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Board of Education Regular Meeting

Minutes

Tuesday, February 10, 1998

Chairman Silber of Brookline called the meeting to order at 9:15 a.m. The following were in attendance:

Members Of The Board Of Education Present:

Dr. John Silber, Brookline, Chairman
Ms. Patricia Crutchfield, Vice-Chairperson
Dr. Edwin J. Delattre, Boston
Mr. William Irwin, Wilmington
Dr. Stanley Koplik, Boston
Mr. James Peyser, Dorchester
Dr. Roberta Schaefer, Worcester
Mr. Micah Silver,
New Salem, Chair,
Student Advisory Council
Dr. Abigail Thernstrom, Lexington
Commissioner Robert V. Antonucci, Secretary

Also In Attendance:

Nancy L. Catuogno, Certified Diplomat Reporter
Ms. Carline Gele, Department of Education

Approval Of Minutes

On a motion duly made and seconded, it was VOTED: that the Board of Education approve the minutes of the January 12, 1998 meeting.

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

Comments From The Chairman

Chairman Silber reported that Commissioner Antonucci has been appointed President of ICS Learning Systems, one of the premier distance learning companies and a subsidiary of Harcourt General. The company is based in Scranton, Pennsylvania. The Chairman thanked the Commissioner on behalf of the Board, stating: He has offered distinguished leadership to this Board. I speak for the entire Board in expressing our appreciation for his distinguished service, and our best wishes for a highly successful new adventure.

Mr. Peyser requested that Dr. Koplik's letter to Board members regarding the Commissioner's resignation be entered in the minutes. The letter states:

Dear Bob:

Congratulations on your exciting news. I join the loud and unending standing ovation you richly deserve. Many believe that a player should move on while at the top of his game and especially when the crowd is cheering. No one better personifies this than you.

Day in and day out you push the Department's agenda with your sights firmly fixed on educational reform and measurable improvement. You were particularly masterful of late representing the Board in negotiation with Lawrence. I had the pleasure of sitting in at the press conference with Mayor Dowling and can testify to your superb performance. There is abundant evidence of your visible heroics, but I also want to thank you for sheltering us from many a storm through your clever, careful and just plain hard work, much of it accomplished behind the scenes without fanfare.

Bob, you have been a splendid public servant. You reinterpreted "bureaucracy" to no longer be cold, impersonal and indifferent. You held the public trust with an unambiguous and uncompromising embrace. I hope your talents, values, energy, enthusiasm and commitment are contagious to your successor. You are one of the few people I know who would leave the Energizer Bunny gasping for air!

As with many of your admirers, I have some mixed feelings about your departure, but above all I enthusiastically send my very best wishes to you in your new pursuits. Harcourt General has made a marvelous selection, and you will quickly affirm their wisdom through yours. I hope our paths will cross many times and I have the special pleasure of continuing our friendship. It has been especially gratifying to watch you flourish and to watch you work; we have all benefitted immeasurably. You did a GREAT JOB!

Sincerely,

Stanley Z. Koplik

In other matters, Dr. Silber expressed his deep concerns about the legislature's failure to revise the special education law. He stated: Despite our recommendations and despite the testimony that was offered by Commissioner Antonucci and myself, the legislature has unfortunately failed to move ahead with the reform of special education. Dr. Silber stated that in his opening statement in the special education executive session, Chairman Harold Lane expressed the importance of changing from the standard of maximum possible development to one of free appropriate public education. Dr. Silber quoted Chairman Lane, who said: "I wholeheartedly support the change to the federal standard, and while I believe there are many other positive changes in this bill besides that, I feel strongly that a bill that does not move us to the federal standard cannot truly be said to be reform at all."

Dr. Silber commented: I think that puts the issue quite succinctly. What the legislature has done, at least what that committee has done, is to back off from any meaningful reform of special education. He went on: The central tension between regular and special education will remain as long as there is a standard in place for special education that is utopian in nature. He added that he agrees with Chairman Lane's comment that the goals of education reform are being side-tracked as a result of the Massachusetts special education standard.

Dr. Silber concluded: I am convinced that students of moderate to severe disability will not be affected by the move to the federal standard, but those students whose disabilities do not preclude learning in less restrictive environments will, I hope, be reassigned under the federal standard in a way that is educationally superior to the placement they now receive.

