

**SCHOOL COMMITTEE MINUTES
TOWN HALL MEETING ROOM
Monday, March 10, 2008**

Members attending: Virginia Justicz, Stu Sklar, Brian Stevens, Will Verbits, Willie Wickman, and Thomas W. Jefferson

Call to Order – Willie Wickman, Chair, called the meeting to order at 7:02 p.m.

Minutes

VOTED Stu Sklar made the motion and Brian Stevens seconded to accept the minutes from the February 11, 2008 Executive Session meeting.
(4/0) to accept the motion. (Virginia Justicz (Yes), Stu Sklar (Yes) Brian Stevens (Yes), Will Verbits (Yes), Willie Wickman (Abstain).

VOTED Stu Sklar made the motion and Will Verbits seconded to accept the minutes from the February 23, 2007 Tri-Board meeting with one minor correction.
(4/0) to accept the motion. (Virginia Justicz (Yes), Stu Sklar (Yes) Brian Stevens (Abstain), Will Verbits (Yes), Willie Wickman (Yes).

VOTED Stu Sklar made the motion and Virginia Justicz seconded to accept the minutes from the February 25, 2008 meeting with minor corrections
(5/0) to accept the motion. (Virginia Justicz (Yes), Stu Sklar (Yes) Brian Stevens (Yes), Will Verbits (Yes), Willie Wickman (Yes).

Student Report

Samantha Leahy, Student Representative, reported that Boys Basketball won their District Semi-final and were scheduled for finals tomorrow at UMASS, Drama won their pre-liminary and is scheduled for finals this coming Saturday, Ski Team won states, and School Council was happy to hear that lowering user fees was under consideration. Emma Cait O'Rourke-Friel added that School Council was discussing extending terms of its members so that they may be more productive, and that they were also planning the Senior Citizen luncheon.

Suburban Coalition

Stu Sklar presented the Suburban Coalition 2008 Position Paper and outlined the Summary of 2008 Legislative Priorities. He also invited the public to attend "Planning for Economic Future" to be held on April 7, 2008 at 9:00 a.m. on Beacon Hill.

Special Education Task Force

Will Verbits reported that the task force had selected a candidate to perform the audit and was in the process of moving the contract forward.

Policy Committee

Virginia Justicz stated that there was a meeting scheduled for tomorrow at 5:00 p.m. to review Personnel and Student policies.

Strategic Planning

Virginia Justicz and Tom Jefferson reported that there was a meeting scheduled for tomorrow to finish the action plan and begin finalizing the report.

DEAC

Willie Wickman reported that they attended an interview today regarding the Devens RFP. Two other schools also submitted bids. She will keep the Committee posted on the progress.

Harvard Elementary School Council

Stu Sklar reported that he had attended a meeting on Tuesday where they discussed the budget, School Improvement Plan, new playground, and concerns regarding peanut allergies within the school. Stu stated that if the Council could reach a consensus regarding an allergy policy, then it may become the Committee's concern. Tom informed that it was on the agenda for review at tomorrow's policy meeting. Brian Stevens suggested contacting the Allergy Department at Boston Children's Hospital for their recommendations.

Superintendent Report

Tom Jefferson congratulated the Boys' Basketball Team for their tremendous post season. He was impressed by the sportsmanship of both players and fans from Harvard.

He also informed the Committee that he should have a proposed SY0809 Calendar for the next meeting. He stated that it was an unusual year, and the committee was working on some interesting solutions.

He welcomed Mark Force as the new Director of Maintenance and thanked Paul Landry for his outstanding work as Interim Director.

Special Education Task Force Report

Will Verbits presented a comprehensive review prepared by the task force over a one and a half year period. They used Acton-Boxborough's report as a point to begin discussions. Will read the Executive Summary which highlighted representations, goals, research and data sources and resulting findings and recommendations.

Willie Wickman thanked the task force for a job well done . She felt it was a collaborative effort, worthwhile endeavor, and that the report would provide direction for the special education department. Charles Horn informed the Committee that his staff had prepared the appendices that compiled the data used within the report. Willie thanked his staff for their efforts as well.

