

MINUTES OF REDISTRICTING
COMMITTEE MEETING
OF THE BOARD OF EDUCATION
Stamford, Connecticut
January 16, 2008

The Redistricting Committee Meeting of the Board of Education was held on January 16, 2008 at the Government Center, 888 Washington Boulevard. The meeting was called to order at 6:47 p.m. by Ms. Nabel, Chairperson, with the following Committee members present: Mr. Freedman, Mr. King, Ms. McManus, Ms. Nabel, and Mr. Rubino. Also in attendance: Ms. Lahiri-Hoherchak, Ms. Lorenti, Ms. Swerdlick, Dr. Singer, Ms. Thessin, representative from the Advocate, and approximately 75 guests.

Ms. Nabel reminded the public that this was a regular Committee meeting without "Time for the Public To Be Heard" on the agenda and unfortunately a Committee meeting is not an opportunity for there to be conversation between the Board and members of the public. There is a Regular Board meeting scheduled for next week and there is "Time for the Public to be Heard" on that agenda. She indicated that she had a note of apology to those who attended the Public Hearing at Cloonan. She had promised that any questions that were submitted in writing would be answered on the website. She noted that the three pieces of paper that people gave her were integrated into the five feet of paper that she carries around. She discovered those questions today and the answers will be up on the website tomorrow as part of the redistricting minutes.

Ms. Nabel noted that on tonight's agenda will be a review and hopefully a solidification of the recommendations we made for the two magnet schools, Westover and Hart, and some more discussion on the attendance/preference zone for the Environmental Magnet School. We will then proceed to a discussion on elementary school facilities.

Ms. Nabel introduced Rebecca Thessin who is a special assistant to Dr. Starr and who has become our expert on the State Department of Education and its continuing position on inter-district magnet schools. Ms. Thessin gave a report on the Environmental Magnet with respect to zoning and/or creating districts for this school.

Ms. Thessin indicated that the regulations for inter-district magnet schools require that all students who go to inter-district magnet schools be admitted through a lottery process. That is not saying that there could not be a preference

zone as described, but students in the preference zone must apply to go to the school. Therefore, if children in that zone choose not to go to the Environmental Magnet School or any inter-district school in Connecticut, they have to have the option of being assigned to another school such as the next contiguous school near the Environmental Magnet School. No students could be zoned according to State regulations to go specifically to the Environmental Magnet School and not have an option to go somewhere else.

Mr. Freedman stated that means that the numbers we assumed from assigning the Ursula Place district, which is 100-110 children, would probably end up being many fewer because while we could make that preference zone, but we could not make it an attendance zone. Ms. Thessin stated that you could not require the students there to go to the school.

Mr. Freedman noted that since that changes the numbers somewhat, he would propose to the Committee that we reconsider the recommendation that we made at the last Committee meeting and that we discuss this item further at the end of this meeting after the discussion of elementary school facilities. Ms. Nabel had no objection and noted that we would take the item out of order again at the end of the agenda.

Ms. Nabel moved to the Review of Magnet School Enrollment Recommendations and she asked Dr. Singer to distribute information she had prepared. Dr. Singer discussed the material that was shared at the December 11, 2007 Redistricting Committee meeting which has been revised slightly. In going over the number of students in each of the geographic areas that were included in this report, she realized that in some cases the number of students in the area included all K-5 students residing in the area, regardless of the elementary school that they attended, and in some cases it was all children residing in the area and attending a specific elementary school. For example, on Page 2, Webb's Hill area from Roxbury – right now the 38 children live in the Webb's Hill area on specific streets. Most go to Roxbury, but not all. Some children are at Hart, Westover and so on. So the data that you are seeing here are all students in particular geographic areas regardless of the elementary school in which they are enrolled so it makes it consistent across all the scenarios.

Ms. McManus asked that is why if you look on the first page under #1-Merrell Avenue – total of 76 children – 20 to Westover, 47 to Davenport and still another 9 go to the various magnet schools. Dr. Singer noted this was correct and that the first page of this document did not change. The total number of K-5 students residing in those three streets – 266 – of those 266 what we are accounting for here is 83 and 148 which is 231 – not 266. The remaining 35 students 23 are enrolled in magnet schools (12 at Hart, 4 at Toquam, etc.) Mr. Rubino noted that it should be 150 – last line at Davenport is 247 and should be 249 and the total should be 150. Dr. Singer agreed and will make the change.

Mr. Freedman asked that if the numbers received last time would represent whatever the incremental changes would be from a redistricting. So if we assume those incremental numbers with Hart he thought 108 was the number. That would be the incremental difference from a redistricting which is

really the number we are focusing on as opposed to the total number of children which includes children at magnet schools, the numbers we received last time are the children at the districted school. Dr. Singer stated that it was mixed. In some cases it was enrolled and in some cases it was total. She noted that Mr. Freedman was correct with respect to the three scenarios for Hart, all of it was enrolled.

