

AUBURN SCHOOL DEPARTMENT
AUBURN, MAINE

REPORT OF REGULAR SESSION MEETING OF THE AUBURN SCHOOL COMMITTEE

Auburn Hall

September 12, 2007

Members Present: Mr. Raymond Berube

Mr. David Das

Mr. Lane Feldman

Dr. Susan Gaylord

Mr. Ross Leavitt

Mr. Thomas Kendall (arrived at 7:36)

Ms. Tara Paradie

Others Present: Tom Morrill, Interim Superintendent.

I. CALL TO ORDER/PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

A. Introductions

Mr. Das called the meeting to order at 7:07 P.M. and led the Pledge of Allegiance. Committee members introduced themselves and stated which ward they represent. Mr. Das reported that Mr. Kendall would be arriving late after he completes his coaching responsibilities.

II. CONSENT AGENDA

A. Approval of Agenda

It was moved by Mr. Feldman, seconded by Mr. Berube and voted unanimously to approve the Consent Agenda for tonight's meeting including the addendum.

III. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

There were no public comments at this time.

IV. SUPERINTENDENT REPORT

A. Personnel

1. Creation of 1.5 FTE Elementary Teaching Positions

It was moved by Mr. Leavitt, seconded by Mr. Feldman and voted unanimously to return Creation of 1.5 FTE Elementary Teaching position to the table for consideration.

Mr. Morrill, Interim Superintendent, provided details and a PowerPoint presentation as well as handouts regarding enrollment information. Mr. Morrill noted that numbers do play a role in the education of students, particularly at the elementary level. Mr. Morrill reviewed the enrollment numbers indicating that at Park Avenue Elementary School the numbers were high in kindergarten and third grade. He noted that at East Auburn Community School the numbers are high in kindergarten and first grade. Mr. Morrill noted that of the 98 students enrolled in ELL classes at Park Avenue Elementary School, 65 of those are at a high level of need. He noted that there are a total of 106 elementary ELL students across the system. Mr. Morrill compared the elementary enrollment numbers across the system and provided four options to address the needs. He explained the cost of the recommendation and noted the funding plan to cover the expenses for these positions. Mr. Morrill noted that in the future redistricting and program placement should be looked at as we plan ahead for the next school year.

Mr. Morrill recommended the creation of 1.5 FTE Elementary Teaching positions. He noted that this would mean adding a teacher at East Auburn Community School for grade K/1 combination and adding a teacher at Park Avenue Elementary School for a 3/4 combination. An existing guidance position at Fairview would be filled with .5 and the other .5 used for a teaching position.

Mr. Morrill answered questions from School Committee members and clarified areas of concern.

Mr. Das clarified that the pre-k program realizes revenue for the School Department that outpaces the costs of that program and it does not divert resources from the system.

Mike Finnerty – 222 Gamage Avenue. Mr. Finnerty stated that he hoped the School Committee would add new positions rather than move kids around.

Stacey Millett – 17 E. Dartmouth Street – Ms. Millett stated that it is hard to see your child in a situation where learning is not happening. She noted that she is very much in favor of hiring a new teacher and invited the School Committee to come visit East Auburn School.

Richard Potvin – 49 Sunview Terrace – Mr. Potvin stated that he had never felt something strongly enough to come before the School Committee. He stated that he came to ask the School Committee to consider hiring a K/1 teacher for East Auburn.

Jamie Dufour – 71 Davis Ave. – Mr. Dufour stated that he felt Park Avenue School was carrying the burden of the ELL program and this causes high enrollment numbers at that school. He stated that it appears that certain schools carry a greater student/teacher ratio and questioned whether it would be beneficial to recommend other options to take care of this situation in the future.

Paula Robinson – Ms. Robinson stated that last year she had a sixth grader at Park Avenue with an enrollment of 28 students in his class. She now has a third grader with 28 students in the class. Ms. Robinson stated that we need to bring in another teacher and we also need to look into the future to plan something for next year so this doesn't happen again at Park Avenue School.

Vickie China – 13 Josslyn St. Ms. China stated that her concern is for all of these children in the classrooms with high enrollment, noting that she also has a concern for the teachers at Park Avenue. She stated that she is in favor of hiring another teacher at Park Avenue and recommended that for the ELL program be split next year. She noted that she is a huge supporter of Pre-K, but doesn't think Park Avenue has the room for Pre-K.

Angie Jalbert – 14 Dexter Ave. Kindergarten enrollment is high. I think pre-k is awesome, but if it takes away from the kindergarten kids, then I don't think it is helpful. Mrs. Fecteau is awesome, but kindergarten is important. The 3/4 grades are around 26. We are exceeding the student/teacher ratio. I don't want to see my kids being forced to attend school at another school. The ELL is a great program, but it takes up too much of the space at our school. I think that needs to be split. I am for adding another teacher, but there is more than one grade that needs a teacher. Adding an ed tech to the classroom could solve the ratio issue.

