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## Board of Education Special Meeting

### Minutes

**Friday, May 22, 1998**

*\*Please note: the following minutes include the formal votes of the meeting. A [full transcript](#) is available from the Massachusetts Department of Education or on the Department's website at [www.doe.mass.edu](http://www.doe.mass.edu).*

The Chairman called the meeting to order at 10:10 a.m. The following were in attendance:

**Members of the Board of Education present:**

Dr. John Silber, Chairman, Brookline  
Dr. Edwin J. Delattre, Boston  
Mr. William Irwin, Wilmington  
Mr. James Peyser, Dorchester  
Dr. Roberta Schaefer, Worcester  
Mr. Micah Silver, Chair, Student Advisory Council, New Salem  
Dr. Abigail Thernstrom, Lexington  
Mr. Frank W. Haydu III, Commissioner ad interim

**Members of the Board of Education absent:**

Ms. Patricia Crutchfield, Vice-Chairperson, Southwick  
Dr. Stanley Z. Koplik, Boston

**Also in attendance:**

Dr. David P. Driscoll, Deputy Commissioner of Education  
Ms. Patricia Dowling, Mayor of Lawrence  
Dr. Mable Gaskins, candidate for Lawrence superintendency  
Nancy Catuogno, Registered Diplomate Reporter

The only item on the agenda was the interview of Dr. Mable Gaskins for the position of Superintendent of the Lawrence Public Schools. Dr. Silber welcomed Mayor Dowling to the meeting. Mayor Dowling introduced Professor Marguerite Kane, Mr. Ralph Carrero, Ms. Carol Bannon and Attorney Michael Sweeney, members of the School Committee who were in the audience. She then introduced Dr. Mable Gaskins, who was the subject of the Board's interview.

Dr. Silber began the interview by stating that the purpose of the meeting was to fulfill the responsibility of the Board of Education under the Memorandum of Agreement with the Lawrence School Committee. He explained that under the Agreement, the School Committee shall not make or extend either a temporary or permanent appointment to the position of district superintendent until a candidate is identified that has the support of the Committee, the Commissioner and the Board. He said the Board has a responsibility to review the candidate and make its own judgment, rather than make a decision based on the recommendation of other committees.

Board members then asked Dr. Gaskins a series of questions, to which she responded. The questions concerned her views on matters including: goals and standards for the Lawrence

Public Schools; Transitional Bilingual Education and how to ensure that students have adequate proficiency in the English language; effective teaching practices; the Agreement between the School Committee, the Board and the Commissioner; teacher evaluation and teacher quality; how to close the gap in academic performance between minority and white students; the role of principals; negotiation with teacher unions; and the elements of a safe and orderly school. Dr. Delattre asked Dr. Gaskins to respond to several quotes attributed to her concerning the role of teachers in the classroom, and, noting her dissertation, asked her about reading readiness and best practices in teaching reading. Dr. Silber asked her about the neighborhood readiness centers for young children that she started in St. Paul, Minnesota.

At 11:30 a.m., the Board concluded the interview with thanks to Dr. Gaskins, and members discussed her qualifications for the position of Superintendent. Dr. Schaefer noted that under the Agreement the Commissioner's representatives will play an important role in working with the Superintendent and the School Committee. In response to a question, Commissioner Haydu said he is impressed by the process the Mayor and the School Committee followed, and that he believes Dr. Gaskins is a very qualified candidate. Mr. Peyser commented that educational vision and leadership by the Superintendent will be critical to the success of the Lawrence Public Schools. Dr. Delattre expressed concern about the views Dr. Gaskins had stated about reading readiness. Dr. Silber said that despite his concern about the candidate's views on best practices in teaching reading, he was impressed by her emphasis on early childhood education and on improving teacher quality.

After further discussion the question was called and a vote was taken.

On a motion duly made and seconded, it was

**VOTED: that the Board of Education support the appointment of Dr. Mable Gaskins as the new Superintendent of the Lawrence Public Schools.**

The motion was made by Mr. Irwin and seconded by Dr. Thernstrom. The vote was 5 to 2, with Mr. Peyser and Dr. Delattre opposed.

There being no further business, the Board voted to adjourn the special meeting.

On a motion duly made and seconded, it was

**VOTED: that the Board of Education adjourn the special meeting at 11:50 a.m. subject to the call of the Chairman.**

The motion was made by Mr. Irwin and seconded by Dr. Schaefer. The vote was unanimous.

Respectfully submitted,

Frank W. Haydu III  
Secretary to the Board

## Special Meeting

### Interview Of Dr. Mable Gaskins Friday, May 22, 1998

**Present:**

Dr. John Silber, Chairman, Brookline  
Dr. Robert V. Antonucci, Commissioner of Education  
Ms. Carline Gele,  
Department of Education  
Dr. Edwin J. Delattre, Boston  
Mr. William K. Irwin, Wilmington  
Mr. James A. Peyser, Dorchester  
Dr. Roberta Schaefer, Worcester

Mr. Micah Silver, New Salem  
Dr. Abigail Thernstrom, Lexington

**Also present:**

Mayor Patricia Dowling, Lawrence

Nancy L. Catuogno, Registered Diplomate Reporter, Certified Realtime Reporter

**Dr. Silber:** The meeting will come to order. I would like to ask Mayor Dowling first to introduce the members of the Lawrence School Committee who are here with us this morning and then to introduce Dr. Mable Gaskins who will then be the subject of our interview.

**Mayor Dowling:** Thank you very much, Dr. Silber. I would ask each member to stand as I introduce them. Professor Marguerite Kane, Mr. Ralph Carrero, Ms. Carol Bannon, Attorney Michael Sweeney. And Dr. Gaskins, will you come forward? Good morning, Dr. Silber, Commissioner Haydu, members of the Board of Education. It's a pleasure again to appear before you this morning. I will just take a minute of introduction, if I may. This juncture represents not only the combination of an intensive cooperative search process involving both the City of Lawrence and the Board of Education, but what I hope will be the beginning of a bright future for the children of Lawrence. Over the past four months we have worked well and effectively with both Dr. Driscoll and Julianne Dow from the Department of Education. Julianne Dow has provided not only effective leadership with Dr. Driscoll but also an indefatigable work ethic which has, I believe, boded well for the City of Lawrence. I believe that both will tell you that Lawrence is ready for change and we are ready to work assiduously for success. We have in the interim restructured our school administration with their help and we now are facing not only the vacancy in our top position of superintendent, but also of several high-level administrative functions. So I needn't remind you of the severe time limit and pressure under which we labor. But in spite of that time limit, let me tell you that we believe strongly in the candidacy of Dr. Mable Gaskins who appears before you. Not only does Dr. Gaskins have an excellent record, but she grew up in Lynn, Massachusetts, a city not unlike Lawrence, and I believe, having grown up in Lawrence myself, that Dr. Gaskins has the added sensitivity to and understanding of the children of Lawrence and the difficulties that they face in today's world. If I may just take a minute. Yesterday afternoon a letter came across my desk, somewhat serendipitously, if I may say, because this letter was from a person that I do not know. I happened to meet him a couple of weeks ago in the area and I'm sure he hasn't spoken to Dr. Gaskins for 20 years, but it's from a person who knew Dr. Gaskins in Lynn back in her late teens and early twenties, and if I may take a moment to read it. Honorable Mayor Dowling. If the Mable Gaskins who is being considered for superintendent of schools is Mable Rocker Gaskins who grew up in Lynn, Massachusetts, then you have an outstanding candidate. While I can't speak to her professional qualifications, I can tell you that in working with Mable while we were in our late teens and early twenties, she made a significant impression. She knew exactly what she wanted and worked hard to achieve it. Always bright and engaging, Mable also was a person of strong, well-reasoned opinions. Though slight of stature, Mable Rocker was strong of mind and determination. When she married she did not abandon the city but bought her home on Watch Street in Lynn. While I don't want this to sound too gushy, there will be no hint of scandal or improper behavior ever associated with her name. I believe she represents the high standards you are looking for and the people of Lawrence deserve. Sincerely, Paul Gilligan, who now lives in North Andover, Massachusetts. So what I would like you to do or what I offer to you is, after you have had a discussion with Dr. Gaskins, if you would entertain a short discussion perhaps with Matt George who not only was on the fact-finding team but also led the joint search committee for the superintendent search and perhaps if you have some questions for either Mike Sweeney or Ralph Carrero, who did the site visit to Minneapolis, and Mike Sweeney spoke before you last week with regard to that visit. So I reiterate that our decision in favor of Dr. Gaskins was neither hasty nor without a firm basis in reason. Our unanimous decision reflects a well-considered research consensus, keeping in mind the best interests of our children. It is my opinion that we have acted reasonably and have gone the extra mile under the agreement which controls our relationship, and I humbly and respectfully ask that if you feel that Dr. Gaskins has passed the test, that you vote in favor of this candidate for the good of Lawrence. Thank you very much.