With respect to the Commissioner search, Dr. Silber said the ads will run in national newspapers this Sunday, and the Board will select an Interim Commissioner prior to Commissioner Antonucci's proposed date of departure.

Comments From The Commissioner

Commissioner Antonucci reported that three charter school hearings were held during the month of January. Applications for Horace Mann charters and Commonwealth charters have been reviewed and will be presented to the Board for a vote in a special meeting at the end of February.

Commissioner Antonucci also expressed his disappointment on the legislature's failure to revise the special education law. The Commissioner said: I thought this was the year it was going to happen. After yesterday's action, I am doubtful. However, if all of us work with the Senate and the House and the Governor to move this along, it may yet happen.

Commissioner Antonucci informed the Board that proposed amendments to the vocational-technical regulations will be presented at a later date. He said three public hearings are being held on the proposal to amend the racial imbalance law, as follows: February 3 in Boston, February 11 in Springfield and February 25 in Worcester.

Concluding his remarks, Commissioner Antonucci thanked the Chair and Board members for their support. He said: It has been a great experience, a great opportunity; and we did a lot. I am leaving a legacy, but it is a legacy of all of you in the audience and this Board. I want to thank former Chairman Martin Kaplan and Chairman Silber. We have worked very well together. That experience has been a very positive one for me. We have a lot of hard work to do in the future. We must stay committed and stay on track, or we will have some difficult times ahead. So I leave with a good feeling and also with a hope that what we have started will continue under this Chair and this Board. I am confident that it will.

Statements From The Public

Mr. Peter Finn, Executive Director of the Massachusetts Association of School Superintendents, praised Commissioner Antonucci saying: In my time here he has been the most popular Commissioner with people out in the field because of his ability to lead and inspire people. Mr. Finn also addressed the Board on the proposals relative to performance standards for the MCAS tests. He commented that there is no need to have multiple standards of failure. He suggested that the Level II standard be considered as the minimal acceptable level of performance. Mr. Finn noted: We would expect that you would then determine the success of school systems by their ability to move students not only from Level I up to Level II, but from Level II up to Levels III and IV. In conclusion, Mr. Finn urged the Board to change the description of Level II. In response to a comment from Mr. Finn about the MASS's analysis of MEAP scores, Dr. Silber asked Mr. Finn to provide the percentage of students who scored III or better on two of the four examinations.

Mr. Steve Gorrie, Acting President of the Massachusetts Teachers' Association, wished Commissioner Antonucci well in his new position and urged the Board to place the highest priority on selecting a candidate who shares Dr. Antonucci's respect for public education. Mr. Gorrie also suggested that the Board reconsider its vote to change the MCAS performance level description for Level II from basic to deficient. Mr. Gorrie mentioned his letter detailing MTA's concerns about the level descriptions. He said the primary purpose of student assessment should be to improve the quality of learning. Mr. Gorrie said: Labeling a large percentage of our students "deficient" would undermine that purpose by punishing rather than helping those who need it the most. Dr. Delattre clarified that the performance standards do not label students, but rather refer explicitly to academic performance.

Ms. Elvira DiFabio of the Massachusetts Foreign Language Association urged the Board to appoint a team of qualified individuals to review the foreign languages curriculum framework and prepare it for final approval by the Board. Dr. Silber asked: if funding does not exist to instruct students in foreign language from K through 12, would it be preferable to have the instruction from K through 8 or should we proceed with the current system? Ms. DiFabio said she would discuss this with the MaFLA board and get back to the Chairman with a response. Dr. Delattre noted that only 28 school districts out of 347 require foreign language for high school

graduation. He asked Ms. DiFabio to have MaFLA consider how that number can be increased.

Mr. Joseph O'Sullivan of the Brockton Education Association thanked Commissioner Antonucci for his dedication and addressed the Board on the issue of test scores and funding. Mr. O'Sullivan said districts with large numbers of students who are transient or who are limited in English proficiency will likely have poorer results on the MCAS.

