

**EAST LONGMEADOW SCHOOL COMMITTEE
MEETING MINUTES**



District Mission

"Our mission in the East Longmeadow Public Schools is to promote achievement and accountability in all endeavors as we educate today for the challenges of tomorrow"

DATE: May 17, 2021

TIME: 6:00 P.M.

WHERE: Superintendent's Conference Room

Meeting called to Order by : Gregory Thompson, Chair

THIS MEETING IS BEING HELD REMOTELY IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE GOVERNOR OF MASSACHUSETTS' MARCH 12, 2020 ORDER SUSPENDING CERTAIN PROVISIONS OF THE OPEN MEETING LAW MA G.L.c. 30A, SECTION 20.

Roll Call: Elizabeth Marsian-Boucher, Antonella Raschilla, Gordon Smith, Superintendent of Schools, Greg Thompson, Sarah Truoiolo, William Fonseca, Pamela Blair, Asst. Superintendent for Business, Kathy Celetti, Recording Secretary (Remote)

Approval of Minutes

Opportunities for Visitors to Address the Committee:

Cid Stark: Requesting that the camera zoom in on the whole committee.

Committee/Sub-committee Communications

Presentations:

Superintendent's Report:

Assistant Superintendent of Business Report :

Old Business: None

6.1 Discussion of FY2022 Budget Development process:

Chair: With a consensus of both the Town Manager and Town Council, we should shoot for a level services budget. The school department has initiatives, things that we would like to accomplish that we see value in, but the uncertainty of the year with COVID, we submitted a level services budget. The Town Manager reviewed it, then it went to Town Council who sent it to their self-appointed Financial Oversight Committee. We met with the Financial Oversight Committee last week, Sarah, Pam, Gordon and myself, we discussed federal grants. We also discussed two additional positions that we would like to fund through some of that grant money (social emotional adjustment counselors) and funding those positions in the future through the operating budget. The discussion seemed to go well. I felt confident coming out of that meeting. Last week the Finance Oversight Committee (appointed by Town Council president) decided they would recommend a cut to level services for the school department of over \$400,000. If that goes through, that would mean a cut to level services, meaning cuts to staffing at ELPS. We did invite the Town Council President, Vice President, Finance Oversight Committee Chair and members of the Finance Oversight Committee to help us understand the financial emergency that we are not aware of. Why a cut was made last Thursday afternoon at a Finance Oversight Committee meeting for their recommendation to Town Council. We were hoping to have them here tonight to help us understand why we are looking to cut up to six position here in the schools. We were requested to reduce our full-time employees by five because of the crisis last year. We worked with the town and we cut many useful positions. These positions are necessary to run the schools efficiently. We did what we were asked to do this year because we agreed with the assessment and went for level services. So if you look at the five positions cut from our budget last year and up to six potentially this year, that is eleven positions across the district which is devastating. This is going to affect the classrooms, staffing at many levels, and the morale. If we knew what the financial emergency is or what the crisis is in this town, which we don't, that is why we were hoping to have this meeting, that discussion with members of the community, Town Council or Financial Oversight Committee, however, none of them committed to attend. We certainly can re-invite them to attend our next meeting on Monday. I can make myself available to the Financial Oversight Committee tomorrow, however, they already told us we can't come and certainly to the Town Council meeting next week to speak at their meeting. I think it's important that the people of East Longmeadow know what's going on. I am not 100% comfortable with the process. The Financial Oversight Committee is not something that is laid out in the Charter, it was created, appointed by the Council President. So if Town Council and Town Manager say level services, then why does the Financial Oversight Committee have different priorities? They are not an elected board! We answer to the voters, Town Council answers to the voters and the Town Manager answers to the Town Council. Our board is on an island that they could come up with an arbitrary number to just cut our budget, which means cutting against staff at ELPS. If anybody is willing to come explain it to us and our families and staff who are concerned we are here to work collectively. There is grant money available in the town. The federal government has sent money down to the state and local levels. That money is available both to the town and schools. We are willing to have a discussion with the Financial Oversight Committee if that's the process the council chooses to use. The Financial Oversight Committee never asked what a financial impact of a \$400,000 plus cut would make, never brought the topic up and then without any input make that recommendation to Town Council is devastating.