The Committee asked Will if the task force had reached a consensus to the findings in the report. He said they had. The Committee felt the report brought clarity to the topic and provided a definitive statement.

Virginia Justicz questioned and commented on the data in Table 1. Discussed if the data could be trended out further than FY05. Lorraine Leonard and Tom Jefferson explained that it was difficult to do that as the data was inconsistent in its reporting methods. The most accurate way would be to take a five year average.

Virginia Justicz was questioned why Nashoba Regional was able to keep its costs down. Will Verbits explained that over a five year period, Nashoba was able to create new in-house programs similar to what Harvard had done with its Preschool program. The Committee had a discussion regarding adding new programs, the cost effectiveness given the critical mass size of Harvard and space limitations. Charles Horn added that at the secondary level, it is sometimes better to provide a program of services versus a separate program as it does not separate the student from the rest of the school population.

Keith Cheveralls added that the task force had done a survey of other towns to see what they were doing to keep costs down. They did not have any success, but he suggested that the Committee look into it further as he felt the task force ran out of time with the survey results.

Brian Stevens commented on Finding #7 regarding the increase in the complexity of medical conditions and suggested forming an alliance with Boston Children's Hospital to assist in this regard.

The Committee discussed Finding #6 regarding inclusion and how to measure its success. The Committee said it needed to be addressed in an action plan to include the budget, community, after school programs, etc. Discussed how to change the culture at the school level through hiring, support, coaching and evaluation. Emma Cait O'Rourke-Friel felt it would be a good topic for School Council to explore ways to create programs to educate students on learning disabilities. The Committee agreed to put inclusion on its list of goals for next year.

The Committee asked that the report be posted on the website, and that hard copies along with the appendices be made available at Central Office, Town Hall and Library.

Stu Sklar made the motion and Will Verbits seconded to accept the Special Education Task Force Report as written..

VOTED (5/0) to accept the motion. (Virginia Justicz (Yes), Stu Sklar (Yes) Brian Stevens (Yes), Will Verbits (Yes), Willie Wickman (Yes).

Response to GCA Audit

Charles Horn presented a Response from this department regarding the approval of the GCA independent audit. The concerns were that some of the audit would be duplicative as it was already done by the Department of Education; the language was antagonistic, and there were limitations regarding confidentiality and access to student records which were not addressed. He also felt that this audit would further scapegoat the special education department.

Willie Wickman said that the audit was being done as a result of a Town Meeting vote. She requested that the response be given to the Task Force subcommittee for their review, that the School Attorney review it, and that a copy be sent to Attorney Nuttall for his review, and that it be put on the Agenda for the next meeting to discuss with Attorney Nuttall after he conducts the confidentiality training.

FY09 Budget Book

The Committee briefly reviewed the draft Budget Book. They will review it further overnight and email suggestions to Tom for a final draft. Printing will begin on Monday, March 17th with a town-wide mailing one week prior to the Town Meeting.

FY08 Budget

Lorraine Leonard presented an updated FY08 Budget as of February 29, 2008. She explained that there was a decrease in the Circuit Breaker reimbursement of \$27,000 in extraordinary aid. This resulted from the audit conducted in the Fall. The Committee asked how this deficit was being handled. Tom explained that there was a freeze on discretionary spending, they were looking for additional fees from Community Education, and Lorraine said a Reserve Fund Transfer of \$11,000.00 would be done.

FY09 Budget Hearing

The School Committee will hold its FY09 Budget Hearing on Monday, March 24, 2008 at 7:30 p.m. in the Town Hall Meeting Room. They asked that it be posted in the newspaper and on the website.

The Tri-Board Budget Hearing is scheduled for Tuesday, March 11, 2008 at 7:00 p.m. Tom will have handouts ready for the public.

Adjournment

Meeting adjourned at 9:04 p.m.

Minutes submitted,

Jackie Smith
Recording Secretary