2. Governor Argeo Paul Cellucci - Character Education And Other Issues - Discussion

Chairman Silber welcomed Governor Cellucci and thanked him for coming to address the Board. The Governor thanked the Chairman and expressed regret that Commissioner Antonucci is leaving. He stated: Commissioner Antonucci has demonstrated exceptional leadership. Our public schools have improved. He has skillfully guided the implementation of the 1993 Education Reform Act. The standards are in place; the testing begins in the spring; he has worked very hard to get charter schools up and running; he has been very innovative; and he and this Board did not shrink from making hard decisions in Lawrence. The Governor concluded: I want to thank the Commissioner for his hard work and dedication to the Massachusetts public schools, but most importantly to the children of Massachusetts. We will miss you. I think we all know we must continue this effort, and build on the progress that has been made.

The Governor said that he hopes that the Board's search for a new Commissioner is swift and thorough. He stated that the budget he filed fully funds Education Reform, and he highlighted these proposals: that ninety percent of all the new dollars be spent in the classroom, and that 4,000 new teachers be hired. The Governor said he has added \$40 million to the full funding of Education Reform, which would bring the total to \$300 million. Ninety percent of that is \$270 million. He proposed to use half of that ninety percent, \$135 million, to hire the new teachers and leave the other half for computers, textbooks, and other classroom resources.

The Governor also stated that he remains firmly committed to rigorous standards. He said: I will stand with the Board of Education. I believe that testing and accountability is the crucial hinge on which the success of our entire program now rests. He went on to state that low standards will not be accepted in the state's public schools. He thanked the Board for their hard work and gave the Board his commitment to work with them to keep these high standards.

The Governor then addressed the Board on character education. He stated: I believe that our public schools must play an important role in developing the character of our children and the virtues they espouse. So I want to urge the Board to weave character education into every school's curriculum and provide the tools for teachers and parents to help our efforts. The Governor said that Horace Mann believed in character education, and he quoted Martin Luther King, Jr. as saying, "We must remember that intelligence is not enough. Intelligence plus character, that is the goal of true education."

The Governor continued: Learning just the academic subjects is not enough, because our children need to be well-rounded. He said the virtues should be learned at home but reinforced in our schools. He stated: Schools can teach students right from wrong, basic values that know no political or social boundary. Honesty, compassion, courage, loyalty, respectfulness, responsibility, self-discipline and perseverance - these are consensus values. They turn up in literature, in art, in history, and they should be embraced by our students, our teachers and our parents. The Governor continued: We want students not only to learn these values, but we also want students to live by them.

The Governor asked the Board to sponsor academies and conferences for teachers so they can understand character education and how to integrate it into their classes. He also asked the Board to create a parent resource guide to reinforce what parents are doing at home.

Governor Cellucci concluded his remarks by stating: I do believe that whether we are pushing character education, holding the line on rigorous standards, helping to hire more teachers in our schools to bring down class sizes or fulfilling our commitment to fully fund Education Reform, every single commitment we make to our schools will in turn benefit our children and their future lives and thus the future of our state.

Dr. Silber thanked the Governor and asked if he had time for a few questions. The Governor agreed. Dr. Thernstrom said she was delighted to have the Governor speak to the Board and warmly welcomed him. She asked the Governor whether he thought the Board had adequately woven character into the History/Social Science framework. The Governor responded that the Board has done a good job, but now teachers need help to understand that part of the curriculum. He explained this is why he suggested the Board sponsor academies and conferences to help teachers understand and to support their efforts.

Dr. Silber said: One of the most important aspects of character education is to develop responsibility. One of the best ways to develop responsibility is to have children understand that there are consequences for what they do or what they fail to do. One way to do this is to hold children responsible for meeting the appropriate standards in education at the various levels. He explained that when students do not meet the requirements of each grade and are advanced nonetheless, the students are led to believe that it does not matter whether they meet the standards or not.

Dr. Silber continued, saying that many school districts recognize the need that some children have for extra help and would like to provide tutorial services or summer programs. He then asked the Governor: With the extra funds that are available for the additional teachers and so forth, might some teachers be hired to perform some of these activities which would really enhance character education no less than educational achievement? The Governor said that the Board would have discretion to use the extra \$40 million that he proposes adding to the budget, so that the Board could direct the extra funds to where they believe funding will do the most good.

