement overwhelming.

Ms. Bickford is amazed at the mandate that by 2016, all core academic teachers in Massachusetts will hold the ESL/SEI endorsement. "Why isn't the state helping us meet this mandate?"

Mr. Sills added that every educator will have to have 45 hours of training and that there is a need to train in-house trainers.

Ms. Bickford and Mr. Pierce said that maybe there is a middle ground and that it may make sense to start with immersion but then have the flexibility to move into others ways to teach English to older students. They both feel it would be better if the law allows districts to determine the best way to teach their ESL students.

Mr. Sills said teachers are feeling very stretched with all of the new mandates and the entire school system is feeling strained.

Dr. Jackson noted that new teachers now need to graduate with three credits in SEI in order to be certified to teach in Massachusetts.

4. Discussion: FY'2014 Budget Proposal

Ms. Bickford presented School Committee members with a summary of the FY'14 budget, which included a page highlighting the new positions, and how enrollment is a driver for these new positions. She also handed out a sheet explaining all new positions by school.

Since the largest increase in the FY'14 budget is in salaries, Mr. Pierce asked Mr. Coelho to get a more detailed break out of the contractual mandates in personnel. Ms. Bickford asked for information on our steps versus other system's steps. Mr. Coelho agreed.

Ms. Bickford said she would like to graphically support each new position requested and how enrollment is driving the request. She would like to figure out a way to do show visually, how the new FTE will improve class size. Mr. Sills agreed.

Ms. Bickford asked what the goal of the new JGMS skills center position is. Mr. Sills said the goal is to have Math and ELA remediation, not MCAS preparedness. He said the high school has a focus to help students pass MCAS in the tenth grade. Support at JGMS is to identify deficiencies and to develop interventions.

Mr. Sills noted that it does not look like our homeless population will change soon and predicts that the State will continue to use hotels in town as transitional housing. Therefore, he would like to add another adjustment counselor at JGMS and BHS to coordinate services with this population.

The School Committee discussed how transportation costs and state reimbursements related to the homeless are accounted for and what may happen in the future with state appropriations. Mr. Pierce said that he feels this risk needs to be noted and watched.

Ms. Seibert said that she believes that issues that affect our homeless families, such as lack of transportation in town, should be the responsibility of the entire town and not just a school problem.

Ms. Bickford asked Mr. Sills to prepare a chart showing each Special Education program at each school with enrollment and current staffing and desired staffing for next year.

Ms. Seibert asked Mr. Sills to explain the rationale for asking to extend the kindergarten program to five days. Mr. Sills said that the Common Core standards (K-12) have pushed math and ELA achievement goals to kindergarten. Teachers cannot meet this demand in four days. It is also complicated by Bedford's philosophy that we have play and social emotional goals in kindergarten. Teachers say it is very stressful on themselves and the students to try and do all of this.

Ms. Seibert said she feels that we should push back on the State mandates at the kindergarten level. "Why are we pushing kids to meet standards when they may not be developmentally ready to do so?"

Ms. O'Gara asked if we have enough support in the kindergarten classroom to help kindergarten children meet their academic and developmental needs?

Mr. Hafer said it is clear that kindergarten students have a three and three-quarter-day week. What are other districts doing? Do they have five-day kindergarten?

Ms. Bickford noted that expansion of the kindergarten program to five days has always been a goal of Bedford Public Schools. Is it time now given the Common Core? Can we choose to ignore the Common Core at the kindergarten level? Kindergarten used to be an option, is it still?

Mr. Pierce asked given the Chapter 70 formula, would a five-day kindergarten program help us get more money to offset the costs?

Ms. Bickford noted that Mr. Sills needs to articulate and quantify the burden of the new teacher evaluation system on the Program Administrators in order to justify the increase in FTEs.

Ms. Seibert asked Mr. Sills to create a list of Massachusetts' mandates and how they are the drivers of many of the budget requests. Mr. Sills agreed.

Ms. Bickford asked for an organization chart to understand the proposed changes in the IT Department. She would also like information on the PC replacement schedule. She also feels that the iPad plan needs to be articulated and include goals and strategies for the other schools. (She wonders whether anything at Davis and JGMS has to occur next year.)

Mr. Hafer agreed with this information request on iPads. He would also like to know more about the Acuity software purchase (future costs?) and any future IT capital requests as a result of new equipment going to schools.

Mr. Hafer would like to know more about the .75 floating custodian and how it will mitigate overtime costs.

Mr. Hafer asked about retirements and/or sick leave. Mr. Coelho said we have had two letters and four inquiries. Teachers have until the end of December to make notice.

Ms. Bickford asked Mr. Coelho and Mr. Sills to analyze growth at the High School carefully and asked if it was truly due to Hanscom increases.

Ms. Bickford asked Mr. Coelho to clarify the FY'14 circuit breaker reimbursement rate.

Ms. Bickford noted that there is a meeting with the Finance Committee on December 6th to give them an overview. School Committee will do the same thing with Fiscal Planning on December 12th.

5. Approval of Bus Transportation Contract Option Year 2

The School Committee discussed the need for considering the approval of Option Year 2 of the Bus Transportation contract at this time. Not awarding the Year 2 Option would require a bid to go out in spring 2013.

Ms. O'Gara made the following motion:

MOVED: That the School Committee agrees to accept Option Year 2 of the 2010-2014 Bus Transportation Contract with Bedford Charter Bus Company. The value of Option Year 2 for Regular Day and Special Ed Transportation and Late Bus Transportation is \$974,376.

MOTION SECONDED by Ms. Seibert

MOTION APPROVED: 5-0

Ms. O'Gara made the following motion:

MOVED: That the School Committee agrees to accept Option Year 2 of the 2010-2014 Bus Transportation Contract with Bedford Charter Bus Company. The value of Option Year 2 for METCO daily and late bus transportation is \$270,000.

MOTION SECONDED by Ms. Seibert

MOTION APPROVED: 5-0

6. Superintendent’s Report

Mr. Sills said that he needs to adjust the CEC Project request with regards to the JGMS switch.

Mr. Sills announced that the Governor announced a revenue shortfall so there will be a likely 5% reduction in circuit breaker reimbursements and possibly a 45% reduction in homeless transportation reimbursement.

Mr. Sills said that the Principal search for the Davis School is extended. He and the Committee were not satisfied that the pool was large enough. He will re-advertise in early January.

7. Liaison Reports

Ms. Seibert said that the CEC is having its final review tomorrow night.

Mr. Hafer said that the BEF Winter Fundraiser was a big success. He reminded everyone of the December 12th and 13th fundraiser at Barnes and Nobles.

Ms. O’Gara noted that Youth and Family Services is meeting to discuss how to support homeless families in town.

Ms. Bickford is working with setting up a meeting with our new State Representative, Ken Gordon.

8. Future Agenda

School Committee members asked for an update on the Educartis International Program status.

9. Adjournment

Ms. Seibert made the following motion:

MOVED: Motion to adjourn at 10:35 p.m. not to reopen.

MOTION SECONDED by Ms. O’Gara

MOTION APPROVED: 5-0

Roll Call Vote:

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

School Committee Secretary

Date

BEDFORD SCHOOL COMMITTEE

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Exhibits/Documents

- **English Language Learners presentation by Dr. Susan Rozen dated 11/29/12**
- **FY'14 Bedford Public Schools November 27th Superintendent's Budget Working Document date 12/4/12.**

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Executive Session
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