

Sudbury School Committee
Meeting Minutes
April 28, 2021
Virtual Meeting

Members Present:

Silvia Nerssessian, Chair
Meredith Gerson, Vice Chair
Maggie Helon
Lisa Kouchakdjian
Sarah Troiano

Members Absent:

None

Also Present:

Lincoln School Committee

Tara Mitchell, Chairperson
Trintje Gnazzo, Vice Chairperson
Adam Hogue
John MacLachlan
Susan Taylor
Kim Mack, METCO Representative
Laurel Wironen, Hanscom
Representative

LS School Committee

Ellen Joachim, Chair
Carole Kasper, Vice-Chair
Cara Endyke Doran
Harold Engstrom
Kevin Matthews
Candace Miller

LPS Superintendent

Becky McFall

SPS Superintendent

Brad Crozier

LS Superintendent

Bella Wong

Special Session Meeting: Tri-District Legislative Forum

1. Call to Order of each School Committee by its Chairperson
 - a. Chair Silvia Nerssessian opened the meeting of the Sudbury School Committee at 7:10 PM, performed a roll call, and made an announcement that the session is being recorded, shared live for the public to see and hear and there should be no expected right to privacy, as this is a public forum. Silvia Nerssessian, Meredith Gerson, Sarah Troiano, Maggie Helon, and Lisa Kouchakdjian all affirmed in the positive.
 - b. Chairperson Tara Mitchell opened the meeting of the Lincoln School Committee and performed a roll call. Tara Mitchell, Trintje Gnazzo, John MacLachlan, and Laurel Wironen were present.

- c. Chair Ellen Joachim opened the meeting of the Lincoln-Sudbury School Committee and performed a roll call. Ellen Joachim, Carole Casper, Kevin Matthews, Candace Miller, and Cara Endyke Doran were present.
2. Welcome Legislators
 - a. Chair Silvia Nerssessian welcomed Senator Mike Barrett, Senator Jamie Eldridge, Representative Carmine Gentile, and Representative Thomas Stanley to this Tri-District Legislative Forum.
3. Statements from the Legislators
 - a. In introductory comments, Senator Mike Barrett expressed his delight to be joining the Tri-District meeting before explaining the boundaries of his constituency.
 - b. Senator Jamie Eldridge likewise expressed his appreciation for the invitation this evening's meeting and explained who he represents in the State Senate.
 - c. Representative Carmine Gentile explained who he represents in the Massachusetts House of Representatives.
4. Discussion Topics
 - a. Circuit Breaker Funding
 - i. Chair Silvia Nerssessian introduced the first topic of the evening, circuit breaker funding, and invited any comments or updates from the area's legislators. Representative Carmine Gentile informed those present on the call that the House recently passed the education portion of the budget, which includes the provision of a \$22.5 million increase in circuit breaker funding. Rep. Gentile also noted that Chap. 70 funding will total \$5.5 billion for the year in the House budget, a sum he noted as a historic high. Lincoln Public Schools and the Sudbury Public Schools stand to see increases of 1.5%, while LS will be around 1%. The House budget also appropriates \$40 million for pandemic related grants for school districts and \$15 million for summer school programs. Senator Mike Barrett noted that there was no specific increase for in-district special education transportation. Senator Jamie Eldridge requested that the Committees share with the legislators information about the costs of special education in-district transportation.
 1. Superintendent Brad Crozier stated that costs average about \$4,000 per student, meaning SPS typically spends an estimated \$100,000 on in-district special education transportation. These costs can, according to Mr. Crozier, act as a disincentive when new programs are being considered. This could result in students being placed out-of-district.
 2. Lisa Kouchakdjian voiced a concern about the cost of in-district transportation resulting in students being placed out-of-district when they could otherwise receive the services they need in their home district.

3. Superintendent Bella Wong stated that this is the first year districts are able to charge out-of-district special education transportation costs to the circuit breaker, which explains why the subject has not been raised previously. This affects roughly 25 students at LS, according to Ms. Wong.
- ii. Transportation Contract Bidding Process
 1. Chair Silvia Nerssessian introduced the second topic of the evening, a discussion about the transportation contract bidding process. Ms. Nerssessian noted that recent history has shown that when the district goes out to bid for transportation partners, only a single bid is ever submitted. Senator Mike Barrett explained that there could be two potential problems at play. The first is an issue of supply, with a shortage of either drivers or of vendors being present; or less likely, but still possible in Senator Barrett's estimation, could be collusion between the bus companies. Rep. Gentile noted that a statewide shortage of bus drivers exists across the Commonwealth. Rep. Gentile stated that he will communicate with the Attorney General's office regarding these concerns. Senators Barrett and Eldridge expressed concern that state laws may not provide much in the way of antitrust protection.
 - a. Vice-Chair Meredith Gerson explained that a driver shortage does not appear to be the problem Sudbury Public Schools is facing when it takes its transportation contract out to bid.
 - b. Lisa Kouchakdjian shared that she's heard that bus companies are dividing up regions of the state and her belief that an investigation should occur.
 - c. Maggie Helon explained that while some smaller districts own their own fleet of buses, that just imposes a different set of high costs. Ms. Helon also noted that bus driver insurance rates are driving transportation costs, before providing insights into the value of staffing bus monitors.
 - d. Chair Ellen Joachim stated her Committee is well aware of the shortage of drivers. The problem is that, when her district goes out to bid, it always receives just a single response. Ms. Joachim stated that she is aware of other districts experiencing the same challenge, and requested a state-level investigation of possible collusion activity.
 - e. Kevin Matthews stated that this forum gives the three Committees the ability to encourage their legislators to do something they are unable to do themselves: look into this issue of possible collusion at a much larger level.
 - iii. Updates on Education Funding