Dr. Thernstrom asked Governor Cellucci if he anticipated controversy in the teaching of values, noting that experience has shown the teaching of values within an educational context becomes controversial. The Governor responded: I do not see why it could be controversial. In talking about the Civil War, why would it be controversial to say we should respect every human being no matter their race, creed, or national origin? Dr. Thernstrom agreed that on that level, it would not be controversial but stated that there may be instances where it becomes controversial. At the Governor's request, Dr. Thernstrom gave him an example. She stated: There are going to be issues within, for instance, health education, that are going to be controversial. There are issues that touch on religious convictions, and so on. The Governor responded: That is not what I have been talking about when I talk about character education. I am talking about these universal values I think we all hold and that we all know are important for young people, to help those young people be good citizens.

Mr. Silver agreed that the teaching of morals has always been controversial and suggested that there may be a less controversial way for teachers to teach values. He stated: Some teachers approach this as discussion rather than as teaching certain values, and they help students find meaning from books by discussing the moral issues that are addressed in those books. That has been a good tactic that does not infringe on people's values but allows people to discuss them openly. This may be a less controversial way to approach the issue of values.

Ms. Crutchfield said that the notion of consensus is important given the controversial nature usually associated with teaching values. She stated to the Governor: The involvement of teachers and community is very, very important in this, and I was delighted to receive your letter.

Dr. Koplik thanked the Governor for addressing the Board and for his budget recommendation on both K-12 education and higher education. Dr. Koplik stated that he was looking for ways to bring together the Board of Education and the Board of Higher Education in a common activity that will benefit both boards' agendas and clearly benefit students. Dr. Koplik said that one way might be declaring a war on illiteracy with the support of the Governor. Dr. Koplik stated: Whether we are talking about Education Reform, K-12 level, or about educating our students in higher education to be reliable members of the workforce, as long as we have this erosion at the bottom in terms of illiteracy, it will be an anchor that will destroy our chance to be the most competitive among the states securing future opportunity. Dr. Koplik continued: I address it here because you have provided some workforce development money in the higher education budget, and there is a lot of opportunity in the K - 12 budge. We may want to talk with you and your staff and with both boards about declaring war on illiteracy.

The Governor responded that he is supportive of any effort for the two boards to work together. He also mentioned that he meets every six weeks with Dr. Silber and Jim Carlin, and Bob Caron from the university system, in an effort to make sure the communication lines are open between K - 12 and the public higher education, both the state and community colleges and the university system.

Dr. Delattre thanked the Governor for coming and for his interest in character education. He said he has been involved in character education for almost 30 years. Dr. Delattre stated: You and Micah and others seem to be quite right to talk about the importance of reading and discussion, but one cannot rely too much on talk. He continued: One of the reasons character education is controversial is that talk sometimes becomes holier than thou. So I hope you emphasize the climate and environment of schools as well as the curriculum, as well as the classroom. I hope you emphasize cooperation of school officials with police and others to control and limit gang predation, control and limit the distribution of drugs, abuse of alcohol, the manipulation of students by threats of violence, and the rest. Governor Cellucci responded that districts such as Boston have very effective collaboration between schools and law enforcement, which should be replicated by other districts.

Commissioner Antonucci thanked the Governor and stated that it was a pleasure to work with him both as Governor and as Lt. Governor, as a professional and as a friend. The Commissioner urged the Governor to stay the course and to support the Department and the Board, and added that he should remember that this is all about the interests of children. The Governor said that he will continue to support education reform and wished the Commissioner well.

Dr. Schaefer welcomed the Governor and asked him about some of the elements that some religious education schools have that public schools seem to lack.. She stated: I understand that we cannot have religious education in schools, but religious education provides something that we seem to be lacking. To the extent that we can inculcate some kind of common civil religion in the schools that we all share as American citizens, I think that is a very important part of our children's education. The Governor responded that may be the reason that waiting lists for charter schools are so long.

Dr. Thernstrom raised the concern that the topic of teaching character is more tricky than it seems. She stated that they had similar struggles in writing the frameworks. Governor Cellucci said that the charter school waiting lists are so long because they have more discipline, and character and morals are emphasized a little more, and if these elements were emphasized in all schools there would be a desire to stay in public schools rather than to get out.

Chairman Silber thanked the Governor for addressing the Board.

3. Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System

a. Student Performance Standards - Discussion And Vote

Dr. Schaefer thanked Mr. Jeffrey Nellhaus from the Department of Education and Board members for their views on the student performance standards. Dr. Schaefer distributed a proposal to change descriptions for the four levels of student performance. She stated that she hopes the revised language will provide clarity on what the Board is trying to do. Dr. Schaefer also said this language will address Dr. Delattre's concern about focusing on student performance.

