

Andover School Committee
Regular Meeting of March 16, 2010
School Administration Building - School Committee Room

Members in Attendance: Chair Debra Rahmin Silberstein, Secretary-Dennis Forgue, Richard J. Collins
Annie Gilbert, and David Birnbach

Others in Attendance: Dr. Claudia L. Bach, Superintendent, Dr. Susan M. Nicholson, Bernie Tuttle,
Interim Business Manager, and AHS Liaison Charlie Smith

I. Regular meeting in the School Committee Room

A. Salute to the Flag

Chair Deb Silberstein called the meeting of the School Committee to order at 7:10 P.M. Mr. Collins asked for a moment of silence followed by the Pledge of Allegiance led by Evan Bromander, a Grade 6 student at West Middle School. Mr. Collins presented Evan with a Certificate of Appreciation on behalf of the School Committee.

B. Recognition of Achievement

Dr. Bach recognized and congratulated the AHS Girls' Basketball Team who became the Division I State Champions this weekend at the tournament held in Worcester. The game was extraordinary and every girl played their best game. Dr. Bach invited the team and Coach Tidsley to attend a future School Committee meeting to be recognized on their outstanding achievement. This was another terrific season for AHS Sport Teams and she recognized the following teams on their accomplishments:

- * Cheerleaders: Basketball - second in MVC, third in North Sectional, ninth in State Meet.
 - and Hockey Cheerleaders - sixth in State Meet
- * Girls Skiing - North Shore League Champs, fourth in State
- * Boys Skiing - North Shore League Runner Up, second in State
- * Boys Track - MVC Champs, Division I Champs, second in State
- * Girls Track, MVC Champs, fourth in Division I, fifth in State
- * Boys Hockey - lost in first round of playoffs
- * Girls Hockey - lost in second round of playoffs
- * Wrestling - finished ninth in sectional playoffs
- * Boys Swim - second in MVC, seventh in North Sectional Meet, fifth in Division I meet
- * Girls Gymnastics – seventh in North Sectional Meet
- * Boys Gymnastics – third in State Meet.

She also congratulated and recognized:

- o Dr. Susan Nicholson for the incredible work she did last week organizing and presenting at the Community Focus Group held at AHS. There were over 200 participants engaged in the process for the Strategic Plan to determine the direction of education in Andover for the next five years.
- o The South School Co-Op Theatre and the participants in the Willy Wonka Performance held last weekend.
- o Rita Casper, Head Nurse who was recognized by the Department of Public Health for the information and preventative inoculations sent out to the community.

Dr. Bach recognized and thanked Dr. Debra Rahmin Silberstein the outgoing Chair of the School Committee stating that Deb's tenure has been unique and important in many ways. Deb has been an incredible advocate for kids and a leader in communication both internally and externally. She is responsible for the rewrite and update of the School Committee Policy Book, has been instrumental in the negotiation process to bring both sides together, an advocate for students throughout the district, and an enormous support personally. Deb is highly valued by our teachers and the Administrative Team. Dr. Bach presented Deb with a bouquet of roses.

On behalf of the many parents and community members, AHS PAC Co-President Diane Costagliola presented Deb with flowers and thanked her for all she has done as a member of the School Committee over the past six years. Diane said Deb has been a tireless advocate for the Andover Schools, relentless in her pursuit of excellence, and maintaining the integrity of the system.

On behalf of the School Committee, Annie Gilbert recognized Deb as an advocate in the truest sense of the word. Her passion for kids and her ability to reach out and engage many people to be involved and to stay involved is a credit to her commitment to the Andover Public Schools and the community. The School Committee wished Deb the best of luck and presented her with a gift. Mr. Collins told Deb it was a pleasure working with her, she is the absolute best!

Deb Silberstein thanked everyone and as one chapter in her life closes she looks for another to open. She also said her best moments in town were the years she spent in the PTO's fighting for children and their schools. She encouraged others to become involved and to give back.

Dr. Nicholson extended her congratulations to AHS Science Teacher Melanie Cutler who is the recipient of a National Grant, one of two awarded in Massachusetts.

David Birnbach recognized AHS Student Christian Waters who placed second in Combinatorics Subject Test at the MIT/Harvard Mathematics Tournament. There were 900 participants who participated in the tournament, one of largest globally. Mr. Birnbach would like to invite Christian to a school committee meeting to celebrate this academic achievement.

Annie Gilbert congratulated the Doherty Middle School Drama Club on their performance of "The Phantom Tollbooth" a wonderful, delightful show and a very student centered project. Annie also recognized West Elementary students, staff, and Principal Liz Roos on the annual West Elementary Readers and Writers Conference held last week, the students did a great job!

Mr. Collins recognized Moira Cronin of the AHS Girls' Track Team who was chosen as a National All-American – 4th in the nation. He also recognized Chris McConnell who is the greatest sprinter in the history of the AHS Track Team and is a great student-athlete.

C. Communications

Dr. Bach reported that the Revenue Generating Pinpoint Committee would like to present a summarization of their findings at the next School Committee Meeting.