**Dr. Silber:** Thank you. Now, first thing, I would like to state what the purpose of this meeting is. The purpose of this meeting is to fulfill the responsibility of the Board under the memorandum of agreement with the Lawrence School Committee. And under that agreement, in the first section it says that the School Committee shall not make or extend either a temporary or permanent appointment to the position of district superintendent until a candidate is identified that has the

support of the Committee, the Commissioner and the Board. The Board has been engaged in what is its responsibility of due diligence with regard to the qualifications of the candidate that has been endorsed, and we understand unanimously, by the School Committee. It is our responsibility to review that candidate for ourselves and not on the basis of the recommendation of other committees and thereafter to, at our assent, offer any other response that we would care to make to that candidate. What we are doing is not outside the process, it is precisely a part of the process of the selection of the superintendent for the Lawrence schools. If the Lawrence schools had not found themselves in the condition they did, of course, this memorandum of agreement wouldn't exist. As long as it exists, and as long as we operate under it, the Board of Education has the responsibility and that is the responsibility we are fulfilling. We would now like to interview the candidate, if you don't mind. And I would ask each member to try to avoid asking the same question. None of us need to ask about the background of Ms. Gaskins because most of us have had the opportunity of reviewing the tape of her interview with the Lawrence School Committee, and all of us have had access to a good deal of material on her background that was submitted as a part of her resume, but I would hope that each of you will try to pay attention to questions that are asked by others so that we do not repeat ourselves. Now, let's begin. Who would like to ask the first question? Roberta Schaefer.

**Dr. Schaefer:** First of all, thank you for coming and I thank the members of the Lawrence School Committee as well. I was looking at the tape of your interview with the Lawrence School Committee and you were asked about EAI and what went wrong in Baltimore. And you mentioned that the expectations were too high and the goals were not clear enough. And I guess my question would be to you: What are the goals and expectations that we should measure you by in Lawrence?

**Dr. Gaskins:** Thank you, Dr. Schaefer. I first want to say good morning to Dr. Silber, Acting Commissioner Haydu and to the rest of the Board and thank you for allowing me to come in today. Dr. Schaefer, when we look at our goals and expectations, I know we have a fact-finding report that has laid out the challenges for the Lawrence Public Schools and so, therefore, I would then develop a work plan that would focus on those goals and lay out timelines, activities, budgets and responsibilities, and that would be the work plan with which I would work, and this Board and the School Committee could hold me accountable for ensuring that we are working towards the recommendations for the Lawrence Public Schools.

**Dr. Silber:** Thank you. Do you have another question?

**Dr. Schaefer:** I thought we were going to take turns.

**Dr. Silber:** I would just as soon let you exhaust yourself.

**Dr. Schaefer:** I would rather not.

**Dr. Silber:** Mr. Silver?

**Mr. Silver:** Thank you for coming. I also was listening to the tape today and I have a question on transitional bilingual education. I think that is a big issue in Lawrence. In the interview with the Lawrence schools you said that you support a more content-driven and not language-driven bilingual approach, and I guess I was wondering if you could kind of clarify that and specifically what you would think would be a good plan for bilingual students in Lawrence.

**Dr. Gaskins:** Thank you, Mr. Silver. First of all, the bilingual plan of action must focus on student achievement. We must look at where students are and move them so that they will be able to meet the standards that have been set by the state. In my experience, bilingual education has focused on language acquisition, that is learning words, how to speak English, how to have conversation in English. My intent would be to implement a content-driven program, meaning that children would be learning the core knowledge subject areas as they move forward so that it therefore would not be just on acquisition of language, but they would learn vocabulary, the nouns, how to write a paragraph, all of those core knowledge areas that children in a "regular" education classroom would be learning, as well as there would be heterogeneous grouping. I need to say this, that I really believe that kids need to be side by side. Kids learn from

one another and so therefore we are missing an opportunity, I believe, when we have a straight bilingual classroom and then a regular education classroom, and I really think that we need to immerse the two together.

**Dr. Silber:** Abigail?

**Dr. Thernstrom:** I also thank you for coming. I also watched the tape last night and I also had exactly Micah Silver's question on the bilingual and I'm still a little confused about it because there are two camps, as you know. One would segregate limited English speaking children and the other mainstreams them and, in effect, has English as a second language or, you know, some combination of that and English immersion. Depends. What I hear you saying is you really have problems, and I just want to check this out, do have problems with segregating these children such that -- I mean, our experience has been such that their English language acquisition is slowed up by the very fact of their ethnic isolation.

**Dr. Gaskins:** Dr. Thernstrom, I believe that we must have flexibility in how we are working with the students. Again, I want to say that student achievement has to be the bottom line. I believe in Lawrence we would do an assessment, and I'm sure there may be areas, some teachers, some classrooms where things have worked. I want to look at those areas. But also I want to bring in experts such as Dr. Lily Mae Wong Filmore who has written on English language learners and has extensive background in that research. I want to make sure that what we are implementing in Lawrence will affect those children becoming academically strong and so, therefore, I'm not going to say it's going to be one way or another, but I think we have to look at all of the systems, the best practices, and then be able to come up with a plan of action that I will be held accountable for to ensure that the students are progressing academically.

**Dr. Thernstrom:** And the bottom line for which you would think of yourself as accountable would be that these children, I assume, are mainstreamed into English language, into classes taught in English, and obviously become functioning citizens in a country in which English is the language.

**Dr. Gaskins:** Absolutely. That would be the bottom line.

**Dr. Silber:** Mr. Peyser.

**Mr. Peyser:** Maybe just to follow up on this one more time. Also in your interview with the School Committee you were asked whether I think English proficiency -- I'm not sure if that's the exact terminology, but whether mastery of English should be a graduation requirement and you indicated that you were ambivalent about that. I think you said that it's important that we not stifle a student's ability to move forward and that further we shouldn't punish students for the absence or the failure of effective English language acquisition programs. I wonder if you could comment on that a little bit more.

**Dr. Gaskins:** Mr. Peyser, it seems like a long time ago since I had that interview so I'm going to try to remember what it was that was a reference to. If my memory serves me, I think that had to do with students graduating, that they would be able to graduate with a diploma if indeed they had not been proficient in English language. Here, once again, having grown up in an area where there were children, students that had all different needs and capabilities -- and right now we have lots of students who are lacking the English proficiency. I agree that we need to raise the bar, we need to be sure that all children are going to graduate and become productive learners. I think this is an area around which there will be lots of discussion, just as it was with special education when we were looking at students graduating with a diploma in special education, whether there are going to be certificates of education, things of that nature. It would be my desire to have all children graduate with a diploma who have the proficiencies that are needed in order to meet the standards of the diploma.

**Mr. Peyser:** I guess the question is: What should the standards of the diploma be in this particular area in terms of English proficiency? What should the standards be?

**Dr. Gaskins:** The standards -- I believe that each student should graduate with three skill areas:



number one, the basic skills; number two, job-seeking productive skills to be productive in a job; and three, to be a productive and caring citizen. So if we look at those three areas, that's what I would be looking for.

**Mr. Peyser:** But again, just to press a little bit further. In terms of competence in speaking and writing English, how would you define an appropriate standard for high school graduation?

**Dr. Gaskins:** There would be standards that have been set by the state for every student to meet, and we would be working to make sure that all students would be able to meet those standards.

**Mr. Peyser:** But that would then imply, I think, that English proficiency wouldn't be a requirement for graduation since the tests -- although actually we should have this discussion at another time. But in terms of the 10th grade tests, in terms of their applicability towards graduation requirements, at least my current understanding is that in English they are -- and it's not -- I mean, the criticism has been the language may be somewhat more complex than many students can handle. It's not a simple or rudimentary English, but actually a fairly sophisticated level of English. So if that is the standard, that would imply, I think, that English proficiency -- your view is English proficiency should be a requirement for graduation.