The new levels in the proposal are as follows:

Level IV -- Advanced

Student performance at this level consists of a comprehensive and in-depth understanding of rigorous subject matter, and an ability to provide sophisticated solutions to complex problems.

Level III -- Proficient

Student performance at this level consists of solid understanding of challenging subject matter

and the ability to solve a wide variety of problems.

Level II -- Needs Improvement

Student performance at this level consists of partial understanding of subject area knowledge and skills, and the ability to solve simple problems.

Level I -- Failing

Student performance at this level consists of minimal understanding of subject area knowledge and skills, and an inability to solve even some simple problems.

Dr. Koplik proposed to change the language in Level I to read: *"an inability to solve simple problems"* rather than *"...even some simple problems."* Dr. Silber proposed to change the language in Level II to read: *"...the ability to solve some simple problems."* rather than : *"...the ability to solve simple problems."* Dr. Schaefer accepted both proposed amendments.

Dr. Schaefer invited Mr. Nellhaus of the Department of Education and Mr. Stuart Kahl of Advanced Systems to join the discussion about the MCAS tests and asked their opinion on the proposed changes in the language. Mr. Nellhaus suggested adding a policy statement to the language explaining what it means to be at any of these levels. Dr. Delattre favored Dr. Schaefer's proposed language, saying: It says straight- forwardly what the criteria are by which one takes something to be advanced, proficient, needs improvement, or failing. Commissioner Antonucci endorsed the Chairman's proposal of the word "some" before "simple problems," saying that it adds to the clarity to the language. Mr. Kahl agreed that the addition of the word "some" is helpful.

In response to Dr. Thernstrom's inquiry on whether the wording of the various levels will influence the distribution of students over the levels, Mr. Kahl stated that the definitions are consistent, and the change in the language and the additional words will clarify the description. Mr. Peyser said Level II performance across the four exams might constitute passage in year 1, but in subsequent years three Level II's and one Level III might be the standard. Dr. Silber agreed, saying: Both of those depend on our seeing the test and the experience. There is no reason to panic superintendents, teachers and parents over some assumption that we have an *a priori* understanding of what those levels are.

Mr. Silver asked how students' performance on the four tests will be reported. Commissioner Antonucci clarified that there will be an overall description of the test scores. Mr. Silver reported that at the last meeting of the Student Advisory Council, they discussed adding an "adequate" category to the performance levels. Dr. Delattre commented: I do not want Massachusetts to throw its heart and soul and assets into Education Reform and end up with a program that encourages students, teachers and the rest of us to think that the real goal is to reach adequacy. That is why I do not want a fifth category here that says adequate. I want the distinction to be between needs improvement -- which all of us do, irrespective of any tests in Massachusetts -- and genuine proficiency. I want the aspiration to be proficiency.

On a motion duly made and seconded, it was: VOTED: that the Board of Education adopt the general descriptors for four levels of student performance presented by Dr. Schaefer, as amended.

Level IV -- Advanced

Student performance at this level consists of a comprehensive and in-depth understanding of rigorous subject matter, and an ability to provide sophisticated solutions to complex problems.

Level III -- Proficient

Student performance at this level consists of solid understanding of challenging subject matter and the ability to solve a wide variety of problems.

Level II -- Needs Improvement

Student performance at this level consists of partial understanding of subject area knowledge and skills, and the ability to solve some simple problems.

Level I -- Failing

Student performance at this level consists of minimal understanding of subject area knowledge and skills, and an inability to solve simple problems.

The motion was made by Dr. Delattre and seconded by Mr. Peyser. The vote was unanimous.

4. Lawrence Agreement - Progress Report And Vote

Commissioner Antonucci reported that the Board has had many discussions regarding the Memorandum of Agreement between the Lawrence School Committee, the Mayor and the Commissioner of Education. A copy of the Memorandum of Agreement, which was signed by the Chairman, the Commissioner and the Mayor on January 27, 1998, is attached to and incorporated into these minutes.

Commissioner Antonucci reported that he has designated Deputy Commissioner David Driscoll as liaison to the Lawrence Public Schools and has given him the authority to make the decisions pertinent to the situation. Dr. Driscoll presented a progress report to the Board on the issues being addressed and the time lines that have been established.

