

**Special Meeting
of the
Lowell School Committee**

November 16, 2009

At the request of Lowell School Committee members David J. Conway, Jacqueline A. Doherty, John J. Leahy and James D. Leary, a Special Meeting of the Lowell School Committee was held on Monday, November 16, 2009 at the Henry J. Mroz Central Administration Offices Edith Nourse Rogers School in the Lowell School Committee Conference Room, at 43 Highland Street, at 7:00 pm, for the purpose of the proposed expansion of the Charter Schools.

ROLL CALL

On roll call at 7:03 pm, the following members were present or absent: James D. Leary, present; Connie A. Martin, absent; Mayor/Chairman Edward (Bud) Caulfield, present; David J. Conway, present; Jacqueline A. Doherty, absent (she arrived at 7:10 pm); Regina M. Faticanti, absent and John J. Leahy, present. Four present; three absent. There was a quorum to conduct this meeting.

Also present were: City Solicitor Christine P. O'Connor, Dr. Chris A. Scott, Superintendent, Jean Franco, Deputy Superintendent, Francis Georges, President of the United Teachers of Lowell; J. Michael Earle, Vice President of the United Teachers of Lowell; administrators, teachers, and staff of the Murkland Elementary School (signatures of attendants ATTACHED TO AND MADE PART OF THESE MINUTES).

Dr. Chris A. Scott, Superintendent, stated that the Murkland Elementary School was a level 4 school. Even as she speaks the legislation on the hill (Massachusetts State House on Beacon Hill in Boston, Massachusetts) are debating underperforming schools in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. There are 30 to 40 of them; Lowell has two. The Murkland has been named as an underperformance school; the second underperformance school has not been named yet. This Wednesday (November 18th) the Massachusetts Legislators will vote on a comprehensive proposal drafted by the Committee on Education that doubles the amount of spending for charter schools. This urgency is the desire to make sure Massachusetts remains competitive for funding from President Obama's \$4.35 million "Race to the Top" program that rewards innovation. What is spent for charter schools takes away money that was designated for public schools. The Lowell Public Schools budget cannot afford any further reductions. If the Lowell Public Schools had the money designated for charter schools, the educational improvements would be met.

Superintendent Scott confirmed the rumor that the Commonwealth of Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education would receive half of the funding that the federal government awards to Massachusetts.

Superintendent Scott further stated that the pending legislation would cripple Collective Bargaining, which is the right of the teachers. The Superintendent would have a right to dismiss teachers in an underperforming school without a vote of the School Committee. These teachers

would not be allowed to teach. They would be paid for one year while taking courses to better instruct students. This would lead to all sorts of lawsuits. "I do not want that power!"

Superintendent Scott stated that the second page of the proposal states that the Commissioner of Education will evaluate the performance of the Superintendent, not the School Committee. This was her reading of the proposal (Senate, No. 2205).

Paul Georges, President of the United Teachers of Lowell, stated that the charter schools are taking the resources out of public school classrooms.

City Solicitor Christine P. O'Connor stated that the present bill (proposal) would double the spending cap on charter schools to 18 % of net school spending over the next eight years. The starting cap would be 12 percent in 2011, and the cap would go up 1 % each year after. The bill also eliminates caps on the number of charter schools that can operate in Massachusetts, and it eliminates the rule prohibiting more than 4 % of the statewide school population from enrolling in charter schools.

Superintendent Scott stated that there were 70 pages to the new legislation. If an underperforming level 4 school comes up with a two to three years educationally-sound-improvement plan that meets the approval of the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, the state will not take over the school.

Mr. Leary stated that the charter schools were pushing to pass this legislation before the present session ends (within a few days). If this bill could be delayed until after January of 2010, a fairer debate could be presented.

Mr. Leahy stated that he still was trying to understand what was going on tonight. He did not like what he read online and in the paper about the expansion of charter schools.

Mr. Conway stated that the problem he had was the number of flaws in the legislation. If a teacher has a good or above-average evaluation, how can one legally dismiss that teacher even if that teacher is working in an underperformance school?

Ms. Doherty stated that she was as familiar with the bill as the Superintendent. It was constantly changing. As of Friday (November 13th) there were many amendments to the bill before she left the State House.

Murkland School teachers stated that when the Murkland School first opened, it was a Demonstration School. Teachers came to the Murkland to observe teachers in the classroom. Some of the problems contributing to underperformance:

- poorest population in the city
- 87 % of the student population receive free lunch
- inadequate housing for some students
- inadequate sleeping arrangement for some students
- no electricity to do homework (non-payment of bill)

- little to no parent involvement
- improper nourishment at home
- single parent care

Dr. Chris A. Scott, Superintendent, stated that neither the students nor their parents can be blamed for underperformance; poverty contributes highly to the cause.

City Solicitor Christine P. O'Connor stated that she has put forth a resolution for the Lowell School Committee to approve tonight and to formerly approve at the regular Lowell School Committee meeting of November 18, 2009. The resolution reads as follows:

COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS

CITY OF LOWELL

Lowell School Committee

RESOLUTION

WHEREAS, the City of Lowell, through its Lowell School Committee and Department of Public Schools, is aware of pending legislation relative to a proposed statewide expansion of charter schools; and

WHEREAS, to the extent that any proposed expansion of charter schools would result in a reduction of local aid to the local public school district, the Lowell School Committee wishes to be recorded in opposition to such pending legislation (Senate, No. 2205).

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE SCHOOL COMMITTEE OF THE CITY OF LOWELL, as follows:

That we, the members of the School Committee be on record as opposing legislation relating to a proposed statewide expansion of charter schools, to the extent that such legislation would result in a reduction of local aid to the local public school district (Senate, No. 2205).

This Resolution adopted by vote of the Lowell School Committee on the 16th day of November, 2009.

Ms. Doherty moved:

To accept the recommendation of the Superintendent and the City Solicitor to approve the above RESOLUTION; seconded by Mr. Conway. On roll call the votes were: Mr. Leary, yes; Ms. Martin, absent; Mayor Caulfield, yes; Mr. Conway, yes; Ms. Doherty, yes; Ms. Faticanti, absent; Mr. Leahy, yes. Five yeas; two absent. APPROVED

Mr. Leary moved:

To send the signed RESOLUTION to the Massachusetts House of Representatives and to the Massachusetts Senate; seconded by Mr. Leahy. On roll call the votes were: Mr. Leary, yes; Ms. Martin, absent; Mayor Caulfield, yes; Mr. Conway, yes; Ms. Doherty, yes; Ms. Faticanti, absent; Mr. Leahy, yes. Five yeas; two absent. APPROVED

ADJOURNMENT – Ms. Doherty moved to adjourn; seconded by Mr. Leahy. This Special Meeting of the Lowell School Committee on Proposed Charter Schools adjourned at 8:35 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Dr. Chris A. Scott, Superintendent and
Secretary to the Lowell School Committee

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Enclosures