

## Unapproved Minutes

District Elementary Enrollment Committee  
Wednesday, September 28, 2005  
3:00 – 5:00 p.m.  
Humiston Building, Meredith

Members present: Richard Hanson, Jeanne Chute, Peter Miller, John Hansen, Phil McCormack, Steve Kelley, Leslie Johnson, Juli Hird and Kay Marini.

Public: Carroll Bewley, Ed Engler, Connie Ryan

Meeting called to order at: 3:05 p.m.

Minutes: Mr. Hansen stated that he had received an e-mail message from Sandwich 5<sup>th</sup> grade teacher Patsy Buteau that said, “I need the minutes from the last ...DEEC meeting to be corrected.” Mr. Hansen noted that on page 2, paragraph 5 he is quoted as saying: “The Sandwich staff was in support of multi-age to address declining enrollment at SCS if they received the support needed to implement it.” Although Mr. Hansen did not dispute saying this at the last meeting, he noted that Mrs. Buteau disagreed in her e-mail message, stating: “This is not true. I, for one, do not agree this is a direction that is best for our students. I believe there are other ways to cut staff at our school.”

Mr. Hansen noted that in June 2005 an anonymous survey of the staff included the following statement: “SCS should address declining enrollment by creating more multi-age classrooms”. Respondents were asked to answer this question on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being *strongly disagree* and 5 being *strongly agree*. Three people *strongly disagreed* with the statement and three people *disagreed* with the statement. Six people *neither agreed nor disagreed*; zero *agreed*; and two *strongly agreed* with the statement. Written comments on the questionnaires from the six people who were ambivalent suggested that they would be in favor of multi-age with appropriate support. Subsequent discussions with the staff and a survey by Juli Hird in September led Mr. Hansen to believe that his statement from the last meeting to be correct. Mr. Hansen noted that he had assured Mrs. Buteau that he would correct the record at this meeting. Dr. McCormack asked if there were any objections to this and there were none. There was clarification that the previous minutes would not be changed, but that the current minutes would reflect this discussion.

Ms. Marini inquired what Mrs. Buteau’s alternative was to multi-age classes. Mr. Hansen stated that he did not know, other than Mrs. Buteau’s statement in her e-mail, “There are other ways to cut staff at our school.” Mr. Hansen did not know what specific cuts Ms. Buteau had in mind, but his own analysis was that the only other positions other than teaching staff that could be cut would be the principal and secretary.

Public input: There was none.

Dr. McCormack noted he had received e-mail from Sandwich Education Committee Chairman John Martin expressing concern about the inaccessibility of the current DEEC meetings to the public. His e-mail noted that previous meetings had been held in a variety

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of venues and at a variety of times in order to encourage public participation. Dr. McCormack noted that during the summer the meetings were scheduled in Meredith to take advantage of air conditioning.

Dr. McCormack read from Mr. Martin's e-mail, "The argument I would choose to submit were I able to attend tomorrow's meeting would be this: numeric parity is a fallacy for the simple fact that the process artificially increases Sandwich enrollment and does not address pedagogical parity – that of a common curriculum and educational model." Mr. Martin also addressed a concern with the awareness of the proceedings of the DEEC and that the meeting minutes of the September 14<sup>th</sup> meeting were not available on the website in a timely manner. He opined in his e-mail that, "Public input can only be obtained when the public has access to the process whether that be in person or by proxy."

While respecting Mr. Martin's opinions, Dr. McCormack noted that Sandwich has had a selectmen present at a minimum of four of the last meetings as well as Sandwich representation on the committee.

Dr. McCormack handed out a rough draft of a possible DEEC recommendation. He emphasized that this draft was simply a possible starting point, a tool to get the discussion moving. It read:

*It is the recommendation of the District Elementary Enrollment Committee that the Inter-Lakes School Board endorse and support the expansion of the multi-age model at the Sandwich Central School to include grades kindergarten through sixth grade.*

*The rationale for this recommendation is that this model is a viable solution to the issues related to the maintenance of a positive and productive learning environment for children, cost effectiveness, efficiency, and identity of the Sandwich community. It will also enhance consistency and stability in the school.*

*As was the case with our recommendation last year, there are a number of related issues that the School Board and administration will have to take into consideration. Some of these include training for staff, curriculum, staffing pattern, and school district policies related to class size (i.e., student to teacher ratios).*

Mrs. Johnson asked that the DEEC's charge be printed first.