Dr. Driscoll stated that the signing of the agreement will improve the relationship between the Lawrence Public Schools, the community, the elected officials and the Department of Education. Dr. Driscoll said: We believe that this agreement has the potential to be effective because both sides will maintain some responsibility. In those instances in other states where a state has taken over and then eventually turned it back, many of the deficiencies remained. I believe this is a unique opportunity for us.

Dr. Driscoll said the agreement will work if three factors are present:

1. The focus must be on student achievement.
2. The Lawrence community needs to work together to achieve better performance by students.
3. All parties need to assume responsibility to improve the system.

Dr. Driscoll also reported that the Lawrence School Committee will hold a meeting on February 19, 1998 to focus on the Lawrence High School accreditation report. The School Committee and consultant have set the date of April 30, 1998 to choose a new superintendent for the Lawrence Public Schools. Dr. Driscoll also reported that there have been some personnel changes including the appointment of a new Acting Principal for Lawrence High School.

In response to Dr. Koplik's inquiry about Lawrence reapplying for accreditation, Dr. Driscoll clarified that the high school is nowhere near ready to reapply for accreditation. Dr. Delattre asked if school officials are ready to focus on student achievement by expecting more of those students. Dr. Driscoll stated that the realization of the system's dysfunction will promote serious changes in Lawrence. Mr. Peyser said structural changes at Lawrence High school will yield dramatic improvements in academic achievement.

Commissioner Antonucci informed the Board of the actions being taken to implement the Memorandum of Agreement. A search committee will be formed with four members named by the Commissioner and five others by the Mayor. The Commissioner also informed the Board that the superintendent's position is being advertised in the Boston Globe, Education Week and other publications.

On a motion duly made and seconded, it was: VOTED: that the Board of Education formally ratify the Lawrence Memorandum of Agreement.

The motion was made by Ms. Crutchfield and seconded by Mr. Koplik. The vote was unanimous.

5. House 1 budget Proposal - Update

Commissioner Antonucci reported that the House Ways and Means Committee hearing will be held in Springfield on February 24, 1998. He said the Governor's proposed increase for early childhood education is not at the level the Board proposed. Another issue is the Governor's inclusion of \$40 million for additional teachers. On the issue of special education, the Commissioner said: The issue of special education was not addressed because there was no bill at that time and the Governor decided simply to include what we requested in our budget. Commissioner Antonucci informed the Board that he will attend the House Ways and Means Committee hearing to advocate the Board's budget. Dr. Silber emphasized the Board's proposed increases in the budget. He stated: I think the Commissioner and I should stress that so far the recommendations of the Board of Education on these budgetary matters have been noted in the breach rather than in any acceptance. There is something strange about expecting educational reform while we continually reject one of the most important initiatives that we need, which is early childhood education. Chairman Silber recommended that the Board request a \$165 million increase in early childhood funding to bring the total to \$200 million. The Chairman continued: I think we should also testify that we should be free with this \$40 million, as the Governor indicated he would support, to use that money in a very constructive ad hoc way to provide tutorial work, to provide summer schools, and perhaps early childhood education. With all that extra money, perhaps we can meet some of our objectives for early childhood education by advising school committees of their freedom to use the additional funds that way. The Chairman concluded: It is discouraging to see how this recommendation of ours, for which there is such overwhelming scientific evidence about the importance of the early stimulation of these children, has been neglected.

6. School Building Assistance Regulations - Annual Adoption Of Cost Standards And Proposed Amendments-VOTE

Commissioner Antonucci introduced the annual change in the reimbursable rates for School Building Assistance Regulations and recommended a 3.5 percent increase in square foot costs. Also the requirements for wiring of schools for educational technology are proposed to be added to the regulations. Mr. Peyser requested clarification on whether the rates are based on a survey of school construction costs or general construction costs. Commissioner Antonucci said the number comes from both the survey of school construction costs and construction costs generally.

Mr. Peyser expressed concern on how the increase is determined. He stated: To some extent this process reflects a self-fulfilling prophecy. We say at the beginning of the year the inflation rate for the coming year is x and then because school construction costs or school construction is so dominated by the public sector, in fact we find that the inflation rate, at a minimum, hits what our reimbursement rate is for those projects. It seems that we ought to be focusing more on the costs of overall construction rather than school construction. At this point I do not have the necessary information to make some evaluation as to whether this number reflects the overall industry or the more narrow school construction industry.