**Dr. Gaskins:** Let me share with you, if you're looking at the graduation standard right now, there are students who probably would not be able to meet that because of the ineffectiveness of the programs in which they have participated. If indeed we implement programs beginning at K-1, at the kindergarten/first grade level, and those students are meeting the standards all the way through, that will not be a problem at all.

**Dr. Silber:** Do you have another question?

**Mr. Peyser:** I was going to go on to a different subject.

**Dr. Silber:** Anyone else want to explore the issues of bilingual education? I have one on that subject if you don't mind.

**Mr. Peyser:** Please.

**Dr. Silber:** K-12, you're quite right, a person in kindergarten in one year can easily learn English at the kindergarten level. There's no problem there. But if you have a student who comes in at age 14, then, or 13 or 10, any time there, in your interview with the School Committee you noted that and you also had the problem that some of them will come into the school system at an advanced age of 11, 12, 14, who have never had significant prior schooling wherever they came from, perhaps only one or two years of school or perhaps none at all. Now, you were asked what you would do and you pointed out that you would first send them to a student assessment and placement center, gather data on these individuals, their skills, what they can do, and then send them to a skill development center. It's critical, you said, that they be given skills first before they enter the regular educational program, which seems to be a very good idea. And you want them to develop those skills before they enter the regular program. What kind of skills, which skills would you want them to have before they entered that program?

**Dr. Gaskins:** Dr. Silber, I think it is important for any student who would come into a new environment to have skills that would assist him or her in becoming proficient in language, acquisition of core knowledge content, learning how to work, to share with one another, with the peers around him or her. And so, therefore, they would have to -- in this basic plan of action -- I guess I can't give you specifically what the program would look like, but certainly core content knowledge in the areas of reading, math, being able to -- when going into a regular education classroom, being able to meet the content requirements in a classroom.

**Dr. Silber:** Now, let me suggest, let's suppose we have a 10-year-old. Will the 10-year-old remain in this special program with presumably intensive instruction in skills until his language proficiency level in reading and in writing and in speaking is at the grade level appropriate to a

10-year-old? Will he have learned history, science, the other subject matters at that grade level before he is transferred?

**Dr. Gaskins:** The answer would be no. Absolutely you need -- children would be there gaining initial skills. Then they would make a transfer, a transition with an individualized plan of action and would be in a classroom with other students. Here, once again, I believe with a heterogeneous grouping, with working with other students, that the children are able to gain, to increase their skill level of mastering the English language and also mastering course content.

**Dr. Silber:** Well, now, what skill level do you think that they would need in the English language before they could function positively and constructively in that other group? And how long do you think it would take to acquire that level of proficiency?

**Dr. Gaskins:** Dr. Silber, at this time I could not give you a time, an answer regarding the time and the exact content that they would need. But I can share with you that I would work with consultants and people who have research-based knowledge on what a process should look like and implement that in the Lawrence Public Schools.

**Dr. Delattre:** Good morning. Thanks for coming.

**Dr. Gaskins:** Good morning. Thank you.

**Dr. Delattre:** I have read your dissertation and you've got a bit of coverage from 1992 to 1998 of EAI in Baltimore and, of course, your fine application. Your referees describe you as having a comprehensive knowledge of learning theory. And in your interview in Lawrence you refer on a number of occasions to best practices. There are two quotes that I would like to ask you about from coverage in Baltimore attributed to you. If they are not accurate, we'll do away with them. And I want to know what they have to do with best practices and research and learning theory. You were quoted on June 10, 1992 in the Daily Report Card, the American Political Network, as saying, of EAI's involvement there, "Mae Gaskins, an EAI vice president, said, 'Classrooms will no longer have a sage on the stage but a guide on the side.'" And you were quoted in the Baltimore Sun on March 31, 1994 as saying, "We are trying to get the children acclimated so they can be successful in the real world." I would like to know exactly what you meant, I would like to know what best practices are involved here and what research supports them.

**Dr. Gaskins:** Dean Delattre, the phrase "sage on the stage" and "guide on the side," in the real world application in working with students on a day-to-day basis with teachers and administrators, I have found there have been too many teachers who have stood in front of the classroom and have said, Open to page 43, every single student in the classroom. In our world today, we have many, many children who are at different places in that classroom. So therefore, as a teacher, a teacher cannot stand in front -- that would be the sage on the stage. The teacher has to be the facilitator of learning and look at the learning styles of the children, the needs of the children and develop learning plans for each one of those children in the classroom and present them with a learning environment to foster their resiliency. That's what I mean when I said no longer a sage on the stage but a guide on the side. As to when the students are acclimated to be successful in the real world. In Baltimore, we had many children, many teachers, who had low expectations. The teachers had low expectations of the children and themselves, and the children therefore had very, very low expectations, as well as the parents. They did not know that they could become all that they could be, to develop to the highest potential. And so, therefore, we were fostering an environment of resiliency and helping them to know that they could become successful. When you talk about best practices, number 1, we talked about staff development. In staff development, a best practice is that you do not have a one-shot staff development opportunity for teachers. There has to be an ongoing comprehensive staff development program. We did provide that. We talked about another best practice, special education, inclusion. Research based. So we were implementing the inclusion model for students and providing the teachers with staff development to help them to move the students into the inclusion process. So that's how I would like to respond to your comments, Dr. Delattre.

**Dr. Delattre:** Thank you. I mean best instructional practices. What you've described is not a sage on the stage but an idiot on the stage, a person who doesn't have any sense of how to deal with students, and I take it you expect that the conclusion to be drawn from that is that a good

lecture has no place in schooling? Is that best practice?

**Dr. Gaskins:** Dean Delattre, number one, with all due respect, in education K-12, certainly lecturing can be an important piece. But if we are looking at children who are at different levels, I think that lecturing to a group of students who are at different levels and have different needs and different capacities, that may not be the most effective. That may not certainly be most effective and certainly I'm not disparaging a lecturer at all. When we talk about best practices, we are 23 looking at reading practices, we are looking at individualized learning plans, we are looking at models. For instance, Success For All is a model that has been used in best practices, especially for Hispanic children. That has proven to be a successful program.

**Dr. Silber:** Abigail?

**Dr. Thernstrom:** I, by the way, agree with you, and I think every member of the Board does, that expectations for children and I think particularly for Black and Hispanic children are too low in general in American education and it is part of the Education Reform Act that we raise the expectations, and that's at the very heart of our effort. On average, Hispanic students, and of course Lawrence has many Hispanic students, on average, have not been doing well academically in this country. How are we going to close the gap in academic skills between Blacks and Hispanics on the one hand, and Whites and Asians on the other, in your view? Aside from English language acquisition.

**Dr. Gaskins:** Dr. Thernstrom, that's a question that's going through the minds of many people throughout the nation. And I want to focus on a book, Closing the Achievement Gap, which was written by Dr. Belinda Williams through ASCD, and Dr. Belinda Williams is that person who developed, with Research For Better Schools in Washington, D.C., the Urban Learner Framework. And it talks about a decision-making process whereby educators and administrators work to ensure that urban learners, and primarily African American students and Hispanic students, are successful. There are six areas that she talks about. And we are beginning to implement this in St. Paul Public Schools. The first one is a school and community linkage. There must be a linkage between the schools and the community including the homes. Okay. The next would be cultural compatibility. The classrooms must be compatible with the culture of the students who are in those classrooms. The third piece would be opportunities to learn. Students must be given opportunities to learn, and that means looking at their learning styles, the way we are teaching them, and ensuring that they are going to become engaged. The next would be teacher expectations, as you had just pointed out, Dr. Thernstrom. The next area would be teacher engagement, teacher/student engagement. We have many teachers who are in classrooms, they need to be engaged with the students who are in the classrooms and the students need to be engaged as well. And the last would be school environments that support the resiliency of the students who are in those classrooms. So if we can put those six areas into a plan of action in all that we do to make sure that we are looking at each one of those areas, I believe we can make a difference for our African American children and our Hispanic children.