Ms. Paradie reminded the committee members that part of the reason that Park Avenue Elementary School was built was because of the ELL program.

Marnie Coleman - 156 Highland Ave – Ms. Coleman stated that she is in support of adding a teacher, but questioned how the classes would be split up. She noted that she would fight to keep her child where he is because splitting the class is also disruptive to kids.

Mr. Das responded that the teachers and administrators would make that decision after working with staff at the schools.

Sharon Williams – 106 Lake St. Ms. Williams stated that she is a former teacher and principal. She stated that she does not want to see her child put in a combination 3/4 classroom for reasons other than sound educational reasons. She suggested that instead of taking children out of classrooms to create a class where there is no space, perhaps it would be best to hire an additional teacher and institute team teaching with a floating teacher. She noted that this way students are not being taken out of the class, but they will have more teacher support where it is necessary. Ms.

Williams stated that in terms of the ELL program she loves the diversity that the ELL program has brought to the school.

Beth Starbird – 81 W. Bates Street. Ms. Starbird stated that with the high enrollment there is no space to do anything extra in the room. She noted that students are getting the bare minimum and there are three distinct groups of children in the class. Ms. Starbird stated that it may be difficult to split the classes, but the gain the students will make in a smaller class will far outweigh the concerns of splitting the group.

Robin Fleck – 27 Hazel Street – Ms. Fleck stated that she is the ELL Team Leader in Auburn. She noted that the ELL program for sixteen years was in the neighborhood school, which was Sherwood Heights. Ms. Fleck stated that we thought our population was about to increase and made the decision to move the program to Park Avenue School. She stated that when we asked our families to change their neighborhood school, it was hard for them; however, this parent group trusted us to provide an equal education for their children and provide an environment that was equal to what they had at Sherwood Heights. She noted that the move ran very smoothly but to hear suggestions of moving the program this year would be traumatic and it would damage the trust that we worked so hard to build over two years. Ms. Fleck asked, “Do we need to figure out a plan for the future with our growing demographics? Absolutely!” She noted that there are 152 students in this program and these children offer our community much more than some people think. She stated that if you speak with parents and children, you will hear how the lives have been enriched by the cultural diversity these people have brought to us.

Karla Downs – 137 Davis Avenue. Ms. Downs stated that she is a third grade teacher at Park Avenue and was happy to see Ms. Paradie and Mr. Kendall visit the classroom. She explained that she finds it difficult to carry on with some of the traditions that she used to have over the years. She suggested that we engage another teacher for our 4th grade team noting that she is willing to do what it takes to provide an enriching program for these children. Ms. Downs stated that teachers would need to find time to meet as a team to plan for these students. She stated that if we had a new teacher, that teacher may not have her own classroom, but we do have space that we could use. She noted that we could utilize this teacher within our own classroom, but we would need time and opportunities to find ways to do this. Ms. Downs stated that we need to do our best to provide every opportunity to do what is best for our students.

Ms. Paradie asked for clarification regarding planning time.

Ms. Downs responded that it takes time to create formative assessments to determine what we want to provide based on the standards. Teachers would need weekly opportunities to update, change groups, etc. and this would be in addition to any Wednesday afternoons available currently. She suggested that some substitute money be targeted because this is an ongoing process.

Mr. Das stated that the School Committee would leave the details of how this will be worked out to the administration.

Melissa Sundell – 42 E. Bates St. Ms. Sundell stated that she is in strong support of the recommendation to hire a teacher at East Auburn. She noted that the story of first graders at East Auburn is a story of needs as well as enrollment numbers and this has been a problem for a year now. She noted that she understands the issues at Park Avenue, but she is begging for the classroom at East Auburn to be disrupted noting that she thinks these students would be better off if they were divided into smaller classes.

Carmine Frumiento – 510 Maplewood Road. Mr. Frumiento stated that he agrees with everything Melissa stated. He stated that the teachers have done a great job, but it would be a tragedy not to divide these groups and hire a teacher to assist at this school.

Julie Farnsworth – 208 Oak Hill Road. Ms. Farnsworth stated that this is clearly a class with a lot of needs. There is chaos in the classroom and a K/1 classroom would provide the support these students need.

June Simard – Ms. Simard stated that she is a first grade teacher at East Auburn School and has been employed at the Auburn School Department since 1985. She noted that she has never felt so strongly about an issue that she had to speak to the School Committee. Ms. Simard stated that the only option for our students is the creation of a K/1 position at East Auburn School and she would strongly encourage support for an additional teacher.

Susan Weiss – Ms. Weiss stated that she had been a school counselor since 1987 and has been in education for 39 years. She stated that of the four options offered, she would strongly support adding a teacher. The students' needs cannot be met now, but it is not for lack of professional effort.