The Physical Education Department will be sending out a Newsletter explaining all activities going on with the Physical Education Wellness Grant.

C. Communications

Dr. Bach responded to a Letter to the Editor from an AEA member printed in the Andover Townsman and she reported that the facts of the letter were incorrect. She said there were in fact 33 employees laid off last year, 16 of which still do not have jobs; and there were several opportunities provided for information on the Race to the Top funds that the AEA could have attended.

Dr. Nicholson reported the Wellness Curriculum Council reviewed the 31 Health units previously taught in K-5 and has identified 17 curriculum units to be revised for the Wellness Program. A full presentation will be provided to the School Committee in June, or by September 1st.

Dr. Nicholson reported on the Community Focus Group held on Thursday, March 11th at AHS. The event was a team effort with principals; PTO chairs, and parents working together to make for a successful evening. Dr. Nicholson especially recognized Val Vicosi, who is donating her time to type up all of the Focus Group notes. Dr. Nicholson will provide a report on the trends and ideas generated from the meeting to the School Committee at a future meeting. Several principals have expressed an interest in having individual school focus groups; and AHS Principal Harris is leading the way by holding a focus group on March 31st at the high school. The Steering Committee will schedule a meeting to review the information accumulated from the March 11th Focus Group.

Dennis Fogue reported that the League of Women Voters and the Service Club will hold a Budget Forum on April 7th at the Memorial Hall Library from 7:30-9:30 P.M. He encourages everyone to attend.

Mr. Fogue also reported that the School Committee has reached an agreement with incoming Superintendent Dr. McGrath. She will start on July 1, 2010 and has signed a three year agreement with a salary of \$195,000 per year - a cost neutral salary structure. Dr. McGrath is excited about returning to Andover.

Deb Silberstein will be member of the Board of TAVAH an organization which helps senior citizens stay in their homes rather than moving to assisted living or other alternate living environments. She would like to have TAVAH present to the School Committee and consider ideas on involving high school seniors.

D. Facilities

1. Bancroft Feasibility Study and MSBA Redistricting Requirements - Tabled

E. Citizen Input

AEA President Tom Meyers, on behalf of all members of the Andover Education Association recognized and thanked Deb Silberstein for her years of service and support.

F. Consent Agenda

Warrants: Mr. Tuttle reported that the warrants are in order.
Minutes: February 8, 2010 Work Session w/MASC and Regular Meeting Minutes of February 23, 2010.
Disclosures: Disclosure forms for Peter Loring, Adam Sapienza, Mary Ann Gorman, Virginia Rossini, and Steve Murray – WMS Adventure Club

F. Consent Agenda (Cont'd)

Annie Gilbert motioned to accept the consent agenda items as presented. The motion was seconded by Richard Collins, voted 4-0 and approved. Dennis Forgue was not in the room at the time the vote was taken.

G. Policy - Tabled

H. Financials

Interim Business Manager Bernie Tuttle reported the budget is still showing a deficit of \$500,000 but with further action taken in reductions we should realize a savings of \$275,000 and continue to work down the remaining deficit.

On a motion by Richard Collins with a second by Annie Gilbert, it was voted 5-0 to approve the General Fund transfers.

Budget Hearing

Deb Silberstein opened the Budget Hearing at 7:55 P.M.

Dr. Bach reported the FY-2011 School Department Operating Budget is a level services budget with \$49,723,653 in Personnel Services, and \$16,421,636 in Expenses with offsets of \$2,366,078 which includes a Circuit Breaker assumption of 40% for a total School Budget of \$63,779,211. The budget includes track/step commitments, or the new In-District Special Education Program at Andover High School but does not include any money for a COLA increase. The budget presented is more than the Town Manager's Recommended Budget.

Mr. Tuttle reported that they have been notified by the State that Chapter 70 funding will be reduced by 4%; which equates to approximately \$231,000 for the School Department and increasing the budget shortfall to \$2,932,414. He also spoke about ARRA Funds of \$942,000 and Stimulus Funds of \$126,000 which will be used by the Special Education Department if awarded.

The CIP Program requests for School 1 consists of items required to meet compliancy laws; School 2 covers school specific projects recommended at various buildings; and School 3 specifies an amount for new textbooks and continued funding for technology; all three sections of the school CIP total approximately \$1.2M with a recommendation by the Town Manager of \$862,500, a difference of \$335,000.

Mr. Tuttle addressed the Circuit Breaker funding stating that historically we have received 75% reimbursement; however, this year we received just 40% and we expect the same for FY-11 or less. The ARRA Funds are dedicated to Special Education and the amount and receipt of funds remains uncertain. The budget can be amended at Town Meeting should we receive ARRA funds and if determined they can be applied to the deficit. Mr. Tuttle reported that by Charter the Town Manager is required to present a balanced budget; and although the School Department works under mandates that the Town does not, and are required to provide services the Town is not burdened with, the Town has supported the School Department in the past, but with decreased revenues there is more competition amongst departments for revenue.