**Dr. Silber:** Do you have another question?

**Dr. Thernstrom:** Yes. Let me just zero in on one of those. I very much agree on the school and community linkage and speaking for nobody but myself here, I'm very concerned when schools are not neighborhood community institutions, because I think that that linkage is so important. I also very much agree on opportunities to learn and we could have a much, you know, longer discussion about teacher expectations, teacher engagement with students and so forth. The one, it seems to me, problematic statement for me that you made, and it's only problematic because this is such a kind of -- because people mean such different things by their words and there's such a kind of spectrum of views and, I think, to me the extremes are very troubling. The question of cultural compatibility. I mean, obviously there is a very fine balancing act that we want to be engaged in here, of being cognizant that we have a very diverse population, and, on the other hand, of not teaching particularly Black and Hispanic kids that they are a separate nation, that they are two separate nations within our nation, that they have a different culture, that they are not individuals but, you know, are defined first and foremost by their race and ethnicity. And so when I hear the words cultural compatibility, I'm not sure whether you are -- how far you want to go down that road. At one end, of course, we have got -- at an extreme end we, of course, have programs in Detroit and Washington, D.C. and Atlanta of Afrocentric education, which I think very much isolate Black children from mainstream American culture



and also do them a disservice in terms of the skills that they need. I assume when you're talking about cultural compatibility that you would not buy into a program that ended up with kids not having the skills they need and with them isolated from American Society. But I would like to hear from you a little bit on that question.

**Dr. Gaskins:** Dr. Thernstrom, what you have just stated is correct. That's not what I'm speaking of when I speak about cultural compatibility. What I'm speaking of is that educators have knowledge, awareness and respect for those children and their parents and the community from which they come and what they bring into the classroom, and work to gain a better working relationship with the community, and be able to provide opportunities for the children to learn in looking at their strengths instead of their weaknesses and developing a plan of action in order to help them to achieve academically.

**Dr. Silber:** Roberta?

**Dr. Schaefer:** As you know, there's an agreement between the Lawrence School Committee, the Board of Education and the Commissioner for moving forward with improving the Lawrence Public Schools. Are you comfortable with -- I assume that you've read the agreement -- can you work with this, with this agreement, if there were a group of people who were appointed by the Commissioner who were working with you during the course of the next year to improve the student achievement in Lawrence Public Schools? Would that be satisfactory with you knowing that there was an evaluation process, an evaluation plan in place, by which you would be judged at the end of the first year? Is that something that is comfortable for you?

**Dr. Gaskins:** Dr. Schaefer, as long as this is a partnership, as the information has been shared with me and as I have read the agreement, a partnership. I would also expect and want to be held accountable for the outcomes that would be laid out in the expectations. The answer is yes, I would feel comfortable in doing that.

**Dr. Silber:** Mr. Peyser?

**Mr. Peyser:** If I could jump back for a second to the Urban Learners Framework that you described and this issue of kind of a cultural environment of the classroom. I wonder if you could -- I'm having a little trouble understanding concretely what it means, what it looks like to the student or the teacher or someone observing the classroom. Let's say you're a teacher in Lawrence. You have a class that includes immigrant children from Central America, the Caribbean, Asia, plus locally born children of various ethnic origins. What do you do on a given day or on a daily basis in order to create an environment that is somehow culturally attuned, if that's close to being the correct terminology here, to that mix of students?

**Dr. Gaskins:** Mr. Peyser, the bottom line is that the teacher must look at these children with high expectations and have the expectation that these children will be able to learn. For too long some children have been looked at through different lenses, looking at their deficiencies instead of their strengths. So when we talk about cultural compatibility, it is the opportunity then for the teacher to look at these children and look at their strengths, what it is they bring to the school, and then to build on those strengths.

**Mr. Peyser:** But regardless of an individual student's ethnic background, shouldn't the teacher treat each student with respect and attempt to find in those students, in those individual students, what their strengths and weaknesses are in order to best deliver quality education? So what is cultural about it, I guess, and what is urban about it, in fact?

**Dr. Gaskins:** You're absolutely right that teachers should look to find the strengths in all children. But in my experience, we have many educators who look at certain children and make a determination that these children cannot achieve. And so through the Urban Learner Framework and ensuring cultural compatibility with the teachers and the parents and the students, this then assists the teacher to ensure that they are looking at the strengths of these children and not looking at the deficiencies of the children. And so there would be an accountability mechanism that would have to be built in so that the expectations would be high for every single student, not just for some of the students.

**Mr. Peyser:** I won't push this that much further here, but in terms of this term cultural compatibility, I guess I'm not sure I understand what it means. As an example, there's an article that I got, I think it is from an ASCD publication, it's written by Belinda Williams and co-author, and she uses an example which I didn't find particularly apt where she's describing a classroom which is about to take up a unit on volcanos. And this is an urban classroom, an ethnically, presumably, diverse classroom. And so they are taking up this unit on volcanos and the teachers get together and brainstorm how they are going to make this unit something that connects with these particular students. They come up with the idea of focusing on the theme of eruptions and then they ask the students kind of at the beginning of the unit, I guess, their own experiences or their own ideas and definitions about the term eruptions. And then it's just a quote from this article, it says, "They enter into a brainstorming technique called a mind map to capture students' responses which ranged from eruptions of acne to eruptions of laughter or anger." The thing that I don't understand about this is this seems to have no cultural content at all. I mean, you could have that discussion with any child regardless of ethnic origin, regardless of socioeconomic status. I mean, this doesn't seem to have anything to do with so-called cultural compatibility or urban focus, either. So I'm sure that there are other examples. I guess I just want to press you a little bit to come up with other examples that might be more specifically directed to this issue of cultural compatibility.

**Dr. Gaskins:** Let me just respond, Mr. Peyser, on this one. For instance, if you talk about volcanos, there may be some children who don't know what a volcano is, have no idea what does eruption mean, but they certainly have had experience with older brothers and sisters who may have acne. So therefore it's something that, you know, jumps out. I don't have to share with you, tell you what that is. But it's a way --

**Mr. Peyser:** I have had it myself.

**Dr. Gaskins:** You've had that, huh? It's a way of transferring, okay? So therefore -- and plus it's a wonderful opportunity for kids to learn that a word can mean more than one -- can have more than one meaning. And so, therefore, if you're looking at this, the kids all of a sudden get the idea, Oh, my gosh, okay, that's eruption, a volcano erupts, then they are trying to find other -- then they would want to learn more about a volcano and also to relate that to other instances in their lives. And so instead of just teaching from the perspective of a volcano, you're now looking at the background and what that child brings to the schoolhouse, and that's what this teacher is using in the lesson.

**Dr. Silber:** If I could, you're quite right, if the child doesn't know what a volcano is, then to explain to the child that it's a pimple on the face of the earth may be a good start. But that, again, does not differentiate between an urban child who's ignorant or a child of a different ethnic group that's ignorant, or a person of a different race that's ignorant or a poor child or a rich child. I don't think you've addressed Mr. Peyser's question. He's asked you for an example that would require teaching not on the basis of ignorance, because that's what all teaching is about. If the students already know everything that they are going to be expected to learn in the class, they don't need to be in the class. So we stipulate to the ignorance of children and the importance of a variety of teaching techniques to engage them. But give an example in response to his question that really responds to his question which was: Where do you have to introduce these distinctions based upon ethnicity, on race, on socioeconomic measures or on urban/rural issues?

**Dr. Gaskins:** Dr. Silber, with all due respect, I'm concerned when we talk about ignorance of children, they are there to learn, so I just have to say that.

**Dr. Silber:** Of course.

**Dr. Gaskins:** Now, Mr. Peyser, this isn't about the kids, this is about teachers, okay? Developing strategies and coming up with examples such as the volcano and the eruption, okay? And so therefore, for instance, going to the zoo or learning about a farm, in an urban environment, that's not what the kids see and so therefore when the teacher begins to plan a lesson, the teacher has to think from a cultural perspective, what is it -- I'm just going to repeat this. What is it the children are bringing to this classroom and how do I then have to change the way I am teaching in order to meet their perspective?

**Dr. Silber:** Mr. Delattre?

**Dr. Delattre:** I would like to go back to best practices again. And on the grounds that we should all learn from children, I'm going to quote from a sixth grader from Baltimore who was quoted in the Sun on March 5, 1996. His name is Donnel Jenkins. And when he was leaving Harlem Park, which was the middle school managed by EAI, he said, "I think the only thing they really did for us was keep the schools clean. We don't hardly read books anymore. All we've been doing is computer, computer, computer." I would like to know your view of the best practices, whether by facilitation or by direct instruction, for children to learn to read and to learn the core content to which you have referred by reading.

**Dr. Gaskins:** Dr. Delattre, best practices are those practices that are going to ensure that all children are going to achieve. And so, therefore, there are numerous best practices. But the bottom line has to be: Are children achieving. And so I'm not sure if you're asking me to go through a litany of best practices. I'm not sure exactly what you're asking for.