1. Chair Silvia Nerssessian introduced the evening's third topic, updates on education funding, noting while doing so that Rep. Gentile also touched upon this earlier in the meeting. Replying to a question from Ms. Nerssessian, Rep. Gentile explained that he expected the aforementioned grants to be awarded based on districts' applications. Senator Barrett added that federal funds are also in the process of being distributed. The discussion then proceeded to cover CARES Act funding that went directly to municipalities, bypassing state legislatures.
 - a. Lisa Kouchakdjian inquired about the status of House Bill 4120, which prompted a discussion of that other and similar bills under consideration in the House with Rep. Gentile.
 - b. Superintendent Becky McFall confirmed that towns have received funds, and negotiations will occur between towns and their schools over how to use the money. Ms. McFall also spoke to how federal funds have, to this point, followed the Title I funding formula. This has negatively affected the amount of funding received by Lincoln Public Schools.
 - c. Superintendent Bella Wong stated that some funds have gone to LS, but other funds have gone to Lincoln and Sudbury. Ms. Wong expressed her appreciation for the funds LS has received, but agreed that using the Title I funding formula does not make sense, as COVID expenses are more universal.
 2. The Committee and the Legislators also discussed the shortage of in-patient services for children across the Commonwealth, particularly for emergency psychiatric services.
- iv. Open Meeting Law
1. Chair Silvia Nerssessian introduced the final scheduled topic of the evening, a discussion about the current state and future of the Open Meeting Law (OML), specifically in regards to the ability to hold public meetings remotely. Sen. Barrett informed the Committee that the State Legislature previously passed temporary reforms of the OML to allow for remote participation. Rep. Gentile detailed pending legislation to provide the public with access to and/or participation in remote meetings. The Committee shared with the legislators that public participation in meetings has increased greatly since remote meetings were instituted during the pandemic. Discussion then ensued about the value of in-person collaboration and synergy.

2. Chair Ellen Joachim stated that her Committee has found it easier to schedule meetings and achieve quorum during meetings with remote participation being allowed.
3. Susan Taylor, concerned about how long it may take for legislation to be passed amending the Open Meeting Law, inquired about what other options exist to prolong municipal committees' ability to meet remotely. The legislators noted that several bills have already been filed for this purpose.
4. Kevin Matthews expressed a desire to return to in-person meetings, citing recent return-to-work orders by several companies, including Google and Microsoft. Mr. Matthews also stated that with schools returning to in-person learning, the committees running them should lead by example and also return to physical meetings.
5. Chairperson Tara Mitchell agreed that some sense of collaboration has been lost by meeting remotely, but hopes that technology can be used in the future to provide committee members and guests with flexibility to attend remotely.

v. Other Topics

1. Superintendent Becky McFall inquired about pending bills regarding early retirement for teachers. Senator Eldridge stated that there are such bills being considered, but that the financial impacts associated are a concern.

5. Adjournment

- i. Lisa Kouchakdjian motioned to adjourn the Sudbury School Committee Meeting at 8:35 PM, Meredith Gerson seconded.

1. ROLL CALL VOTE

- a. Meredith Gerson: Aye
- b. Maggie Helon: Aye
- c. Lisa Kouchakdjian: Aye
- d. Silvia Nerssessionian: Aye
- e. Sarah Troiano: Aye

- i. **VOTE: 5-0.** Motion carries, meeting adjourned.

- ii. Trintje Gnazzo motioned to adjourn the Lincoln School Committee Meeting at 8:36 PM, John MacLachlan seconded.

1. ROLL CALL VOTE

- a. Trintje Gnazzo: Aye
- b. John MacLachlan: Aye
- c. Susan Taylor: Aye
- d. Tara Mitchell: Aye

- i. **VOTE: 4-0.** Motion carries, meeting adjourned.

- iii. Carole Kasper motioned to adjourn the Lincoln-Sudbury School Committee Meeting at 8:37 PM, Candace Miller seconded.

1. ROLL CALL VOTE

- a. Carole Kasper: Aye
- b. Cara Endyke Doran: Aye
- c. Kevin Matthews: Aye
- d. Ellen Joachim: Aye
- e. Candace Miller: Aye
- i. **VOTE: 5-0.** Motion carries, meeting adjourned.

Respectfully Submitted,
Justin Dulak

Documents Reviewed During the April 28, 2021 School Committee Meeting

- 1. None