

KINGSTON SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEETING

Special Meeting

Thursday, June 21, 2007

Kingston Elementary School

The meeting was called to order at 7:03 p.m. by Chair Christopher Mamakos at the Kingston Elementary School.

PRESENT FROM SCHOOL COMMITTEE

Mr. Christopher Mamakos, Mr. Joseph Chaves, Mr. Eric Crone, Ms. Stacey Elmes, Ms. Sheila Vaughn.

ABSENT FROM THE COMMITTEE: none

PRESENT FROM ADMINISTRATION

Mr. Dana R. Parker, Supt. of Schools; Ms. Joy Blackwood, Asst. Superintendent; Mr. John Tuffy, Director of Business Services; Ms. Paula Bartosiak, Principal; and Ms. Cheryl Wrin, Principal.

Also Attending:

The primary purpose of the meeting was to discuss full time Kindergarten.

Chairman Mamakos reviewed the “decorum” of the meeting and the orderly and professional procedure to be followed.

Mr. Chaves, Vice Chair, started the discussion. It was his understanding that the Kindergarten Study Committee would be recommending a procedure.

Superintendent Parker stated that goals will be established for the implementation of full day Kindergarten. He said at this time we are moving forward on a budget that is for partial implementation. Short and long range plans have been discussed. It has been discussed as to how many budgets it may take to implement the program fully. In reviewing the override vote approval, full day Kindergarten was a portion of the Kingston School Department’s budget that required a favorable vote of the override; this was received.

Ms. Elmes thought that a detailed plan would be presented after the passing of the override as to how many classes. She received a letter stating a lottery was to be held to determine who would be able to attend full day Kindergarten. Ms. Elmes would like someone to describe “partial”—how many classes will there be in the fall.

Mr. Parker stated that he has been working with the Teachers Association since the override to reinstate the teachers who had been laid off back to their positions. The Kingston School Department is making the best use of resources with the approved budget. Administration and the Teachers Association are working to avoid negatively impacting class size and/or programs. Halifax is not making use of the Kindergarten Grant since they are not putting in full time

Kindergarten at this time. He further stated that there is the same number of positions, the same number of people and with maximizing resources the Kingston School Department, KES would be able to achieve five full time Kindergarten classes and three half-day classes.

Ms. Elmes asked if administration is proposing five full day Kindergarten classes in September? And Mr. Parker responded yes and full implementation is expected down the road without impacting programs, services and resources given the parent interest of more than five full time sessions.

Mrs. Vaughn asked how the Kindergarten Grant is affecting the Special Needs students. Mr. Parker stated that the Director of Special Education is holding one place in the inclusive process. Mr. Chaves asked how this will effect rentals and mid-day bus costs. Mr. Parker said the cost would be \$42,000, plus change. Mr. Tuffy said the disbursement depends on where the students live in town. He also stated that the Silver Lake Pre-School is moving back to the High School and PAC will be taking over that rental space.

Mr. Chaves stated that four sections of full time Kindergarten had been discussed previously, where did the fifth classroom come from? Mr. Parker answered that the second level grant includes aide money and we can provide the same levels of service for the excess demand from parents for full day Kindergarten. Mr. Chaves asked how many students? Mr. Parker stated there would be 120 capacity with five full day classrooms, with 130 students wanting full day Kindergarten.

Mr. Mamakos asked if the grant is written for a 1:10 ratio and will five classes for 100 students be a 1:10 ratio. Mrs. Blackwood stated that each classroom will have a second adult at all times. The quality full day grant will fund additional paraprofessionals. This is not guaranteed but an entitlement.

Mr. Mamakos asked if the School Committee was on the hook if grant does not come through. Mrs. Blackwood stated that eight aides are already in place even if grant does not come through.

Ms. Elmes asked if the choice to keep children in half-day sessions will be a disadvantage to those children. Mr. Parker stated that the move to full day Kindergarten is because it is an advantage. Parents always have options. Kindergarten is not mandatory. A transition year accommodates a variety of wishes. We want to move forward with full day Kindergarten for all.

Mr. Crone's concern is regarding the override issues. He stated the perception was that we were looking at two full day Kindergartens and now there are five being presented. Voters could be upset with what was made public to do with money.

Mr. Parker stated the ideal would have been to layout a plan fully. Additional staff is coming from a smaller sixth grade for the next school year. The Chair of the Finance Committee referred to this during budget hearings. To use resources to the best that we can is what we do.

Mr. Tuffy stated this is a timing issue. We would not be having this conversation if Mrs. Blackwood had not secured the grant monies. We did not know until April 2, 2007 that Halifax would reject full day Kindergarten and turn down the grant. Full day Kindergarten receives twice the amount of state aid that half-day Kindergarten receives.

In relationship to aides in 2008-09, Mr. Chaves asked how long do we keep the 1:10 ratio? Where is sustainability for this? Mrs. Blackwood answered that the grant is long standing and she is confident it will continue based on her experiences. Mr. Chaves asked if we eliminated the middle day bus, could we implement eight full day classes?

The money for specialists and additional staff will most likely effect class size and/or number of specialists. Going to eight full time classes will require more research. Mr. Crone stated that in going to eight full time sessions what about the parents who have chosen not to have full time Kindergarten.

Mrs. Elmes asked Mrs. Bartosiak to describe full day Kindergarten as compared to half-day Kindergarten. Mrs. Bartosiak explained how the McGraw-Hill Reading Program is intended for full day Kindergarten. Half-day Kindergarten does not get into the possible depth nor can we provide as much repetition to reinforce skills. There is more time to address the curriculum with full day.

Mr. Elmes said that with the majority of students in full day Kindergarten, her concern is the creating of a minority (those who did not choose full day Kindergarten). How long would it take a student to “catch up” in first grade. Mrs. Bartosiak responded that it would be based on the individual child.