Dr. Singer referred to the other memo and stated that there was a question at the December 11, 2007 about students living on streets off of West Avenue (Acosta, Burr, DePineda, etc.) and that list is in the second memo that was distributed. Ms. Lorenti asked if any of those students currently attend Westover and Dr. Singer will have to check and get back to her. Ms. Nabel stated that someone raised the question of a crossing guard. Ms. Lorenti reported that there is not a crossing guard at the service station. Dr. Singer referred to the next page and the question about which of the preferred area streets to Westover and these are the same streets that you had asked about are also preferred. Ms. Nabel asked if the Committee felt it was necessary to have Dr. Singer give us the numbers of the children who attend Westover currently? Ms. Lorenti stated that she was curious because she just, as we talk about the attendance zone, that we were not putting too many at Westover and also not taking away from the other schools. Since we haven't decided how large the attendance zone was going to be and she was not sure of how many students would be coming out of Stillmeadow or Davenport. Ms. Nabel asked if anyone on the Committee wanted further information about the preferred area streets (who is going to Westover and who isn't). Mr. Freedman stated that at the Public Hearing we heard a significant amount of comment that as long as the enrollment is capped at 120 per grade that the plan as we had recommended at the last meeting was acceptable and, given that, why at the last meeting it was voted out as a recommendation. He would say that in the desire to move this along that we approve the plan that was voted on at the last meeting. Ms. McManus stated that she did not have any need to make any changes to the Westover plan that had already been discussed. She felt it still gives us a very large, strong viable magnet school and a number of magnet seats to draw on from around the City. Mr. Rubino noted that we were aiming a little high at 720 only because if the district produces more than we think it is going to than we are going over what we hear is acceptable for that teaching model. He would recommend 700 and knows that you can adjust it by magnet seats, but then you have an imbalanced economically advantaged vs. disadvantaged if you do that. Mr. King stated that he supports on the plan that was recommended as long as we keep each of the classes to the 120 level which would total up to 720, but no more than 720. Ms. Lahiri-Hoherchak noted that she was curious to know what we are thinking about the streets that are currently preferred streets when talking about keeping the plan as it is. Ms. Nabel said that according to the minutes we left that hanging because we wanted to know what streets were currently in the preferred zone and now we know that. She thinks we need to act on that in one way or another and she wanted to be precise so that Dr. Singer knows what we are talking about. She thinks it is very clear that we are talking about a total enrollment of absolutely no more than 720 and absolute cap per grade of 120, but what we have in the minutes is Myano, Connecticut, Catoona, Alvord, and Whitmore. She just wanted to make sure that we go forward the correct streets with plus/minus

the current preferred zone seats. What we need to decide is the plus/minus the preferred zone seats.

Mr. Freedman said the question is “will the preferred zone streets stay as a preferred zone” and it is not a discussion that we are going to create a larger attendance zone. Ms. Nabel confirmed that this is correct. Mr. Freedman asked Dr. Singer if the list of preferred zone streets includes streets not within walking distance. Dr. Singer stated yes. Mr. Freedman asked if they are preferred zone streets for historic reasons – what is the rationale for why these streets were in the preferred zone. Dr. Singer responded that some of the streets are in the preferred zone go back to when Westover was initially created as a magnet many years ago because they are streets that are in the immediate vicinity of Westover. Other streets like North Street, Summer Street, Washington Boulevard, were streets that at one time were assigned to Hart and when the attendance area for Hart became too large, it was the recommendation to include those streets as preferred streets for Westover so that even though they were assigned to somewhere else, because they are streets closer to Westover than to some of the other schools, to give these children the opportunity to continue in a magnet school. Mr. Freedman noted that preferred zones exist for different reasons and are created at different times. The rationale behind the preferred zone for Westover certainly made sense to include Connecticut Avenue, but now that we have created a substantial attendance zone for the school, whatever historic reasons were behind the creation of these preferred zone areas no longer apply and at this point it is inequitable to make it easier for certain children to get into this particular magnet school as opposed to other children. He would suggest that now that we are creating an attendance zone for the school that we eliminate the entire preferred zone. That gives children, advantaged or disadvantaged, an equal opportunity to magnet into the school. A preferred zone was obviously created in part for reasons of balance and we have addressed those reasons. Ms. McManus asked Dr. Singer what percentage of students on those streets actually applied to attend Westover. Dr. Singer noted that the bulk of the students come from Myano, Merrell, and Connecticut Avenue. Ms. McManus asked if they will be in the attendance zone – the smaller number of children that come from other preferred streets. Dr. Singer noted that when these streets were part of the preferred area, not all students from the preferred area – could be accommodated because disproportionately they were minority students. Ms. McManus noted that we always had such a low percentage of minority students at Westover. Dr. Singer stated that there were more on the list that could have been taken—Ms. Nabel said this gives more credence to Mr. Freedman’s position of the necessity for the preference zone to be eliminated by the attendance zone that we are creating. Ms. McManus stated that she supports Mr. Freedman’s proposal, but would like to see before the full Board vote, the new attendance area taking out the preferred streets, as precise as possible, the mix of advantaged/disadvantaged of the attendance area. Mr. Rubino said that information is on Page 1. Ms. McManus asked do we have as part of that how many of the students already go to Westover and Mr. Freedman confirmed that we do. Dr. Singer stated that if these streets become the attendance area, she would guess that some students would continue to apply to Hart, Toquam, or Rogers and the new Environmental Magnet. Ms. McManus thought it was 31% and Ms. Nabel thought the information was in the packet of information we received in October. Ms. Nabel said that Ms. McManus’ question

is – if you take out the preferred streets and look at the attendance zone what is the breakdown of the advantaged/disadvantaged students in the attendance zone we have created. Ms. McManus added that she would like that information on the 720 figure. She thought it was around 30.5%. Ms. Lahiri-Hoherchak stated that from the notes of the last meeting that we calculated it was 82% of our attendance zone for Westover would be disadvantaged and that 82% is part of the 30%. Ms. McManus wants to make sure that those percentages of the 720 figure and not the current enrollment and thinks that they are, but did not need this information to vote tonight.