**Dr. Delattre:** A list of best practices and distinguishing them from unacceptable practices with respect to learning to read and learning content by reading would be just fine.

**Dr. Gaskins:** Dr. Delattre, there are many -- you can go across the nation, and I'm sure that you have probably done this, there are many teachers who have many successes with many children. I believe that a combination of phonics and whole language certainly helps children, would help children to learn how to read. But here, once again, we have to look at what is working and there are probably some best practices out there that I'm not even aware of that are helping children to read. And so we would look at what is working, we bring in research-based best practices that have been proven, and implement those into the Lawrence Public Schools so that the children will be achieving.

**Dr. Delattre:** Could you say a word about the research on which you would now rely? Whose research would you rely on most heavily now?

**Dr. Gaskins:** No, I would not be able to list names of people but I do know that we are using Success For All, the Success For All program. It's an early-intervention reading program. There are a list of programs out there. I cannot sit here and give you the names of people, but I can assure you that I would have research-based best practices that would be implemented in the Lawrence Public Schools.

**Dr. Delattre:** Let me ask one more question about this. In your dissertation, you relied in part on a 1967 article by a person named Zeit (phonetic), and you quoted Zeit as saying, "Only about 25 percent of the children in kindergarten have reached a neurological maturity to cope with the symbolization necessary for reading. The eye may be ready to receive the visual image, but for more than 75 percent of the children, the neurological system has not reached the maturity needed to make connections between what they see and what they understand. There is nothing that can be done to speed up this readiness. Only time can do this." I would like to know if you believed that then and if you believe it now.

**Dr. Gaskins:** I would have to read that, look at it, look at the context in which I used that. My dissertation was done in 1984 and I would have to ask you to read it over again, to have a few minutes to study it. I can't comment on that at this moment.

**Dr. Silber:** Mr. Silver?

**Mr. Silver:** Based on the fact-finding report that was presented to us several months back, it is my understanding that many of the teachers in the Lawrence Public Schools are currently uncertified, and actually it seemed like there was no count of who was certified and who wasn't certified. And we have kind of talked about your philosophy of education, but the teachers are really kind of the messengers of anything that you're thinking of. So I guess my question is: What is going to be done to essentially remove the terrible teachers from the school system, or at least assess the teachers and get them certified, and also what would be done to attract quality

teachers to fill those positions and how would you ensure that those teachers were kind of doing what they should be doing in terms of teaching the frameworks and this and that?

**Dr. Gaskins:** Okay. Good question. Mr. Silver, first of all, there would have to be an assessment of the teachers who are in the district to find out who was certified, who is not certified, then to work with them to see, if they have been working towards certification, how far away are they from being certified. The next piece is attracting quality teachers. Certainly you attract quality teachers to come into a quality program, so therefore we would talk about the pluses that are in Lawrence at the moment and also what our plan of action is in order to -- where we expect to be in three to five years and, Hey, do you want to be a part of this wonderful success story? So you start really marketing what the expectations are for Lawrence to attract quality teachers. I also think that there must be an opportunity for incentives for teachers in order to -- why should they come to Lawrence? So we would have to talk about incentives. And then the last piece is accountability and there has to be a performance appraisal system to which all teachers must be held, and if they are not performing and then after giving them intensive assistance in helping them to become better performers, it still doesn't work, then they will have to be counseled out of the district.

**Mr. Silver:** Can I follow up?

**Dr. Silber:** Certainly.

**Mr. Silver:** I guess how comfortable -- what is your position if you find out that there are some teachers who have been underperforming for several years, for however long they have been there, they have been uncertified. What is going to be your plan of action with them? Is it going to be through professional development or to try to replace those teachers?

**Dr. Gaskins:** Both. First of all, we have to look at where they are. As I said earlier, have they been working towards certification. If they haven't, then certainly they would have to be counseled out, if they are not anywhere near becoming certified. The second piece is -- I lost the thought that you had on the second piece.

**Mr. Silver:** That's fine.

**Dr. Silber:** After they have been there quite a while and have been through improvement programs and they were deficient, is that it?

**Mr. Silver:** Yes.

**Dr. Gaskins:** Yes. They would be gone, they would have to be moved out of the district.

**Dr. Silber:** I think what you're asking is how.

**Dr. Gaskins:** Oh, there's a performance appraisal process which would require documentation. They would be documented. There's also a piece in there when you have documentation that's part of the performance appraisal system, that you have to give them intensive assistance in order to improve. That would be a piece of it. If they don't improve, then the documentation would be the vehicle through which they would be removed from the system.

**Dr. Silber:** I would like to follow up on that. That is one of the things I noticed you had emphasized when you were meeting with the School Committee and you had said that if you put them through the professional development and there is no progress, you said, then I have to say you no longer belong in the classroom and some alternative for that teacher has got to be found, but that they must be given the chance to learn the strategies, you used the word strategies, to do better. I wondered whether you meant strategies or whether you might also mean content. There's a local district in which the superintendent told me that he, in reviewing a science teacher, listened to the science teacher tell the student that there was an eclipse of the sun once each month. I don't think that comes under the heading of strategy. I think it comes under the heading of abject ignorance with regard to the field which the man was teaching. So by strategies,

I take it you would include in strategies having knowledge of the subject matter.

**Dr. Gaskins:** Absolutely, Dr. Silber.

**Dr. Silber:** Now, the second thing is you emphasized that the principal is the institutional leader. You put great emphasis on the important role of the principal and, obviously, then you're going to be responsible and held accountable on the kind of selection you make of principals in the Lawrence schools. I want to know how can the principal be an institutional leader given the union contract and the extent to which management rights have been stripped away from the superintendent, given away by former school committees, so that the ability of the principal to assert his leadership becomes extremely difficult. Let me give you an example out of the Boston City Schools contract. They emphasized first off that they believe in site-based management. That's a cliché, as you know, in educational circles. The decisions are going to be made in the school, in the classroom or by the principal within the school. And then they announced that the union is going to really decide most of those issues which means that it's not in the hands of the principal at all. The principal cannot even select the most qualified teacher because unless two-thirds of the union members agree to it, he's got to select the teacher with the greatest seniority within the system. Now, I'm not speaking specifically -- I'm using the example of Boston so that I don't step on any toes in Lawrence. When you find elements in the teachers' contracts that make it difficult to do your job, I wonder if you have asked the School Committee of Lawrence, are they going to back you up and support you as you attempt to negotiate a new contract in the future that will enable you to regain management rights?

**Dr. Gaskins:** The answer to that is yes, Dr. Silber, I have had that conversation and I do know at this time -- as a matter of fact at the last board meeting -- that a negotiator had been hired to work with the School Committee and members of the State Department of Education.

**Dr. Silber:** Abigail?

**Dr. Thernstrom:** I want to go back to the issue of best practices. Roberta Schaefer and I were recently at a Brookings Conference on Education for two days, and one of the things that struck me as we read and discussed the papers at the Brookings Conference, one paper for instance on Houston, another on Chicago, both of them moving ahead in terms of reform but with very different successful, seemingly so far successful strategies. I mean, one of the things that struck me is that best practices, effective practices come in such a variety of forms and they are often incompatible, but they depend on good leadership and they often depend upon precisely what you were saying, good leadership from principals. And I think that that's what you were saying when you were saying, Look, there isn't a formula. But, you know, I'm double-checking here with you.

**Dr. Gaskins:** Absolutely. Good leadership, instructional leadership must come from the principals, and that doesn't just happen. There must be opportunities for principals to have ongoing opportunities to increase their performance as instructional leaders. In St. Paul, for instance, we have A, an Administrator's Academy that is a three-day retreat before the beginning of school when we talk about what the focus areas will be for the school year to help principals meet with people, consultants, researchers who can come in and help them to look at some of these best practices. Number two, we also have an ongoing Administrators Institute which meets every six weeks and the administrators are able to come together to speak about the things that are happening in their schools, and also develop techniques and learn best instructional strategies, administrative leadership strategies that will help them to become better administrators all year.

**Dr. Thernstrom:** So what I was saying is, Look, principals can have very different educational philosophies, and different philosophies can really be effective. I think that's one of the things we are learning --

**Dr. Gaskins:** Absolutely.

**Dr. Thernstrom:** -- by looking at examples across the country, and I was assuming that's part of what you were saying, that there wasn't a kind of neat little formula and a checklist.