Commissioner Antonucci introduced Jim Anderson, Administrator for School Building Assistance. Mr. Anderson stated that in order to determine the costs for school construction, items including contracts for all construction personnel, costs for construction goods and bids coming throughout the construction process are reviewed. Dr. Thernstrom inquired about the difference in inflation rate between the construction costs for public buildings and private industry buildings. Mr. Anderson explained that under the public law, general contractors have to go through certain requirements. He said: It is certainly different under the private bidding process.

Mr. Peyser commented that public school construction costs in Massachusetts are higher than in other states or private construction costs for other projects. He said: I am concerned that we are continuing to ratchet up what constitutes an adequate school building to the point where we can not even afford to do it anymore. Through the addition of this new requirement, we are increasing costs, we are ensuring that the reimbursement rate will be higher next year and by passively accepting the previous increases over the past year, we are again reinforcing that school construction is more expensive than I think it needs to be.

In response to a question from Dr. Thernstrom, Mr. Anderson again clarified that the construction process for public buildings is different than that in private industry. Mr. Peyser requested comparative information on construction costs between public and private buildings.

Dr. Silber commented: Having seen a great deal of construction going on in Boston University, I think that 3.5 percent really overlooks the inflationary pressure in the building industry. We contract with open competition and we look for the lowest bid of a competent contractor. I do not think we have ever seen a year in which the inflation, in recent memory, was only three and a half percent. Mr. Irwin commented that studies will show the highest rate of inflation is dependent on materials, sites and other similar things, whereas labor is comparable to any state, whether it is a union or nonunion state. Mr. Irwin also mentioned a study done by ENR finding that in non-union states, construction workers are not trained, whereas in the states that are union, wages are comparable. Dr. Koplik agreed with the recommendation to amend the regulations in terms of the technology infrastructure of school buildings, stating: You cannot build a building today without that wiring capacity.

On a motion duly made and seconded, it was: VOTED: that the Board of Education, in accordance with the requirements of Chapter 645 of Acts of 1948 as amended, approve as interim regulations, for purposes of soliciting public comment, proposed amendments to the School Building Assistance regulations, 603 CMR 38.00, as follows:

1. 603 CMR 38.06 (1), the school construction cost standards, shall be increased by approximately 3.5% for fiscal year 1999 as follows:

Elementary School \$158.00 per square foot (from \$153.00)

Middle/Junior High Sch. \$169.00 per square foot (from \$163.00)

High School \$180.00 per square foot (from \$174.00)

Vocational School \$191.00 per square foot (from \$185.00)

2. 603 CMR 38.03 (2) shall be amended to read:

"The design specifications for all projects, including those for the expansion and renovation of an existing building, shall meet the applicable requirements established by the Executive Office of Public Safety."

3. 603 CMR 38.03 (8) shall be amended to read:

"All projects shall include voice, data and video infrastructure capable of delivering industry-accepted bandwidth into every classroom and administrative office in the facility. Facilities shall be designed with [a] sufficient electrical service to support the equivalent of at least five computers per average instructional room; [b] adequate and appropriate utility space to host servers, routers, hubs, WAN head ends, and other local telecommunications equipment; and [c] adequate heating, ventilation and air conditioning to support the technology that will be installed in the school."

The motion was made by Mr. Irwin and seconded by Ms. Crutchfield. The vote was unanimous.

7. Approval Of Grants

The Commissioner recommended that the Board approve the grants as presented.

On a motion duly made and seconded, it was: VOTED: that the Board of Education

approve the grant for the Safe Schools Program for Gay and Lesbian Students, as presented by the Commissioner.

The motion was made by Ms. Crutchfield and seconded by Mr. Irwin. The vote was unanimous.

8. Mailbag

Chairman Silber explained that many of the inquiries in the mailbag have been answered specifically either by Commissioner Antonucci or himself.

On a motion duly made and seconded, it was: VOTED: that the Board of Education adjourn the meeting at 11:35 a.m., subject to the call of the Chairman.

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

Respectfully submitted,

Robert V. Antonucci
Commissioner of Education

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