Mr. Freedman stated that if we have 720 students and have a target of roughly half advantaged and half disadvantaged that would be 360 each. The attendance zone includes most of the preferred zone students is 190 students (80 + 110). Ms. McManus said the disadvantaged number is 161 out of 360. Mr. Freedman said that would be about 40%. Ms. Lahiri-Hoherchak noted that we also have Alford, Catoona and Whitmore and Mr. Freedman noted that was correct and would be 24 more for a total of 205 and 75 are disadvantaged. That would be just about half of the target enrollment for disadvantaged. Mr. Freedman said it would be 65 + 96 + 15. Ms. McManus said she knows that very few disadvantaged families apply which is one of the reasons we are doing this. What she needs to find out from the current numbers of the advantaged students that are there, how many are from attendance zone/preferred zone. She really wants to find out if we are leaving enough open disadvantaged seats for the actual number of disadvantaged families in this district who will still apply. Mr. Freedman said that the enrollment is 638 and 31% are disadvantaged. That is about 190 disadvantaged at the school right now. If you subtract the students from what we know if preference zone students, the bulk of the preference zone students are 20 + 29 is 49, plus Merrell Avenue is 69. That means there are roughly 110 disadvantaged children who have applied to the school from outside the preference zone. So at 720 if we have 175 coming from the attendance zone, that leaves 185 to get to 360 and there is only 110 now. Ms. McManus noted that we will still have to do active marketing to balance the school. Ms. Nabel stated that 48% disadvantaged would be about 345 disadvantaged and 375 advantaged from the three areas that are outlined. She believes that refers back to the proposed attendance zone. There are 176 disadvantaged students. If you subtract that from 345 that leaves you with 170 magnet slots that would need to be filled and is exactly the district average. Ms. Nabel said Dr. Singer does not have to break out attendance zone numbers in terms of advantaged/disadvantaged. Dr. Singer said she could go back and look at the enrollment now, take out the children coming from the preferred and Ms. McManus said she did not need any further information. Ms. Nabel said that we are reasserting that we are recommending an attendance zone for Westover (Myano Lane, Connecticut Avenue, Catoona Lane, Whitmore Lane, and Alvord Lane) and we are dismantling the historical preference zone for Westover School.

Ms. Nabel asked Mr. Freedman to make a motion.

Mr. Freedman motioned, seconded by Ms. McManus that we replace the existing attendance zone for Westover with a new attendance zone which would

include Connecticut Avenue, Myano Lane, Alvord Lane, Catoona Lane, and Whitmore Lane and that we eliminate any existing preference zone for Westover.

The motion was passed with the following Committee members voting in favor: Mr. Freedman, Mr. King, Ms. McManus, Ms. Nabel, and Mr. Rubino.

Ms. Nabel reviewed the expansion of the Hart attendance zone to include the Long Ridge area from Stillmeadow which is defined in several places as 35 advantaged/16 disadvantaged for a total of 51 students and the Meadowpark area from Newfield with 50 advantaged/7 disadvantaged allowing for a lottery population of approximately 138 students at Hart. Dr. Singer confirmed that was Scenario B. Mr. Freedman stated that it was only the portion of Scenario B that included the Meadowpark area from Newfield and the Long Ridge area from Stillmeadow. Dr. Singer stated that the numbers are all the children within the Meadowpark and Long Ridge areas whether they are from Meadowpark enrolled in Newfield or not and similarly Long Ridge all the children whether they are currently enrolled in Stillmeadow or not. Mr. Freedman stated that whenever we do a redistricting, the numbers from last time build in some assumption that some number of students won't magnet out so this is probably a more accurate number. Not everybody in a particular area is going to go to their neighborhood school. So whatever the historical pattern is for children magnetizing out we can make some assumptions that it will be similar going forward. Dr. Singer said that assuming at Westover the number of magnet seats associated with the lottery may be reduced as a result of the attendance area and if any other changes are made to the magnet schools. Mr. Freedman said that in any case the numbers between the two are not that different.