Mr. Hanson read his prepared proposal for consideration:

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*The District Elementary Enrollment Committee has concluded its deliberations as to its charge of “(G)iven enrollment trends, how do we best manage and staff our elementary schools with respect to student needs, concerns of the three communities, and the financial resources of the Inter-Lakes School District” and makes the following recommendation to the Inter-Lakes School Board:*

*Effective with the school year 2006-07, the Sandwich Central School will incorporate a multi-age classroom model for the delivery of instruction to students of the Sandwich Central School.*

*This unanimous recommendation of the committee represents the culmination of many hours of discussion, debate and research on how to manage the reality of declining enrollments while maintaining a stable, consistent and challenging learning environment.*

Mr. Hanson noted that he thinks the history of the committee needs to be included. He also noted that the DEEC should communicate to the Board a need for assurances for continuity of this recommendation and providing the resources necessary to implement it.

Ms. Marini commented that the DEEC charge does not focus simply on Sandwich. The DEEC charge is global, but it seems that the committee then just jumps straight to Sandwich, she noted. Ms. Marini thought that the DEEC should include discussion about how to address enrollment issues at the other school too.

Dr. McCormack noted that the District has contracted with a consultant regarding enrollment projections. All indicators were pointing to a decline in enrollment at all schools. On the other hand, this committee has not focused on other schools in the District as the size of ILES makes it possible to address declining enrollment differently. Dr. McCormack reminded the committee that ILES reduced its staffing this current school year by a half-time kindergarten position due to a smaller than expected kindergarten enrollment; instead of four kindergarten sections, there are only three.

Ms. Hird shared thoughts on how to organize the DEEC recommendation. She concurred with some earlier ideas and added that the committee should then discuss some of the history of why the committee was formed and focused on Sandwich. Ms. Hird was concerned that if the proposal only made a recommendation without a discussion of the steps that have led the DEEC to this point, it might cause difficulty in the wider community.

Ms. Hird appreciated the statement about enhancing consistency and stability in Dr. McCormack’s proposed recommendation. She also would like bullets with a bit more depth regarding the related issues the Board needs to consider.

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Ms. Chute thought that by including history, it shows that the DEEC's focus is on Sandwich rather than on all District schools. Ms. Chute thought this was a good and important consideration.

Mrs. Johnson asked if ILES kindergarten had been three groups of 18 or 20, what would the District have done? Dr. McCormack noted that the Board and administration would have to look at the specific composition of the classes to decide how to proceed. The current three classes number about sixteen each, so this did not come up.

Mr. Hanson felt uncomfortable at the beginning when the group gave a title to this committee, calling it a "District" committee. He believes that the committee has spent 99.9% of its time dealing with the issue in Sandwich. He is still uncomfortable going to multi-age as a solution to solve all enrollment problems District wide. In the course of this discussion, Dr. McCormack noted that several people have stated that too small a class environment is also a problem.

Mrs. Johnson inquired if the cutoff for multi-age should be 4<sup>th</sup> grade. She has concerns about the curricular demands that begin around that time. She noted that the primary concern of those questioning the Sandwich school seemed to be financial and also equity. Mrs. Johnson commented that the equity in terms of adults in the classroom was already there, so really this issue is all about the financial piece. Then she asked if multi-age classes would actually save the District money? Mrs. Johnson asked if the goal was simply to cut a teacher and save money or to address a class size of six students or to address parity with ILES? She noted that the DEEC needed to address the potential cost savings in its recommendations.

Dr. McCormack said he thought it was more than that. He commented that the District should not be in a position where it has to make knee jerk reactions to enrollment changes. Such action is detrimental to the students' learning, to staff morale, and to the community as a whole. What it seems that the DEEC is reaching consensus on is one plan. What Dr. McCormack did not include in his draft proposal is the Town of Sandwich pursuing perhaps another plan that might include a special village district. Dr. McCormack did not think that fell under the DEEC's purview.

Ms. Hird said the DEEC needs to acknowledge the perception of inequities among the District's towns, and programmatic inequities. In Ms. Hird's eleven years, the program has changed back and forth and back at Sandwich. The question of inequities is a problem that needs to be addressed, so that all communities realize that there are inherent inequalities at both schools.