David Birnbach continues to encourage everyone to look at the budget differently and address where we can best put dollars that would impact students the least. Mr. Birnbach would like to see more forward thinking, better use of technology to reduce labor investments, and looking at the teaching model in a more cost effective way to realize cost savings. He would like to investigate the impact of identifying “master teachers” to oversee two classrooms with additional instructional assistants to deliver instruction. Mr. Birnbach also urges the Committee to follow the theme of Bill Daggett to take something off the plate.

Annie Gilbert would like to see more clarity on the Town/School allocations and the specificity of the revenue received, i.e. meals tax revenue. Mr. Tuttle said this information should be part of the discussion at the Triboard Meeting.

Audience:

Tom Meyers commended Dr. Bach for presenting a level services budget and stressed that communication/contact between children and teachers is essential to a good education. He feels the draconian cuts put forward will hurt the students and is asking the School Committee to go to Town Meeting and press for money from the Town’s reserve fund to maintain our schools.

Bob Willard, 76 Tewksbury Street feels we should support core academic values of the town and if necessary eliminate the Athletic Program. Andover has a reputation for providing a good education but he maintains that the cuts to the elementary schools in increased class sizes will be painful but invisible to the public, the elimination of the Foreign Language Department at the Middle Schools will be visible, and changes to the block schedule at AHS will be very visible. He also suggested elimination of high school stipends, and stipends not mandated.

Ben Gibson said the Athletic Program builds team work and makes for a well rounded student and it would not be to anyone’s benefit to eliminate it. Before making any changes to the School Department he demands to see the Town budget, and questioned the transparency of the Town budget while the School Department budget is scrutinized line by line by the Finance Committee and the Board of Selectmen. Bonnie Zahorik, Granli Drive is concerned with the budget process and stressed the importance of the Town and School working together to solve this problem, and to be clear on the message.

Deb Silberstein said the three Boards along with several subcommittees of the Boards (Team 470, Communications sub-committee, budget advisory committee, etc.) are working together to close the budget gap; and she stated the School Committee and the public need to decide what issues we are willing to compromise on. David Birnbach said there are expensive commitments that have to be addressed (health care/pensions). Deb Silberstein stated significant changes have been made to the employee health plan design over the past several years; however we should not be facing a 12% rate increase. John Zipeto, 14 Canterbury Street stated that the Federal Government continues to under-fund mandates for Special Education, and the School Department should not be held hostage to cover these expenses because it is also the Town’s responsibility to fund these programs not just the School Department’s. He also stated that the School Committee has the authority to approve a reasonable budget, and Town Meeting will afford the opportunity for public discussion and decisions. Dennis Forgue expects there will be two different budgets presented at Town Meeting.

Michael Volger, 32 Carlton Circle said he is concerned about going to Town Meeting with a level service budget in this economy, and although we can't change the fixed costs in the budget the School Committee should have options to provide the community for consideration. He talked about re-examining tradition and to consider moving away from the block schedule which, although the longer blocks work for some courses, it also means 82 minute study halls, and 82 minute Physical Education classes, and for some courses 40 minutes of teaching with the other 40 minutes spent doing homework or reading. AHS Liaison Charlie Smith suggested a component of the two schedules, the block and the 5 x 7, be looked at. Mindy Rutfield, 5 Elysian Drive is concerned about the long-term effects of the cuts because it seems that programs which are cut never come back. Cyndi Weber, 9 Gavin Circle said time is of the essence and the School Committee has to get together with the other Boards quickly to resolve this problem and determine how to allocate our resources to avoid a battle at Town Meeting.

Deb Silberstein stated it is the role of the School Committee as fiduciaries of the schools to be advocates of the schools, and to bear in mind that making the changes being put forward would change the landscape of the entire school system. Dennis Forgue wants the School Committee to meet over the next few weeks to dialogue and vet through the choices presented, come to consensus as a group and make an informed decision. David Birnbach would like to see a zero-based budget approach and to look at what is the most important and stated this is a perfect time to inject key concepts of Bill Daggett's presentation.

Annie Gilbert stated how important it is that the five members of the School Committee understand the educational implications of the decisions to be made, and they need to have a starting point to work from, and continue the dialogue from there with feedback from the Strategic Plan, and State House funds, etc. Dennis Forgue will work with the Superintendent to schedule additional meetings.

The Budget Hearing closed at 9:50 P.M.

I. Other

1. Town Meeting Warrant - Tabled

2. School Committee Reorganization

David Birnbach motioned to nominate Dennis Forgue as Chair of the School Committee effective Wednesday, March 24, 2010. The motion was seconded by Annie Gilbert and unanimously approved.

David Birnbach motioned to nominate Annie Gilbert as Secretary of the School Committee effective on Wednesday, March 24, 2010. The motion was seconded by Richard Collins and unanimously approved.

J. Adjournment

At 10:00 P.M. on a motion by Annie Gilbert and a second by Dennis Forgue, it was unanimously voted to adjourn the meeting.

Respectfully submitted,
Dee DeLorenzo, Recorder