**Dr. Gaskins:** Correct. Correct.

**Dr. Silber:** Roberta?

**Dr. Schaefer:** I would just like to point out, in spite of the constraints of the contracts, it apparently is possible to hold principals accountable. I know that in Worcester, the superintendent has been giving differential contracts to the principals in terms of the length and the amount of increase in their pay, and many of them are not very happy about it but it has been going on for several years and apparently with some success. So I would urge the School Committee in Lawrence to think about that.

**Dr. Silber:** Mr. Peyser?

**Mr. Peyser:** If I could change the subject for a moment. I don't know if you've seen this report, consultants' report from June 1997. It's not critical that you've seen it. I commend it to you, it's a very interesting, I think well-conceived document. But the report states, and again this is a year ago, that student discipline at Lawrence High School is a major problem, and some of the things reported are the teachers indicate there's widespread use of profanity and physical intimidation of teachers; students are routinely late for class if they arrive at all; detention is a matter of negotiation; dress codes are ignored. Now, assuming all these conditions still exist, and they may not, there's been obviously some intervening time, but assuming this is the situation you walk into. What two or three things would you do first to reestablish an orderly learning environment at the high school?

**Dr. Gaskins:** Mr. Peyser, the first thing that I would do is to -- and if I were to keep the same -- we'll just have the agreement that the same staff would be in place, okay? So therefore I would present them with a profile of the school. This is what's happening in this school. And we'll be looking at attendance, dropout rates, student achievement test scores, parental involvement. This is what's happening in the school today. Now, this is what needs to be happening. How are we going to get there? So then we would work with the staff and the administrators to develop a plan of action. First of all, one of the things they have to understand, it has to be a warm and welcoming climate or environment for these children to come. And the children have to know that there is an expectation for them to come to class, that there's an expectation of them to walk in the hallways, not to use profanity, to get to their classrooms on time, to do their homework. And they also -- then the next piece would be the expectation, and then we have to get the parent and the community involved in that as well. So the teachers would know that they are not in this by themselves, so that there would be that school/community linkage that we talked about. And once those expectations were put in place and the teachers knew there would be support and resources for that to happen, I believe that we would see a change, a beginning change in that school.

**Mr. Peyser:** In your experience, though, what are the the basic elements of an orderly learning environment, an orderly school? What are the things, again, in your experience or generally true that need to be in place in order for learning to take place and for, you know, general discipline to hold in a school, especially a high school?

**Dr. Gaskins:** Teachers who are committed and know the subject areas they are teaching, have the content knowledge, expectations, rules, policies, regulations that are adhered to, and also consequences. I think there have to be consequences.

**Mr. Peyser:** I'm glad you raised that because this relates to another issue I wanted to bring up related to the interview you had with the School Committee. I believe you were asked at one point what policies you might propose for dealing with chronically disruptive students. I think that was the term that was used. And in your answer you discuss the need for special programs including special education programs for, I think I'm quoting you accurately, students whose needs are different from others. I wonder if you could explain sort of the relationship between that comment and the issue of consequences for poor behavior.

**Dr. Gaskins:** When we have children who are chronically disruptive and we have tried everything we can in the regular classroom setting, then there should be an opportunity for those

students to be in an alternative school setting. And so that would be a consequence. But it should not be a punitive consequence, it should be an arena in which the children are still going to be able to move forward to meet standards, but in a different setting.

**Mr. Peyser:** Is there a role for suspension and expulsion?

**Dr. Gaskins:** Absolutely. Absolutely. I believe that we have to have zero tolerance for any type of a weapon coming into school. I have been in both Minneapolis and St. Paul where students have been expelled for bringing weapons into schools. Zero tolerance. But as an addition to that, those students are then placed in an alternative setting.

**Dr. Thernstrom:** Just one follow-up on that. I'm delighted to hear that answer, and actually at the Brookings Conference I was given a paper on school discipline. Help me with something. One of the problems is that, of course, IDEA very much protects kids who are labeled Special Ed because of emotional problems, that which take the form of disrupting classrooms, hitting other kids, hitting teachers, et cetera. What is the solution to that? I mean, yeah, I threw up my hands, too. How does one work with that?

**Dr. Gaskins:** That's a problem, Dr. Thernstrom. One of the things that has happened, though, in Minneapolis and St. Paul, we do have separate programs. I believe we called them Eisen Minger programs, and I don't know why they are called Eisen Minger. Probably named after a person. But what happens is those children are placed in a separate school. And they do have their IEP's and they are moved through the process, through the schooling process at this separate setting.

**Dr. Thernstrom:** But their parents have to sign off on that.

**Dr. Gaskins:** Absolutely.

**Dr. Thernstrom:** So you would be very, I assume, very firm and aggressive in getting parents to sign off on separate placements when kids are making learning impossible for everybody else.

**Dr. Gaskins:** Absolutely. Correct.

**Dr. Silber:** I would like to pick up on one of the things that I thought was a highlight of your interview in response to School Committee Woman Kane who asked you about these neighborhood programs. You spoke of the neighborhood readiness centers and that you had established two of these centers where you deal with the problems of the earliest education of the child, from the mother carrying the child in utero, preparing the mother medically for the birth of a healthy child, the avoidance of harmful ingestion of products, and then birth to 1st grade, all the way through there, so that when they come to school they have had the kinds of advantages they might have had in the most privileged middle class home. You get all the players at the table, you talk about getting all the social agencies at the table, pointing out the replication and duplication involved, you talk about getting them into a coherent plan that is not duplicated, seeing how you could deliver this and that, you came up with two centers. What I would like to ask you is: What were the budgetary implications of this? How much did those two centers cost? Because obviously this early childhood intervention is in the long run probably the key to our whole problem in our urban centers.

**Dr. Gaskins:** Dr. Silber, thank you for mentioning that, and I'm glad that you saw that as a highlight. Thank you. The neighborhood readiness centers, the reason why we had so many people, we had to get all these people at the table, is because they had dollars that they were spending regarding early childhood education and so therefore those dollars then, we were able to go to each one of those agencies and they were able to put in a portion of the dollars that would have been spent into a pot. We used those dollars plus there were dollars from -- there was a new convention center and there were dollars through a tax base that we were able to use for these neighborhood readiness centers as well as Title I dollars for ongoing operations. So it was a collaborative approach to getting the funding.

**Dr. Silber:** Do you have any idea just what was the budget on each of those centers? How much roughly? How much money did you have to find out of a school budget?

**Dr. Gaskins:** I really don't have that information. I don't have that information. We had to build one neighborhood school readiness center that was attached to an elementary school. I would say -- I'm not going to say. I don't have that but I can certainly find out for you.

**Dr. Silber:** I think that if Mayor Dowling gives you all the money you need for those, it's going to be great. But if she doesn't, then of course you're going to have to figure out how to budget those programs. But I doubt that there's a more important point in solving the problem of the chronically disruptive child or anything else than that early intervention.

**Dr. Gaskins:** I agree.

**Dr. Silber:** That leads me to the last question I have which is on accountability and the budget. You pointed out the necessity of having zero-based budgets from all of the people working in your system. You don't tell them to start out saying you've got this, that and the other, and so they need to add this. You say, Start out from zero and get rid of the stuff you don't need and let's see what you have because the budget is going to be based on a goal to the district and on the outcomes to be achieved. You tell me how you're going to meet those goals and those objectives and then how much you need in order to do so. So now you have a very cooperative principal, you've given him the goals and objectives, you've said, This is what you've got to do, perhaps he is the principal of your high school and he wrings it all out and let's stipulate that he is a superb principal, he's done everything you've asked him to do and he says, What I need is approximately -- I'll pull a number out of the hat -- five million dollars. And you look at the budget for the whole district and you say, Well, I'm sorry to say I can only give you four million dollars. Now, how are you going to hold him accountable? You've already defined the level of accountability in terms of the goals and objectives. He's told what you he needs, you've reviewed it and you can't find anything wrong in his budget presentation, you know that he really does need every penny he said he needed, now you're only going to give him four-fifths of it. So how are you going to keep him responsible? That's a real-world question, not an academic question.

**Dr. Gaskins:** I'm dealing with that in our budget in St. Paul at this time. If we look at -- if this were a situation that did happen, first of all, we need to be able to go back and look at what was his budget last year and what did he do with it and then look at the budget this year as he is saying. So now he is meeting all of the goals, so now it would be up to me to look at the other budget managers throughout the district and to make a determination of where we would be able to pull those dollars because that high school right now is a high priority and so therefore within the budget of the Lawrence Public Schools, we would have to find those other dollars.