Mr. Hanson shares some of the concerns Ms. Hird stated, but noted that when you look at the big picture he is looking at the continuity and predictability of any solution. As much as this (multi-age) might not be a perfect solution, it does address declining enrollment in a responsible way. It's not as if we have many other options to consider. The other reality is that in the mid-term there may be some financial implications to this. This committee has always been the Sandwich Declining Enrollment Committee.

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Dr. McCormack noted the primary reason this was called a District committee was that decisions made about Sandwich would impact the entire District in many ways, depending on what decisions were made.

Mrs. Johnson asked for clarification of the Board class size policy regarding minimum class sizes. Would this recommendation only include classes that are below the minimum? What about a maximum class size? What is the number?

Dr. McCormack noted that that is a policy decision.

Ms. Chute asked Dr. Kelley about class sizes of ILES's multi-age classes of the past and whether the Board made limits to them. Dr. Kelley said there was no class size differentiation between straight grade and multi-age classes.

Mr. Miller like Mr. Hanson's opening introduction and agreed with Ms. Hird that some history is needed. It would be good for the public at large to know what we deliberated about. There should be some reference to how this committee came into being -- Mr. Miller believed that at least one SCS class fell below the Board policy threshold, causing the creation of the committee. Regarding the equity issues, he thought these were issues best left idle for now due to the differences at each elementary school. Mr. Miller has given some of the most vocal critics a chance to jump at the equity issues and they have not. He hopes that the pedagogical changes will appeal to the Sandwich community and even modest cost saving will appeal to other communities.

Mr. Miller noted that Dr. McCormack's draft did not have an implementation date. Dr. McCormack stated that is for this committee or Board to decide.

Mr. Miller believes this is a great prospect for SCS. In the second paragraph it is important to include a statement to the effect that the model can accommodate a fluctuating enrollment. In the last paragraph, Mr. Miller agrees with the issues that the Board should take up. Mr. Miller thought it might be a good idea to include some sort of statement that acknowledges the need to balance financial support for a multi-age approach with the financial needs of the District.

Ms. Hird asked whether it would be a good idea to divide up different parts of the recommendation among the committee members. Dr. McCormack had no objection to that.

Mr. Hanson stated that he believes that if we go to multi-age, it must be funded adequately. If not, this whole thing may be a terrible mistake. The Board has to clearly support that.

Mr. Hansen asked whether it was for the committee to make recommendations regarding what grades would become multi-age. He noted that if we follow the current pattern with a K-1, we would have a 2-3, a 4-5, and a stand alone grade 6. At some point in time, a small class would hit the sixth grade and he wondered what would happen at that time. Would

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there be pressure to have a 4-5-6 for one year only or perhaps send a small 6<sup>th</sup> grade class to Meredith for one year? It would be a similar situation if the combinations were 1-2, 3-4, and 5-6 insofar as a small class would affect the kindergarten at some point.

Dr. Kelley noted that a recommendation might need to state what is meant by multi-age – is this two grades, three grades? As a parent, I might be uncomfortable with three grade multi-age, but not with two grades.

Dr. McCormack didn't want to do something that might lock SCS and the staff into something that might not work later.

Mrs. Johnson did not anticipate that the whole school would go multi-age. She does not think that the public of Sandwich is expecting that. Mrs. Johnson noted concern with the students being in multi-age classes throughout their elementary career and to do so raises more questions of inequities.

Ms. Hird noted that in the past there were some multi-grade and some single grades. This led to discomfort among the staff. Pedagogically, a school should pick one approach or the other.

Mr. Miller likes multi-age because it allows for flexibility to determine the ideal application.

Dr. McCormack feels that a multi-age that spans three grades is too great. He thinks that perhaps the DEEC should put something in its recommendation that limits the recommendation to two grade level combinations.

As the discussion expanded to questions a number of possible scenarios, Mr. Hanson stated that the committee might be trying to find solutions to problems that are not within its purview.

Mr. Miller thought that the committee should allow for maximum flexibility for the administration. There may be some subject areas where combining three or more grade levels is desirable. We should trust this to the administration.

Ms. Hird felt that there should be a statement recommending no more than two grades being combined. For example, the 6<sup>th</sup> grade science curriculum is not appropriate for a 4<sup>th</sup> grade student.