Ms. McManus stated that she thought that we do need to discuss the material and that so many parents have come to us and so she thinks it is fair to have that discussion. Obviously the enrollment at Hart is down this year and we are using this year's number. She is not advocating one thing or the other, but we do have in our budget this year to give support from downtown to help Hart reinvigorate their magnet and have it become a more vibrant program as it has been in year's past. With that she wants to make sure that we all feel we are leaving enough lottery seats open for people to magnet into the program. We came to a middle ground at the last meeting and just want to make sure that this is enough seats. She was in favor of leaving the number of magnet slots at 170, but some thought it should be cut down to 120 and we came to the middle of 140. Ms. Nabel said we actually started at 90. Ms. McManus stated that if we currently have 170 why we would want to limit that magnet. We can have the attendance zone work to the balance we think we feel we need by moving different neighborhoods in. Mr. Freedman said at the end of the day there is a limit to how finely we can slice this. He would support what we recommended last time and thinks it was a fair compromise that was arrived at after significant amount of work and input from the public. Mr. Freedman noted that compromise means that not everybody gets what they want. Ms. McManus said she had not looked at the previous years and had only been looking at the current year enrollment numbers and that does skew the numbers. Ms. Nabel noted that we don't have the magnet numbers, but we do have the attendance numbers for the five schools. There isn't a huge amount of variation. Ms. McManus stated it was

100 students in three years and that was obviously because of the strength of the magnet because the attendance zone hasn't fluctuated that much.

Ms. Nabel asked Dr. Singer if the Meadowpark area and Long Ridge area are self-contained polygons that we have not already split. Dr. Singer noted that they are not polygons, but a set of streets and she can provide the list. Mr. Rubino confirmed that we are at 140 and Ms. McManus responded that is what we compromised on last time. Ms. Nabel said she thought that the compromise we arrived at that balances the attendance zone and allows for a healthy portion of magnet seats will serve the school well and is satisfied with the compromise. Mr. Freedman pointed out that if you take the 5 year enrollment from Dr. Singer and subtract the district enrollment from the enrollment going back to 2004, the total enrollment has dropped 100, but the magnet population has dropped in half from 340 to 170 and that is a precipitous decline. Ms. McManus noted that she understands that and which is why we have money in the budget for next year which obviously could be cut out, but hopes not, to help the school build the magnet program back up to the vital program that it was. It was and is a fabulous program and feels that it is incumbent upon us to help make it work and I think we are giving up at 140.

Ms. Lahiri-Hoherchak stated that she would be happy to keep at least 160 magnet seats at Hart since we are saying when it was successful it was 340 magnet seats. The goal is for it to be successful again and can we really have that as a goal if we don't allow for that room. There is a perception involved and if the perception is that when you cut magnet seats at a school you are not fully supporting the magnet program, then does that perception just lead to a spiral affect where even if you put more money there it is not going to bring anymore success. They have also had significant administrative turnover in recent and maybe the drop in is related to the program itself. Mr. Freedman noted that Ms. Lahiri-Hoherchak is a Rogers parent and given that Rogers has the lowest percentage of magnet seats as the percentage of its total population, would you consider that a weakness of the school. Ms. Lahiri-Hoherchak responded that she would want him to remember that that percentage has increased significantly over the years as the school has become a stronger program. Mr. Freedman noted that the number of magnets slots as a percentage of the enrollment was still pretty low – 25-30%. Ms. Lahiri-Hoherchak noted it will continue to grow every year. You can't expect it to go from 6% when she started there up to 50% and remember when we were down at 6% we had a much bigger district. Mr. Freedman said one could make a reasonable counterargument which is that when a school becomes more balanced it has a better chance of attracting a balance of magnet applications. Ms. Lahiri-Hoherchak responded that unfortunately a lot of things are about perception. Mr. Freedman stated that perception could cut either way. Ms. Lahiri-Hoherchak stated that she is not disagreeing that we shouldn't give more of a majority or advantaged attendance area to Hart to balance it a little bit more, but would be happy to keep open more seats. We are only talking about the difference between 140 and 160. Mr. Freedman stated it is probably a difference that we can't control for anyway. Ms. Lahiri-Hoherchak said let's set a goal for 160. Mr. Freedman said we set the goal by creating an attendance zone, but the question then is how large is the attendance zone. Mr. Rubino asked what the capacity of Hart is and Dr. Singer answered 480. Mr. Rubino noted that if the capacity is 480 and we are talking

about 140 magnet slots and how many additional students would the Meadowpark area and Long Ridge area give us. Mr. Freedman stated it would be 108. Mr. Rubino confirmed that we would be right at capacity.

Ms. Nabel asked if anyone on the Committee would like to change or amend the recommendation. Hearing no changes she asked for a motion to codify the Committee's recommendation regarding the attendance area and portion of the magnet seats for Hart Magnet Elementary School.

Mr. Freedman moved, seconded by Mr. King to expand the current attendance area for Hart Magnet Elementary school to include what is defined in Scenario B as the Meadowpark area from Newfield Elementary School and the Long Ridge area from Stillmeadow Elementary School with the understanding that before the full Board votes that Dr. Singer will give us the list of streets.

The motion was passed with the following Committee members voting in favor: Mr. Freedman, Mr. King, Ms. Nabel, and Mr. Rubino. Opposed: Ms. McManus.

Ms. Nabel indicated that they would be saving the discussion of the Environmental Magnet attendance zone to the very end of this meeting and moved onto Elementary School Facilities.