**Dr. Silber:** Any others questions? Mr. Peyser?

**Mr. Peyser:** I would like to ask you a question about standards which actually, I think, is in some ways related more to state level standards. But I think as you're aware that obviously has implications on curriculum and other things at the local districts. According to the Fordham Foundation, which has done ratings of standards across the country, Minnesota Profiles of Learning for History, which I haven't seen them but I think is analogous to our curriculum frameworks in history and social science, are, quote, useless, gave it an F grade. And the Council for Basic Education, which participated with Education Week in producing their 1998 Quality Accounts Report, gave Minnesota standards an overall rating of C plus. Now, I know you have worked with these standards recently in St. Paul in trying to integrate them into the curriculum and also even earlier during I guess the predevelopment stages, perhaps, of these standards in the State Department of Education. Could you with respect -- ideally, with respect to the history or social science standards, but perhaps if not that specifically then generally, could you describe what these standards or documents are like, the Profiles of Learning and give your evaluation of their quality?

**Dr. Gaskins:** Mr. Peyser, I cannot speak directly to the social science standards. I cannot speak directly to the social science standards. I can speak to the fact that this whole process of standards throughout the United States, we can look at many, many states where the people who are developing the standards think they are the greatest thing since sliced bread and other people

look at them and think no, that isn't true. I think we're going to be finding out the same thing probably here in Massachusetts. So it is an ongoing developmental process. What I can say about standards, it's raising the bar for all of the children, and the expectations are being raised that all children have to meet these standards. And so if we are looking at the quality of the standards, and I think that's an ongoing process where they may have to be strengthened, but I cannot -- I can't speak to you directly on the social science standards.

**Mr. Peyser:** But on maybe some other parts of it, because I know you've indicated that you're working in St. Paul to integrate the profiles of learning with the Urban Learner Framework, so you have some, I think, detailed knowledge of these things. Maybe not on that particular subject area. I'm interested what your critique would be, positive or negative, of the Profiles of Learning.

**Dr. Gaskins:** My critique is I believe that they are raising the bar for all students. I think it is necessary to have standards and I support them.

**Mr. Peyser:** Maybe one final question which concerns St. Paul, and maybe this is too hard a question now that I think about it. You've been in St. Paul for a while, been in Minnesota for a while observing the system. I wonder if you could -- maybe this is an unfair question, but I wonder if you could critique the St. Paul school system. And it's okay for you to describe strengths, but I really want you to describe some weaknesses as well. And then related to that is -- I think this also is probably another unfair question. If it is, this one in particular, tell me. There's a superintendent search going on in St. Paul and I wonder if you are under consideration, if you want to be under consideration; if so, why, if not, why.

**Dr. Silber:** Mr. Peyser, I think to use the cliché, with all due respect, I think as long as she's got a job in that place, I don't propose to put our candidate on the spot because if she is a candidate for that position, the answer to that question might affect the outcome and I don't think we should put her on that particular spot.

**Dr. Thernstrom:** Some of us have a time constraint. We need to bring this to a close.

**Mr. Peyser:** Okay. I'm willing to accept your judgment. I think we have until 12, at least.

**Dr. Schaefer:** We want to have a discussion after this.

**Mr. Peyser:** Okay.

**Dr. Silber:** Any more pressing questions that need to be asked or have we all had a --

**Mr. Peyser:** Unless the candidate insists that she respond to this question, I'm willing to yield.

**Dr. Delattre:** I want to ask one more, if I may. Education has a shortage of a lot of things. It's never had a shortage of fans. You describe yourself as interested in data-driven decision making. Now, suppose somebody comes to you and says, We want to implement this instructional plan or this practice, this curriculum in this school. I want to know what kind of data you're going to ask for before you decide whether to implement it.

**Dr. Gaskins:** Dr. Delattre, first going into Lawrence Public Schools there will be a profile of every single school, that's upon which the plan of action will be built, along with the fact-finding recommendations. And so, therefore, anything that needs to be -- that a principal or others would ask to do in a school, it has to be related to this work plan and the goals that we have set forth. And if it's something that would enhance what it is we are doing, we would certainly have to look at the research on that, and the bottom line is how does it affect student achievement. Is it good for kids? That's going to be the ongoing question.

**Dr. Silber:** Are we done? Thank 17 you very much. Thank you, Mayor Dowling.

**Mayor Dowling:** Thank you very much.

**Dr. Gaskins:** Thank you very much.

**Dr. Silber:** It's up to us under state law to have our discussion right here in public. I think the obligation will entail a good deal of candor on the part of us and even though it's not a personal matter, on some level it's a sense of personal sensitivity, so I think the discussion now needs to take place. Who needs to open up?

**Mr. Irwin:** I think, Mr. Chairman, in order to open this discussion, I think we should start with a motion on the table to frame the discussion around. Therefore, I would like to make a motion that the Board of Education support and recommend Dr. Gaskins for the job in Lawrence.

**Dr. Thernstrom:** I second it.

**Dr. Silber:** The motion has been made and seconded and it's before the meeting. Roberta?

**Dr. Schaefer:** I think that Dr. Gaskins obviously has a number of strengths, she's had a lot of experience in other systems. According to the agreement that we have reached with the Commissioner and the Lawrence Public Schools, I would guess I would like for the Board to recommend that -- I don't know that we need a motion on this, but so that the Lawrence School Committee gets a sense of the Board, that the Oversight Committee continue in place to help Dr. Gaskins to assist with establishing what the goals would be for the year and that there be an evaluation process in place by which she and the district would be evaluated at the end of the year. I guess I would also like to ask at this point if the Commissioner would -- he's been very silent during this, if he would weigh in as to how he feels about what I've just suggested and his general sense of the situation.

**Dr. Thernstrom:** His general sense of the candidate.

**Dr. Silber:** Do you have any recommendation with regard to the length of contract?

**Dr. Schaefer:** Well, you know, I'm not very familiar with these things, but I would like to suggest that -- I know that Lawrence has the authority to enter into the contract with the superintendent, but that perhaps it be a two-year contract.

**Dr. Thernstrom:** I'm concerned about giving her too short a contract because, in all fairness, it takes a while to get a situation like Lawrence under control. I'm open to suggestion. I'm also very eager to hear what our Commissioner has to say on both subjects, that is the quality of the candidate before us and the question of the length of the contract and so forth.

**Commissioner Haydu:** I don't have a lot of new information to add to what I said before or during our last meeting when the Mayor came with the candidate to the table. I'm particularly impressed by the amount of ownership that the Mayor and the Lawrence School Committee has taken for the problems that those of us who were on the Lawrence fact-finding team found. I'm particularly thankful to Matt George who was on the Lawrence fact-finding team and Juliane Dow who was on the Lawrence fact-finding team for their continued effort on behalf of the City of Lawrence and on behalf of the Board of Education. An awful lot of time has been put into this process by folks who are all well-meaning folks, that have worked very hard and have spent countless hours, and I believe that we have had a very strong process that has led today to Dr. Gaskins being with us. I have had an opportunity to spend a little bit of time with her but not nearly as much time as Matt George and David Driscoll and others have spent, but I think that I could speak for the entire senior staff that has spent time on this issue and say that we are comfortable that A, it's been a good process, and that B, we have a very qualified candidate before you. At the same time, because of the nature of the tri-party agreement that everybody entered into, and obviously I was on the fact-finding team when it happened and now I serendipitously find myself as Commissioner, I think it is up to this Board to deliberate amongst themselves and to come to their own conclusions regarding this candidate. For my own self, I have concluded that this is a very-well-qualified candidate who will work herself to death to make education happen for the children of Lawrence. In terms of the length of the contract, I don't have a specific thought about it. I would like to think about that some. I'm not sure what our rights are under



this agreement to be setting the length of the time. At the same time, I'm very open to continuing the collaborative working agreement with the City of Lawrence which has probably worked better than any of us could have hoped. I will tell you, as Dave Driscoll and I have traveled around the state at times, I have had an opportunity not only to get to know Mayor Dowling on the phone, but personally. I think that there's been an incredible working relationship that has been forged and I would like for one to see that continue.