Chair Mamakos at this point stated there would be no more questions from the School Committee. Mr. Mamakos presented his view, which included the following:

- Large growth of population
- Student needs (academically)
- MCAS scores indicate a need
- Large 6th grade class moving on to Middle School which allowed forward movement of full day Kindergarten
- Agreed to two full day Kindergarten classes
- Nothing brought to the School Committee regarding additional full day classes
- Partial implementation would be the transition
- Concerns stated by Mrs. Elmes and Mr. Crone regarding leaving out a very small population
- Perception of community that we have “extra” teachers now
- Maintain integrity and trust of community
- Looks like we misrepresented the budget we put forward
- Two full day Kindergarten classes—additional teachers/resources to target Grades 1-6
- Recommend we go forward with two full day Kindergarten classes as outlined, pull out additional Kindergarten teacher in the budget (no need to hire)
- July 9 meeting—we see a full implementation plan for full day Kindergarten, that we are being fair to all the children
- These are my personal views, not necessarily those of the committee

Are there any observations and/or thoughts from parents?

One parent stated others felt obligated to enroll their children in full day Kindergarten even though their child may not be “ready”. It was asked if this School Committee and/or past School Committees supported full day Kindergarten? The answer was yes, always. The money was a deterrent in the past. This is a good opportunity for us to move forward on full day Kindergarten by taking advantage of grant monies.

Mrs. Katie Condon (parent) stated that parents do not know what is going on. What is the lottery? What is the curriculum? Where is the information as to whether to choose or not to choose full time Kindergarten.

Mrs. Blackwood responded that the goal is to accommodate as many students as possible, as quickly as possible. The override timing caused difficulty—the grant money needs to be spent by June 30, 2007. She stated that Plympton’s implementation last year was a hard transition. She also felt that every effort was made to communicate what we had answers to regarding full day Kindergarten. She assured parents that the administration will communicate as soon as a decision is made.

Ms. Marianne Howard (parent) stated that there was a year-long study on full day Kindergarten six years ago. What tools will be available in first grade for those children who did not participate in full day Kindergarten. People did not just vote because of full day Kindergarten.

Mrs. Blackwood stated that reading scores that already exist will be available. The Phonics Program is for all students Grades K-2 and know what we will be teaching. The curriculum is in place.

Ms. Christine Ward is in favor of four, rather than two, full day Kindergarten classes. Are there statistics on the advantages? What is the goal of full day Kindergarten?

Ms. Ellen Elwood asked where does the Halifax money go?

Mr. Chaves thanked the administration for looking deeper into this. We have been discussing full day Kindergarten all year and have discussed the possibility of four full day Kindergarten classes.

The perception “out there” is that the School Committee is against full day Kindergarten. Mrs. Elmes suggested that everyone look at the town website for School Committee dates. Ms. Paula White (parent) asked when would parents be advised as to the curriculum?

Mr. Parker stated that after deliberation, the largest impact for full day Kindergarten is time—curriculum is already strong. The School Committee has recommended that we take on full day Kindergarten in a timeframe that is reasonable. To build the Program now as fast as we can is the best benefit to our children.

Ms. Julie Borjenson stated her belief is that all has been done to implement full day Kindergarten. She is concerned about two sessions—parents will want more. Can we learn from other towns that have had a longitudinal study of how to implement?

Mr. Parker is concerned about long-term budget issues. Kingston School Department will not be receiving any more state aid except additional money for full day Kindergarten students. The plan is to move as fast as possible to implement full day Kindergarten. Administration is working very hard with a group of parents and teachers to accomplish this. Mr. Parker felt that parents' concerns should have been referred to administration to allow the opportunity to provide the information that was available.

Mrs. Vaughn felt there was a tight deadline and that five full time Kindergarten sessions were better than two.

Mr. Chaves asked if the 20% ELA Coordinator's position was still an option for the Kingston School Department. Mr. Parker answered possibly. Mr. Chaves asked if there are any resources left to pre-pay.

Mrs. Elmes stated that she does not recall four full day Kindergarten classes ever mentioned. Mr. Mamakos said that the Committee could not go forward without the budget override vote and that administration was acting in the best interest of the children and the schools. Mr. Chaves asked for a motion.

Mrs. Bartosiak reported that at Kindergarten registration there was plenty of opportunity for parents' questioning and there have been meetings with parents to clarify with much open dialogue.

On a motion by Mr. Chaves, seconded by Mr. Crone, it was

MOVED that the Kingston School Committee support four full day Kindergarten classes.

The following discussion occurred. Mrs. Vaughn asked why not five classes? Mr. Chaves said that any deficiencies should be turned back into the schools. Mr. Mamakos reiterated that there was a motion on the floor for four full day Kindergarten classes; therefore, making the remainder half-day classes. Mrs. Elmes felt better about the split. Mr. Mamakos asked for the vote.

The VOTE was unanimous to approve four full day Kindergarten classes.

The administration was thanked for all their hard work which was appreciated by the School Committee.

Two upcoming meeting were reported. Superintendency Union 31 would be meeting on July 12, 2007, 6:30 p.m., at the Middle School, to reorganize. Also on July 12, 2007, 7:00 p.m. Silver Lake will be having their regular meeting to which each of the elementary school committees have been invited.

Mrs. Blackwood briefly explained the lottery system in relationship to full day Kindergarten students. The lottery will be held on Wednesday, June 27, 2007, 9:00 a.m. The students who will attend half-day sessions will remain as a.m. or p.m. for the entire year with no switchover.

On a motion by Mrs. Vaughn, seconded by Mr. Chaves, it was unanimously

VOTED to adjourn the meeting at 9:10 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,
Cheryl Wrin
Secretary, pro tem