Elizabeth: In the last year and half the union, staff, vendors, collaborative, students, parents, and more have endured an enormous effort to educate our students. The whole thing has been unprecedented. With all the concerns we have had trying to get our kids back into school, keeping them safe, dealing with sick staff who couldn't come in due to illness or families who were sick. Having teachers out on any given day because they have to quarantine, finding staff to fill those spots. This entire year and a half the biggest concern that this committee has had, is the fact that the Finance Oversight Committee cannot have the decency to have a conversation with us. This is our biggest concern, after a year and a half this budget shortfall. Did they bother to visit our schools this year, did they bother to see the herculean event, or bother to talk with parents who suffered this past year trying to educate their kids. We don't even know what we are going to get next year in terms of our students education (emotional or educational) level. We have no idea. The federal money being given to us is money that is supposed to help set us up for the next year and a half. I think this Financial Oversight Committee thinks we are getting federal money, like it's free. It's not free, this stuff cost money, it's expensive and the fact that they can't have the decency to come to this meeting is an atrocity. We are looking at the deficiencies in terms of our children, the students of this town, our kids because they are all our kids. They deserve to get what they need moving forward. If we have to take the hit between last year and where we worked with them to eliminate positions and this year, you are talking eleven (11) positions. It's absolutely devastating. Our children are going to get the brunt of this, and I think that is a shame. Our town is better than that. This Town Council and Financial Oversight Committee that is appointed by the way, we do not vote for the Financial Oversight Committee, they should not have that much power. In the past ten years, that I have been on this board, we have worked with our town, we have cut budgets severely, we have worked as a team, but this is not a team approach. This is the Financial Oversight Committee telling us what to do and that's in appropriate.

Sarah: To that point Beth, we have provided a ton of documentations, we have meet as Greg alluded to prior to this meeting. There was no conversations regarding any form of cuts being made. We were provided with thirteen questions that we needed to be prepared to speak to for that meeting. We were ready to speak to all of those documents that were provided. We addressed concerns that they had and provided answers. We also spoke at that meeting about the fact that we don't know what is going to come. We don't know what student and faculty are going to bring to us over the course of the next year and a half. That is why these federal funded grants are meant to be spent over a period of time so that we are able to think critically about the students and

what their direct needs are. And that we are not just throwing money at a situation, but what we are being thoughtful about the ways those funds are being expended, so that they are working in service of kids. That's the bottom line, those funds are meant to work in service of the best interest of students. To see that money is coming into districts to support that, but yet, in our town we are saying we have money, so now we are going to lose money from the town. It's not meant to replace what are typically receiving in terms funding, it's meant to support because they are recognizing that we are in unprecedented times and that those needs, need to be met with different resources. Different resources cost money and they certainly do not mean we need a reduction in staff. It makes no sense! To think that we are going to go into a year, again like no other and be down eleven positions makes no sense. They should be here to talk with us about it as we have gone to talk with them every time they have asked for something or requested documents. There has never been that they asked for something and we have always met with them. Not to show up tonight is really shameful.

William: If there is a financial crisis that we don't know about, please come and explain it to us. We are more than willing to work with you. This to me seems kind of arbitrary. And that is what upset all of us, because no one saw it coming. I appreciate the communications, you guys thought everything was great last Monday. Than all of sudden by Thursday, the landscape has changed. If there is a financial crisis, please come to our meeting next Monday and have a conversation with us. We are willing to work with you.

Elizabeth: Let me give an example just for anybody who is watching. The federally funded CREE lunch program for every child in America this year that was a wonderful thing. But guess what, it cost us almost a buck per meal or more in some instances. A buck, an extra dollar above and beyond what we got to package this food and to get it to our kids. They are still having to package the food separately in different ways even if the kids are in. That's a dollar for every single meal that has been given out for free to anybody in this town. Happy to do it! Our lunch program is devastated, there is nothing left in that account at the end of the year. Money comes from somewhere, and that's what the ESSER money's for, things like that.

William: Free lunch will continue next year.

Chair: The ball's in the Financial Oversight Committee and Town Council's court for some explanations to us, to better understand why the Financial Oversight Committee is recommending cuts to the school department staff. I am willing to go to their meetings, if they would like to come to our meeting next Monday, night that invitation is now extended. Let's work this through as a town. This is not working for the kids of this town. We are all passionate about it, because in the end it will affect the students of East Longmeadow if we start cutting more staff. We are on it, keep moving forward. I appreciate everybody's time tonight. I would ask the Financial Oversight Committee reconsider their recommendation tomorrow. Then they come forward next week to the Town Council, so I am asking you to reconsider and go back to level services. Any cut to level services is a cut to staffing at ELPS. I would ask the Town Council to not taking the recommendation and going with their initial request of level services and to fund the teachers and staff at ELPS for the students.

New Business

William moved to adjourn at 6: 18P.M., Antonella seconded the motion.

Chair: Any further discussion? All those in favor say aye (5), those oppose (0), motion carries (5-0)

For a more detailed version of this meeting, go to: www.eastlongmeadowma.gov (ELCAT)

Minutes Recorded by: Kathy Celetti

Respectfully submitted by: Superintendent Smith

Signature