**Dr. Silber:** Any other comments? Mr. Peyser?

**Mr. Peyser:** I guess I would preface my comment by saying that the Lawrence Public School system has a management problem, but I think Lawrence has a more serious, a far more serious educational problem. And thanks to the work over the last six months of the School Committee, of the Department of Education, especially with Dave Driscoll, Dave Driscoll's efforts, the district is already making significant strides in putting its organizational and fiscal house in order. Certainly more work needs to be done, but I think we've made great progress over the last six months. The matter of educational direction and leadership, however, remains for the new superintendent and, therefore, I think the decision that we need to reach today and the thing that I'm most interested in is ensuring that we hire a superintendent who has a clear and sound educational vision and leadership skills necessary to turn that vision into a reality. I think we owe that to the process and I think we owe it to the City of Lawrence and certainly we owe it to the children in the Lawrence Public Schools. In talking to people in Minneapolis and elsewhere, in reviewing the published material and listening to Dr. Gaskins, I have no doubt about her managerial competence and experience. I admire her commitment to fact-based decision making. I'm impressed by her work ethic and her sincere interest in children. Having said that, I'm troubled by what I perceive to be a lack of clarity in her educational vision. And I think that came through at least for me in some of the questioning today but also in terms of the interview with the School Committee, and I'm troubled by some of the specific views that were expressed today on some of the individual yet important educational issues. So on the managerial side, I have no doubt that she has the competence and the skill and the work ethic necessary to maintain order, if you will, within the district. But I think much more is needed and that Lawrence is suffering through an educational crisis more than a managerial crisis of the district, and I'm not persuaded by, again, what I've read and what I've heard today and earlier that Dr. Gaskins' experience and competency is up to the level that is necessary for a district like Lawrence which is indeed in deep crisis. So I have expressed some serious concerns.

**Dr. Silber:** Mr. Silver?

**Mr. Silver:** I just have one concern about one specific thing. Bilingual education. I guess I was just concerned that specifically, as Lawrence has a very high bilingual population, this will be a huge issue for the students of Lawrence and will affect many of them as the MCAS starts having high stakes attached to it, and I guess I didn't think the view was extremely clear or ironclad or something, but I think that this could be possibly remedied under number 2 on the memorandum of agreement. We talked about the Commissioner's representatives. It says that the representatives shall review, et cetera, et cetera, on major policy issues. And I think that bilingual education in Lawrence will be considered a major policy issue and since I think it is extremely imperative that Lawrence has a superintendent as soon as possible and Dr. Gaskins seems to be very competent and I think in many ways is an excellent choice, that since this is a specific concern, I think having a representative on bilingual education to kind of assist her, or something, may do it.

**Dr. Schaefer:** That is why I talked about the continuing, as you call it, Commissioner's representatives, Oversight Committee, that obviously there are certain issues that we are concerned about. But I do think that with the assistance of the people who will be the Commissioner's representatives, that these issues can be addressed and will be kept in focus as a result to make sure that they are addressed during the course of the year.

**Mr. Silver:** What kind of influence or say do these representatives have in the decision making in Lawrence? Or is it just advisory?

**Dr. Thornstrom:** At the end of the day, Micah -- Mr. Chairman, if this is not correct -- at the end of the day, because there will be an evaluation which has consequences, there is an incentive,

built-in incentive to listen to the concerns of this Commission. I believe that's correct, and you can correct me if I am wrong.

**Dr. Silber:** I think you have put it very well, Abigail. I think that the advisory committee that will be engaged in a supervisory role in Lawrence will give its recommendations, and if those recommendations are disregarded, those who disregard those recommendations better be right. That's all. Otherwise, there would clearly be consequences, expected consequences. On the other hand, I don't think you can have an advisory committee that is the authoritative voice of those schools without that committee becoming de facto the superintendent of schools. And that is not what the agreement entails. But the supervisory role and the evaluational role are going to go hand in hand, and I think Abigail has stated that relationship quite accurately.

**Dr. Schaefer:** Would the Commissioner care --

**Commissioner Haydu:** Let me only say that in terms of appointing a committee, since the agreement calls for me to do that, I would be taking input from all of you plus, obviously, the City, and the object would be to find the best committee we could find to benefit the children of Lawrence. So I truly see this as a continuation of a collaborative agreement that has actually been working well between the DOE and the City of Lawrence, and to the extent that I'm sitting in this seat as interim, I would be committed to making sure that we in fact continue to have the fine collaborative working relationship we have had.

**Dr. Silber:** Mr. Delattre?

**Dr. Delattre:** I want earnestly to support this motion and I cannot. I have been very hopeful because of Dr. Gaskins' repeated expressions and her long track record of regard for high expectations -- and I don't think anybody should have to wear a dissertation like an albatross -- and that's why when I asked about the passage, whether 75 percent of kindergarten children are incapable of learning or understanding anything about learning to read, I asked both did you believe it then and do you believe it now. I was hopeful, whatever Dr. Gaskins believed then, that she would say straightforwardly that her sense of high expectations for children, and research that has been widely published and well known since the early sixties, all of which proves that many kindergarten children are capable of making good progress in reading, that she would simply say, I don't believe it now. Her failure to say that is so troubling to me with respect to the reality of high expectations and the possibilities of children, that I cannot support the motion.

**Dr. Silber:** My own view is that what I have found disappointing in the interview with the candidate is the vagueness that characterizes so many of the responses. The responses made in terms of Profiles, undefined; standards, undefined; strategies, undefined; community relations, it's not clear at all what it means to be working with the community as opposed to working with the parents. But the thing that bothers me most was the response to the best practices question that was raised by Professor Delattre. The response on the best way to teach English was, well, whole language and phonics, I think that's best. That doesn't reflect at all the prolonged study by the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development that demonstrated the outright falsity of the three dogmas on which the whole language movement is based, that language is instinctive, that children should be encouraged to guess at the meanings of words and, still, children in reading should skip words, all of which have been demonstrably shown to be counterfactual. And also, the whole research of the last decade in neurophysiology, with techniques that were never available before, has demonstrated that the neurological capacity of a child is stimulated by exactly the exercise that the child goes through. If the child is not encouraged to read at age three or four, the neurological channels that enable the child to read are not going to be encouraged. That falling back on the cliché of whole language and phonics does not impress me. On the other hand, I think that there are very strong aspects in Candidate Gaskins, aspects that are exemplary. Her emphasis on early childhood education I think is absolutely first rate. I hope that she will read the latest research in neurophysiology because if she does, I think she will encourage reading in that early learning program in those neighborhood development centers, parenting centers, at an age of no later, certainly, than four, and having children read to no later than ages two and three. And I also think that she has been forthright in her insistence that the quality of teaching has to be improved, that teachers will be given the opportunity to improve, but that if they don't improve, they have to be informed that there's no longer a place for them in the school system. Those two positions that she has taken, taken decisively -- and she has a record that backs her up in having made such decisions --

indicates to me that she's got the toughness, the backbone, the kind of inner strength that is going to enable her to face the challenges of that job and come through. It's not going to be an easy ride. It's going to be a hell of a hard ride. And I think that she is probably one of the strongest candidates we are likely to interview in just that personal inner strength that is necessary to make the tough decisions that are going to be called for. So although I have areas in which I disagree and areas in which I have my doubts, I think overall this is going to be a successful administration and I will join with the others in voting in favor of it.

**Dr. Thernstrom:** Can we call the vote, Mr. Chairman?

**Dr. Silber:** I think we pretty well have. Let's call the question unless someone wishes to filibuster.

**Mr. Peyser:** Is that what this is, filibustering?

**Dr. Silber:** Since there's no filibuster present, neither filler nor buster, let's go. All in favor?

**Dr. Thernstrom:** Aye.

**Dr. Schaefer:** Aye.

**Mr. Irwin:** Aye.

**Dr. Silber:** Aye.

**Mr. Silver:** Aye.

**Dr. Silber:** Irwin, Schaefer, Thernstrom, Silber, Silver. No kin, by the way.

**Dr. Delattre:** Opposed.

**Dr. Silber:** Where do you stand?

**Mr. Peyser:** Opposed.

**Dr. Silber:** So Mr. Peyser and Mr. Delattre oppose. Our work is done and it is now up to the School Committee of Lawrence to proceed on this appointment and it is up to the Commissioner in consultation with the Board of Education to develop an Oversight Committee that's going to work with the School Committee of Lawrence to improve the situation and reach the objectives we have in mind. I believe that was the only agenda item for this meeting. Consequently, that being completed, the meeting I believe is adjourned.

Commonwealth Of Massachusetts

I, **Nancy L. Catuogno**, Registered Diplomat Reporter, do hereby certify that the foregoing is a true and accurate transcription of my stenographic notes, to the best of my knowledge and ability.

Witness My Hand, this 26th day of May, 1998.