Mr. Miller asked about more than two grades in music or gym class. Mr. Hansen said the same developmental concerns that Ms. Hird expressed regarding intellectual issues also apply to the physical development in a gym class.

Dr. McCormack felt that if numbers get so low that a two-grade combination isn't practical, and then he thought there would probably be a new DEEC. He also didn't think a two-grade class configuration would not limit the staff from making up groups that had a

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larger grade span. Someone noted that in a sense this is already done at SCS with reading buddies in which a sixth grade class might work with the third grade class for a short period of time in reading.

Mr. Hanson thought we should share in the final document a definition of multi-age.

Ms. Hird stated that a structure needs to be created that shows what the combined grades are going to be and we need to commit to that arrangement for a period of time. Dr. Kelley noted he had seen detrimental impact when such a stable and predictable structure is not in place.

Mrs. Johnson asked if the administration should have the flexibility to only combine what needed to be combined. We have had this issue for so many years, but then there was a Board policy that set lower limits for when a class would run as a single grade. Are we doing away with that with this recommendation?

Mr. Hansen discussed what he is trying to accomplish with stability. In the past, a small class would be combined with the next smallest class on either side of it. This combination often changed year to year, which did not allow for continuity for students or staff. Multi-age is one way to address this, if we select a grade arrangement and stick with it.

Dr. McCormack asked the rest of the committee about Ms. Hird's idea of dividing up the work for the final recommendation. Mr. Hanson felt that it should be limited to two or three people to work together. After a brief discussion, the committee, by consensus, determined that Ms. Hird, Mr. Hansen, and Dr. McCormack would work together on a draft.

Dr. Kelley noted that there are some challenges / issues that require further focus by the Board. Which grades should be combined? When should this be implemented? How many grades should become multi-age? What should the maximum class size be for a multi-age class?

Mr. Hanson wants a brief statement as to what multi-age is included in the final document.

Public input: Mr. Bewley noted that a quarterly Sandwich newsletter going out at the end of September to all taxpayers will include a questionnaire created by the Sandwich Education Committee. Mr. Bewley further noted that the people of Sandwich take pride in their community and the school. The loss of the school would be like a death in the family. At the same time, when there is a problem, they understand that has to be dealt with. If a fair and equitable solution is created, he believes they will support it.

Connie Ryan thanked the committee for all the time and effort put into this undertaking. She appreciates that a variety of models have been considered. One of the things that has struck her is that change can create stress, but unknown change creates even more stress. She thought that to this end, the recommendation should be as specific as possible, sharing

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the work and research that has been done; yet also leave some flexibility in the recommendation.

Michelle Martin noted that she is a parent of two students at the school as well as half of a sixth grade teacher. In her conversations with other parents she has learned of their desire for a long-term commitment – that is the biggest concern. They want to know what is happening.

Ed Engler asked for a brief explanation of the difference between multi-age and multi-grade classroom. After Ms. Hird provided the explanation, he asked if what is being done in the Sandwich K-1 is multi-age, not multi-grade? He was told it is multi-age.

Plus/Delta: Ms. Marini said we're getting there. Mr. Hanson noted that the group is coming together with more focus with a solution in sight. Ms. Chute appreciated the homework done by several that provided direction for today's discussions. Mr. Miller thinks we are very close to a set of recommendations that he can support enthusiastically. He believes a multi-age K-6 at SCS can be funded appropriate with there also being cost savings to the district. Mr. Hansen appreciated the solution is in sight. Dr. McCormack noted how well the committee has worked under a consensus model. Although that can be slow at times, it is fruitful. Dr. Kelley is pleased with the way the draft is going to come out, as everyone's voice will be heard in that draft. Mrs. Johnson said that being new to the committee, she still has some questions. She is concerned about the flexibility of a recommendation, especially with larger classes. She noted that minimum and maximum class size numbers need to be included in any recommendation. Ms. Hird is looking forward to the recommendation that is put together. She is feeling good about many of the related issues that will be put to the Board that she expects will come back to the faculty. She thought the faculty was feeling pretty good about the process and the possibilities of multi-age as a viable solution.

Next meeting is Wednesday, October 19, 2005 from 7:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. in Meredith at the Humiston Building.

Meeting adjourned at 4:52 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,  
John Hansen