Belinda Chadbourne – 65 No. Auburn Road. Ms. Chadbourne stated that she strongly supports hiring another teacher and dividing up the classroom.

Lynn Bolmer – 355 Court St. Stated that redistricting should only be considered as a last resort. She stated that she was a student in Auburn and was redistricted, noting that to this day it has affected her life. Ms. Bolmer stated that she wants to give her children and all children in Auburn the opportunity to progress. She noted that she is in favor of hiring another teacher because these children are fragile and we need to think more about them and less about the money it will cost to fix the problem.

Cherry Waters – 54 Linden St. in Auburn. Ms. Waters stated that she did not want people to discount the importance of the pre-k program, which provides a valuable transition for students before they go into a full day kindergarten setting. She stated that anything we can do to prep our kids for school is important. Ms. Waters stated that the numbers in grade 3 are extremely high, but her child is in Ms. Downs' class and is excited and challenged. She noted that she is concerned about the split. She stated that she feels we need to add a teacher at Park Avenue and at East Auburn, but we also need to look at the systemic problem at our schools and figure out how to address the problem prior to the start of school. She noted that she loves the fact that Park Avenue has the ELL program, but felt that we needed to look at the numbers over the district and see that we have the proper resources to meet all the students needs so we don't end up with this same issue next year.

Will Talpey – Mr. Talpey stated that he feels strongly about the quality of teachers but worries about them getting burned out with these high numbers.

Mr. Morrill stated that it was the decision of the Auburn community to have small neighborhood schools, which does present a problem of flexibility. He stated that we attempt each year to distribute staff and students evenly noting that these numbers are looked at every spring and staffing changes do occur over the summer for the coming year. Mr. Morrill stated that it is difficult because of the district lines and people get wedded to their neighborhood school, and their perception of their school; however, we occasionally we have families move in and it changes the numbers at the last minute. Mr. Morrill noted that sometimes it takes until Labor Day to get accurate numbers because even in the first week of school we have students show up that we never anticipated.

Mr. Das stated that we make decisions regarding the budget that also have ramifications later on in the year and we rely on the best information we have. Unfortunately, enrollment is not a science and we do the best we can with the information we have.

Mr. Morrill noted that there have been budget cuts and difficult times. He stated that we would love to hire more teachers but we simply can't because we need to ensure that we meet our budget requirements.

Dr. Gaylord stated that we are all here because we care about students and education. She noted that it is important to have reasonable numbers and we have no option but to create these positions.

Ms. Paradie stated that the fund that we are looking at using is a particular fund for staffing and this is the fund that we have to use for the entire year. She noted that by creating these positions, there will not be much money left in that rainy day fund.

Mr. Berube stated that not too much has changed since 25 years ago because everything that was said tonight was said then. He stated that the population in Auburn has not changed; however budgets and expenses have increased. Mr. Berube stated that he felt there had been some poor planning and if you have to redistrict you should do it before the school year starts.

Mr. Kendall stated that he experienced this same thing 30 years ago when he served on the School Committee noting that the expressions from parents are identical to what I heard back then. He noted that he takes exception to the fact that we have not done our planning correctly, noting that district wide we are doing quite well. Mr. Kendall noted that we have about three problem areas and those are three areas out of over 300 classrooms so we have to look at the larger picture. He stated that there are limited funds and limited opportunities. He noted that we have additional space and the idea of redistricting might need to be explored. Mr. Kendall stated that Auburn would need to face the reality that the district lines will need to become flexible from year to year and the population will have to come to grips with that. Mr. Kendall stated that he is not in favor of adding staff because it will strap the budget, but he is in favor of spreading out the population.

Mr. Das stated that the challenges are there with small schools and having been on this committee he didn't feel that flexible lines would address the issue.

Mr. Das reminded the citizens that the chickens will come home to roost and there will be a ripple effect down the road in our budget.

Mr. Leavitt stated that since ESP has come in from Augusta we don't have the flexibility we had in the past. He stated that there are some set numbers that Augusta is demanding and we may be forced to look at new ideas, but currently we support small schools. Mr. Leavitt reminded the citizens that they have a responsibility to follow these things with regard to the mandates from Augusta, noting that if they want us to have flexibility, they need to make their voices heard in Augusta too.

Mr. Berube stated that he was very involved in schools in the past and it has been at least 20 years since he had been in the schools until his recent visit. He stated that the schools now have far more than they had 20 years ago and people should be proud of the schools we have today.

It was moved by Mr. Leavitt, seconded by Ms. Paradie and voted 5 in favor and 2 opposed to approve the creation of 1.5 FTE Elementary Teaching positions.

V. ADJOURNMENT

It was moved by Mr. Leavitt, seconded by Mr. Feldman and voted unanimously to adjourn from regular session at 9:00 PM.

Attest, a true record,

Thomas Morrill, Secretary
Interim Superintendent of Schools

TM/rmw