



LOWELL SCHOOL COMMITTEE
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Dominik Lay
Vice-Chairperson

Finance Subcommittee Meeting
Thursday, December 5, 2024
Central Administration Building
TV Studio - 5th Floor
4:30 p.m.

Fred Bahou
David Conway
Eileen Delrossi
Jackie Doherty
Connie A. Martin

Subcommittee Members Present:	Chairperson Bahou, Mr. Conway and Ms. Martin
School Committee Members Present:	Ms. Delrossi and Mr. Lay
School Department Personnel Present:	Dr. Pinto, Assistant Superintendent of Finance

Chairperson Bahou called the meeting to order at 4:31 p.m. The following agenda items were discussed:

1. [By Jackie Doherty]: Request the Superintendent provide the committee with: a. a finance update on the purchase order process and payment timelines b. how to get approved vendor status c. compensation schedules to teachers for professional development and other time outside standard work hours d. the policy for reimbursing staff for appropriate school-related purchases
2. Review RTM - Abrahams Report:
 - a. Abrahams-Report-Memo
 - b. Abrahams-Report-Data
3. ESSER-Funds - Allocation and Use

Chairperson Bahou asked Dr. Pinto to address the 3 agenda items.

Dr. Pinto began by addressing Ms. Doherty's motion. He discussed the School Committee's policy, DJBR – Purchasing Procedures, which outlines a timeline based on the type of purchase order being requested. There are two categories: goods and services. If a proper quote is attached to the requisition, it should be approved within a few days. Once the requisition is approved and a purchase order is issued, the items must be received by the purchaser. After receiving a receipt, the vendor will send an invoice, which should be processed during the same

week it is received. Invoices are matched with the purchase order and forwarded to City Hall on an Accounts Payable (AP) sheet, which is processed weekly, except during holiday weeks (Thanksgiving and Christmas). Checks are sent to vendors on Fridays, and vendors should receive a check within 2–3 weeks of the invoice being received.

Contractual services are handled differently, depending on the cost. For contracts under \$5,000, quotes are required, and sound business practices must be followed when entering the requisition. Once the requisition is approved, services can be rendered after the purchase order is approved. For contracts between \$5,000 and \$9,999, the Committee must approve the purchase through the Permission to Enter (PTE) process, and no further action can be taken until the PTE is received. Once the PTE is received, the requisition can be entered and approved within a few days.

For contracts between \$10,000 and \$24,999, the Committee's approval is required for the PTE, and three quotes must be included in the requisition. Once the three quotes are submitted and the PTE is received, the requisition can be entered and approved within a few days. For contracts between \$25,000 and \$99,999, Committee approval for the PTE is required, along with three quotes. The contract process with the City of Lowell must be initiated, and depending on the contract's complexity, this process may take several months.

For contracts over \$100,000, the request must be sent out to bid, and a scope of services must be prepared and shared with the City of Lowell's Procurement Officer, who will advertise the bid for two weeks prior to the open bid date. A contract must also be initiated with the City of Lowell. New vendors must provide a W9 to the School Department, and the Purchasing Office will handle vendor setup.

Compensation schedules for teachers involved in professional development and other activities outside regular work hours are governed by the collective bargaining agreements.

Currently, there is no policy for reimbursing staff for purchasing materials outside of Student Activities. All purchases should be directly related to the club or activity that staff are sponsoring or participating in. It is preferred that staff follow the established procurement procedures (Policy DJB-R). Unauthorized purchases that bypass the accepted procurement process can lead to budgeting inaccuracies.

Staff should follow the appropriate chain of command (department head, principal) to seek approval for purchases.

- Staff have designated budget lines for supplies and materials at their sites.
- The Committee does have a reimbursement policy, which is outlined in Policy DKC – Expense Reimbursements.

Mr. Bahou inquired about DocuSign and whether it would help with this process. He stated that DocuSign was addressed in the Abrahams report and also requested that the subcommittee discuss the report at this time as well.

Dr. Pinto stated that it would be helpful. He mentioned that he has been attending meetings with the city CFO and his team. He also noted that e-signatures are legally binding and

enforceable. He believes that, in some ways, e-signatures are safer because they provide a time stamp along with the signature and is sent directly to his inbox.

Ms. Martin stated that she is in favor of using DocuSign. She also requested that the entire document be provided when the request is sent to the Committee.

Ms. Martin moved to propose to the full Committee executing a contract with DocuSign; the motion was seconded by Mr. Conway. The motion passed with 3 yeas.

Mr. Bahou then inquired about increasing the threshold for Committee approval to enter into a contract. Currently, the threshold is set at \$5,000. The Abrahams report suggested raising it to \$25,000, and he asked for the subcommittee's thoughts on what the limit should be.

Dr. Pinto stated that raising the threshold would be helpful. He explained that it would help reduce the backlog.

Mr. Conway asked if the contracts would be categorized. He expressed concerns about eliminating oversight for contracts that may not make sense.

Mr. Bahou asked if providing a report to the Committee on this would be cumbersome.

Dr. Pinto stated that he can provide the report to the Committee. He mentioned that it will include the reason the contract is needed, the vendor's name, and a description.

Mr. Conway stated that he is concerned about consultants.

Ms. Martin asked if, moving forward, the Committee could see this report starting with contracts under \$10,000. She stated that this would help the Committee decide whether to proceed. She also requested that the report include the vendor's name, contract amount, duration of the contract, and a description.

Dr. Pinto stated that they can conduct a trial for a few months and that he'll plan to start it in January.

Mr. Bahou then addressed the possibility of allowing contracts that exceed the threshold for the purpose of expediting emergency items.

Dr. Pinto stated that he will work with the facilities department and provide the dollar amount that has historically been spent on emergency situations.

Ms. Martin stated that she would like to explore the possibility of executing a contract before an emergency occurs. She mentioned that we often know the areas where emergencies are likely to happen.

Dr. Pinto asked if \$25,000 would be an appropriate amount to set aside in the budget.

Ms. Martin agreed, stating that we could see if this helps streamline the process.

Dr. Pinto informed the Committee that significant progress has been made since the report was released, and he and his team have addressed each recommendation that was given.

Ms. Martin stated that she believes tracking time electronically, to reduce paper use, would be helpful. She specifically noted that this would be useful when employees leave and need to be removed from the payroll.

Dr. Pinto mentioned that time clocks are being implemented for custodians and cafeteria employees.

Ms. Martin moved to adjourn at 5:19 p.m.; the motion was seconded by Mr. Bahou. The motion passed with 2 yeas, 1 absent (Mr. Conway).

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jack Pinto". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Dr. Pinto, Assistant Superintendent of
Finance for Liam Skinner, Superintendent

DP/mes