Ms. Nabel indicated that everyone had a copy of the slides that were presented at the January 3, 2008 and January 8, 2008 meetings because these have been the templates that we have discussed thus far and so far have relied on in terms of our discussion on maintaining a certain number of elementary schools within the district. She noted that in using our redistricting criteria to construct and evaluate closing scenarios we are examining a snapshot of five elementary schools chosen within enrollments this year of under 550. For each school that is on the list we are looking at balance, at walkers, at bus rides, fiscal footprint and impact of each school and the potential disruption from not maintaining that school as a working school in Stamford. There have been two very vocal community meetings, a very well attended and very long public forum at which we heard from many members of the public. The Redistricting Committee has arrived at this juncture after many months of debating the fiscal future of our schools, a debate which is necessary because we are opening a new environmental magnet school and setting an attendance or preferred or some sort of zone for that school necessitates not only incorporating it into the attendance pattern of the district, but also into the budget for the school district as a whole. We have heard from many people and we have been called to the Board of Finance and have heard their opinion. She thought it was important at this point to get a sense from the Committee on where we are in discussion of closing or transitioning an elementary school. She wanted to make sure that every Committee member has the opportunity to speak if they wish. She thought we should respond to the many people from the public hearing who are disturbed, upset, who are very worried about the future about their school and who have shared their worries with their children, and she knows that none of us have a desire to prolong that kind of uncertainty for members of our school community. She thought it was incumbent on the Committee at this point to move ahead, but also thought that the Committee needs to touch base with each

other and confirm whether or not we are still of a like mind in pursuing this direction.

Ms. Nabel further stated that she has been heard the outcry from the community and responsive to the argument that we are elected to be the defenders of our students and we are elected to be the people who go to other City boards and demand and get everything we need for our students and she has heard that all of a sudden we are backing down and not asking for everything we can get. She noted that she has been on the Board for seven years and got on the Board at a time when the Board of Education was almost unanimously vilified by other City boards for being wasteful, fiscally irresponsible, and for being fiscally ignorant. She said that in one of her ears she hears “Go out there and fight for what our kids need” and in her other ear she hears “Make sure that the children indeed will benefit from what we are saying they will need.” She feels like someone has to be the parent here and say asking for everything you need and asking for everything you can get is easy on the surface. She honestly believes not operating 13 elementary schools will enable us to focus our resources and deliver the kinds of support to our children that they need. She cited conversations she has had with different staff members and what she hears is “I don’t want to operate my school without the resources I have. I don’t want to operate my school without being able to deliver the support to the students that they absolutely need.” She firmly believes that we will not have enough money if we operate 13 elementary schools. Maybe we will have it this year, but we will not have it when we open a new school to deliver the support we need across 13 elementary schools and so she supports continuing this discussion. She thinks however that we can move fairly quickly toward a solution that will hopefully answer what parents have also repeatedly said which is “you need to show us that if you close our school we will have the same quality education that we have now.” She also firmly believes that every school in our district is a quality school. Everyone has come out and has been proud of their school. Everyone wants their school to stay open. She is confident that whatever school is not in operation we can do a better job for the students who may attend a different school building.

Mr. Freedman referred to the comment Ms. Nabel made about when she was elected that the Board of Education was vilified for being wasteful and irresponsible. He thinks that a lot of the parents in this audience were at the Board of Finance meeting on Monday and there was definitely a pronounced strain of that from the Board of Finance at that meeting. The general tone he heard from the Board of Finance is that we have roughly a \$200M budget and that it is our decision as to whether or not we want to operate 12 elementary schools or 13, which implies not so subtly that there is some amount of slack in our budget that we can eliminate. It was reported in the paper that we did not answer one of their questions, but it was not reported that they did not answer one of my questions, which was if they believe there is slack in our budget then what would they like us to cut. I offered them some options – we have \$6M that we spend on social workers and psychologists - would they like us to cut that? Would they like us to cut the \$5M that we spend on Special Education teachers? Would they like us to cut the \$10M that we spend on school librarians and guidance counselors and on reading teachers? He did not get an answer. He thought that at the end of the day it was a question that he posed to John

Louizos which sums up the situation which would he view favorably a solution that involves 12 schools as opposed to 13 that is sound educationally and that people agree is reasonable. Mr. Louizos is very smart and a lawyer, and so he really didn't answer my question. So I asked him again and his response was that the devil is in the details, but that he would support a smart plan. At the end of the day it isn't really about 13 versus 12, but about a consensus plan that makes sense and that has broad support. Many people have asked us for over many months to try and find a consensus solution that works, but the problem is that it is not an easy thing to develop given the complexity of what we are dealing with and that this Committee operates in a highly charged environment that is quite public. It is in the spirit of this consensus that he would like to present a plan this evening to the Committee, and while it may sound obvious once it is laid out he assured all that it was anything but obvious to develop and it took a lot of time to work out the details and for a consensus to develop that change could be positive.

Ms. McManus stated that she certainly does not want to close a school and when we started this Committee last February she would venture that closing a school was not on our agenda. In the past when the Board - and only a few of us are still on the Board from 3-4 years ago - went to the City and asked for this new school, our budget increases were in the range of 5%. They varied each year, up and down, but they were right around 5%. She thought that all felt that if we needed another 1-1/2% to 2% to open the new school that it would be supported. At that time to keep our schools running year to year with no changes in the program was about a 4-1/2% increase. Last year as we know the City went through a lot of changes because of reevaluation and we were given only a 2.7% increase. Last year we cut 10 central staff positions because the Superintendent would not cut any teaching positions. He did not want the cuts to come out of what happens directly one on one with the children. Also, last year we were all given the impression that increases this small were not going to be a one time deal. The reevaluation is continuing on and everyone is very concerned about property taxes in the City of Stamford. That is really when we really started talking about how are we going to open this 21st school. She does not want to always call it a 13th elementary school because it is also a middle school. So how are we going to open this 21st school when for a several years running we are going to be having some lean years. Our Federal and State grants are either flat or down, while salaries and benefits for our staff go up well over 4% every year. In her mind if in 2009 we open a 21st school and we are given generously a 5% increase in our budget that means we will have to make real cuts to programs across the board in all 21 schools. At the elementary schools our class sizes will increase, and we will not have 20 students in a class and will probably be pushed to 23-24-25. High school electives will be cut. There are only so many things we can cut. We can't cut the busses out since we have to bus students, we can't cut salaries and benefits, we have to heat the schools, and we have to provide health benefits. So all we can do is to cut is staff. It is the only thing we can do and we don't have much central staff left to cut. Her concern, if we are going to have a couple of lean years in opening a 21st school, that we are going to have to cut a lot of programs across the board. She finds that much worst to all the children in the City of Stamford then closing a school building. She does not love any of it, but just can't imagine the cuts we would have to make three years from now if we leave 21 schools open. People have

said to us that we don't know how to fight for the money. Most of those people have never been with us at a budget fight every spring. Last year the property owners in Stamford were out en masse, and while she does not disagree with them since we have a lot of senior citizens on fixed incomes and they have a terrible time with the big increases in property taxes last year, but most of our parents have not seen the battles we go through to try and get each and every little dollar, and getting the 8% increase that we will need to open a 21st school in those couple of years, she does not see how that is possible. She would much rather have 20 really strong schools than 21 stripped less-than-the-optimum schools. This is her reasoning behind her comments made at the Committee meetings.

Mr. Rubino agreed with Ms. McManus. He thinks we have a fiscal need to take this act now. There maybe program cuts in the future, but we are minimizing that possibility by taking this act and not having 13 elementary schools. We can't put ourselves into the position where we commit ourselves to 13 schools and then get the rug pulled out from under us, and that has happened in the past. The Board of Finance can say whatever they want, they can make whatever promises they want, but the members of the Board of Finance change and they are subject to much different pressures than we are. As Ms. McManus said there is a strong taxpayer lobby and we just can't depend on representations from the Board of Finance right now. The luxury they have is, we are managers and have to run a budget and actually run an organization. They just sit back and criticize. He noted that he loves the Board of Finance and it was a great Board and you did not have to take responsibility for anything, but we do and we will be criticized in the future if we don't take our medicine now. What he fears is that if we don't take our medicine now and that we end up not getting the money to run 13 schools that we keep open, it will be a school system you don't want to be in.

Mr. King stated that he did not have much to add, but did agree with Ms. McManus and Mr. Rubino. He stated that he has only been on the Board this time for about 6 months, but he assured everyone that when he was on the Board earlier we had the same issues that we had to deal with and no one likes the decision we have to make now, but also stated that every time he sees some of his close friends who sit on the Board of Representatives and the Board of Finance, they remind me that 61 cents out of every dollar for the City goes to the Board of Education and we all should be aware of that. That is the kind of pressure that we feel that 60% of the money that is raised from taxpayers does go to supporting the schools. The biggest thing for him is that he does not want to see us water down our academic potential in this City because we want to do something that is easy. We all have to take on the challenge of being part of something that has changed and hopes that the proposal represents a win-win situation. He appreciates everyone that has come out and appreciates the challenge. We are here to make the best decision that we can and hopes that it is a win-win situation.

Ms. Nabel added, and felt that everyone agrees; we wish that we could find a way to harness the outcry that has risen through our having these public discussions and the public airing of our numbers. She hopes that many of the parents who have become energized will come to our budget meetings which are

taking place all of this month so that they can know what we are fighting for. She thinks that it is fair to say also that there is no other Board in the City that knows the Board of Education budget as well as we do. Mr. Rubino hit the nail right on the head – the Board of Finance has a tendency to sit back and criticize and make suggestions that they never have to be held accountable for. We are held accountable for every single one of the fiscal decisions that we make.

Mr. Freedman added that we keep focusing on March 2009 as the critical juncture in all of the slides that we have been presenting going back many months, but there is actually a critical juncture long before March 2009 and that is March 2008. This year's budget is more important than the March 2009 budget because it comes first and would encourage everyone in this room, as much energy as you have shown in this process, to show the same amount of energy in helping us fight for our budget this year with the other City boards.

Mr. Freedman stated that while it may sound obvious now, he assured everyone in the audience that we would not have taken this long to develop this plan or gone through a tumultuous process if it were that obvious in its development. The plan is essentially to move the entire student body of Toquam to the new magnet school. There are a number of compelling reasons that suggest this plan. There has been a lot of discussion that in any acceptable plan we need to provide as at least a rich an educational experience as the children have at their present school. The new school is a magnet school like Toquam is and as such has the additional resources and the additional staffing that a magnet school has. The numbers for this level of staffing have been built into all the budget estimates that we have been providing to the public during this entire process.

The second reason, as he has stated many times, is that both the building and campus are going to be spectacular, and suggested people visit AITE if they want to see the level of architecture and the richness of the facilities that we can provide when the State of Connecticut pays for the construction costs. Also, the school sits on 13 acres which he believes makes it the second largest campus of any elementary school after Davenport.

The third reason, the new magnet school ends not in 5th grade, but in 8th grade which would mean students entering from Toquam would have the option to remain at the school through 8th grade. The middle school component will be unique in Stamford in that it is going to be quite small and intimate. He pointed out that this proposal addresses only moving the children. The moving of the children is much easier than moving the staff which involves a whole host of contractual and educational issues and he will look to Dr. Starr to determine the best plan.

Mr. Freedman also pointed out that at the time of its approval there was a commitment made to the Cove neighborhood that they would have access to this school and this plan in no way compromises that commitment. The classroom space that is proposed to be used to accommodate the children from Toquam would otherwise be empty, and as the children from Toquam graduate and phase out they would be replaced with grades enrolled by whatever magnet

enrollment process we design. He suggested that we design a magnet process that gives a lot of opportunity for children from the Cove area to go to the school.

Finally he would like to give credit to his fellow Redistricting Committee members who have focused solely throughout this process on what is best for the kids and particularly gave credit to Mr. Rubino who initiated the thinking of moving one school to another and also catalyzed the process that led to this proposal. He also thanked the Toquam parents have been quite considerate and intelligent in their contributions to this entire process. There are obviously details to be worked out and I would look forward to a collaborative process to work out a final plan.

Ms. McManus asked that we would allow Toquam parents the option to go to their districted school if they don't want to go to the downtown school. That was confirmed by Mr. Freedman. Are we thinking about including a sibling policy so that brothers and sisters of children could get a preferred application to the new magnet or is this part of the detail that we are to discuss? Mr. Freedman stated that is one of the details. We have a magnet sibling policy now which guarantees entry into the school if you have a sibling at the school, and that would be reasonable to consider. He also mentioned that this is a pre-K through 8 and if we decided on a sibling policy, the sibling could come into pre-k. Ms. McManus asked about the middle school portion because there are very small numbers of middle school children that will come from Stamford and did not think that all of the Toquam students would be able to move up into the middle school. We have to look at the numbers. Mr. Freedman responded that if he understands this correctly from Ms. Thessin – we decide on which grades we open with and so tell the State when we open the school we are going to begin with pre-K, K and 1st grade, for example, and those grades will be enrolled using whatever magnet enrollment process we decide on. The rest of the space, which would be 2nd through 8th grade, would be considered by the State to be swing space and usable at our option. Ms. McManus stated that as we open middle school as part of the magnet the number of seats will be greatly reduced. Are you talking about waiting 4 or 5 years and Mr. Freedman responded that if you came in as a 5th grader from Toquam the following year the 5th graders from Toquam would become the original 6th grade, the next year the original 7th grade, and the next year the original 8th grade. Ms. McManus stated that she did not think there was room for the out-of-district magnet kids that we will have to put in there and the Toquam kids. Mr. Freedman responded there will be since we are phasing in the magnet grade from the bottom. Ms. McManus noted we don't need the middle school seats anyway.

Mr. Rubino noted that this is the beginning and the details are not all worked out and we have a lot of work to do. Ms. Nabel stated that Mr. Freedman had discussions with some of the Toquam parents, but it seems that we need to do two things at once here. One is to really hone in on the questions we need to have answered like if we have a sibling policy what is the span and what exactly are the numbers. Mr. Freedman stated that one of the questions is what do we do with this coming year's kindergarteners into Toquam. and how many can we admit. We need to make some provision at Toquam next year for incoming kindergarteners who are siblings of existing Toquam children. He said it needs to be addressed since it affects this year's magnet lottery. Ms. Nabel indicated

that while staff is working on that we need to go to Toquam and meet with the Toquam parents, not just the Board but the administration as well, take questions, answer what we can and take the other ones back. Since they are the only group that is the most directly affected by this, it is incumbent upon us to work with them to make this a winning situation for them. We will need to schedule a public community meeting at Toquam in the next 3-4 weeks. Mr. Freedman noted that the Community Partners meeting format that we have had a couple of times is an excellent one since we present some information to the parents, take questions during the presentation, have a discussion, and then break out into separate groups.

Ms. Nabel said she knows that she will have a lot of questions about how this will work with the staffing piece because one of the things we heard from all our schools. We do want to ask Dr. Starr and the administration of the school and perhaps a representative from SEA to begin discussions on how that will work immediately. Ms. McManus stated that was going to be her comment – she thinks Richard and Dr. Starr need to set up appointments with the head of the SAU and the SEA. We obviously can't require any teacher to move there and it is certainly up to them as individuals. This is one of the things we will have to talk through.

Ms. Nabel stated that she is hearing from the Committee that there is positive reaction to this plan. For the sake of clarity can we assume this is the direction we are going in? It seems this eliminates any further need to discuss Davenport, Hart, Murphy, or Rogers as potential buildings to close. If the Committee is unified in its desire to pursue the idea of transitioning Toquam into the new Environmental Magnet School she would need a motion. Mr. Freedman said before making a formal motion he thinks we have to talk to the parents and have the Committee meetings at Toquam to make sure that it can be flushed out. Ms. Nabel stated she wants a sense from the Committee that everyone agrees this is a positive direction to go in, and that taking this direction for the foreseeable future eliminates further need to discuss other school buildings as potential closings. The Committee agreed. Mr. Rubino said that he would make a formal motion that we indicate that to you just so we are not spinning our wheels.

Mr. Rubino moved, seconded by Mr. King that this Committee indicate whether or not it would like to move forward with the plan to move the Toquam student body to the new Environmental Magnet. Ms. McManus suggested "moving forward with working out the details to make sure it is as viable as it sounds."

The motion was passed with the following Committee members voting in favor: Mr. Freedman, Mr. King, Ms. McManus, Ms. Nabel, and Mr. Rubino.

Mr. Freedman stated that now that we know we cannot assign an attendance zone to the Environmental Magnet school, that the attendance zone from Toquam that we contemplated assigning to the new magnet at our last meeting has to be assigned to another school if we are going to move ahead with our plan with Toquam since it can't be assigned back to Toquam. He thought that we should get more data, people can think about and then we can

talk about it at the next meeting. We should have a preference zone for the new Environmental Magnet school and would suggest that the preference zone be any child who can walk to the school. That would include most or all of the East side district for KT Murphy and most or all of the district immediately surrounding Rogers. We need to know from Dr. Singer how many children that preference zone would include. It would be a large preference zone with a lot of children in it and so if we didn't cap it, probably the entire Environmental magnet school would fill with children from that preference zone. So we would need a cap. There are 45 Stamford students per grade at the new magnet, and we had recommended an attendance zone providing 20, but there was an assumption that on top of that attendance zone there would also be students magnetizing in from KT Murphy and Rogers. So he thinks the cap should be some number higher than 20, perhaps 30 which leaves about 15 magnet slots per year for students from areas other than the preference zone and that certainly demonstrates a significant commitment to the Cove area that they will have a preference to get into the school. This is the basic idea and we don't have to move on this tonight. Ms. McManus stated that it should truly be walkers, not the one mile and Mr. Freedman stated this was correct. Mr. Freedman also pointed out that we received a memo in our packet this week that the walking access from Cove Road, which tremendously expands the walking district, appears to have real potential to happen by the time the school opens. It was received favorably by Proctor & Gamble (Clairol). Mr. Rubino asked if you would include East Main Street in a preference zone. Mr. Freedman responded that probably not north of East Main Street because they would have to cross East Main Street, but if we determined that they could walk then they would be in the preference zone. Ms. Nabel asked if Clairol approves that change, what other approvals are needed. Ms. McManus stated that from the letter it doesn't sound like they are giving us an easement, but just allowing children to walk through. Mr. Freedman said we would probably want an easement, but in any case the City would be likely to approve it if they were not going to charge us and it was going to benefit the entire neighborhood. Mr. Rubino stated that we need some certainty on this issue.

Ms. Nabel proposed that we table the Environmental Magnet School zone for tonight and asked Dr. Singer if we have a breakdown of the advantaged/disadvantaged of the Toquam 2 area. Dr. Singer responded that we had this information last time. Mr. Freedman stated that in asking for this data, we need the total and the advantaged to disadvantaged. Dr. Singer confirmed that the information being requested is for the true walkers and the Committee agreed that is what they were requesting.

Mr. Freedman requested the following data:

Number of children in each of the polygons on the map broken out by advantaged vs. disadvantaged, total number of children, number that are at the home school, number that are at each of the four magnet schools (Hart, Rogers, Westover and Toquam) because we need to know the trend for how many of these children magnet out, and also the number of children who are of district whether they are bilingual, etc. It all has to add up to the total number.

He also requested information on the number of walkers vs. the number of bussers in the following districts: Newfield 1, Stark 1, and Stillmeadow 1 and we need to have an idea of where the walkers/bussers are by street. We need an update of what schools have out-of-district bilingual students, what grades, and what is the enrollment by grade. Also, would like to know the potential walker status for the following areas: Toquam 3 (can those children walk to Stark), Westover 1, 2, and Toquam 1 (can those children walk to Rogers), portion of Newfield 3 that is east of Grove Street if those children can walk to Stark, and if there is any portion of Stillmeadow 1 that is east of Strawberry Hill Avenue that could walk to Stark.

Ms. Nabel said that we now have to move on to our original purpose which is balancing schools that need to be balanced and explore the Toquam transition with the parents and the staff.

Ms. McManus requested that with the changes the Committee has already moved, moving neighborhoods to Hart, moving neighborhoods to Westover, could we look at the advantaged/disadvantaged students left at any of those schools that we pulled those children out of (part of it is Davenport, Stillmeadow, and Newfield). Mr. Freedman requested what the enrollment is (advantaged/disadvantaged) based on what we have recommended already.

Mr. Rubino moved, seconded by Ms. McManus to adjourn the meeting at 8:30 p.m. with the following Committee members voting in favor: Mr. Freedman, Mr. King, Ms. McManus, Ms. Nabel, and Mr. Rubino.

Joshua P. Starr, Ed.D.
Superintendent of Schools
Executive Officer