

**BRISTOL WARREN REGIONAL
SCHOOL COMMITTEE WORKSHOP/MEETING
MONDAY, FEBRUARY 9, 2009**

The monthly workshop/meeting of the Bristol Warren Regional School Committee was held in the cafeteria of Mt. Hope High School, 199 Chestnut Street, Bristol, RI, on Monday, February 9, 2009. The Chairperson, Paul Silva, called the meeting to order at approximately 7:30 PM.

Present:

Paul Silva, Chair, Paul E. Brule, Vice-Chair, Marjorie J. McBride, Secretary, William M. O'Dell, Treasurer, Denise R. Arsenault, John C. Bento, Diana B. Campbell, Karen A. Lynch and John P. Saviano; Edward P. Mara, Superintendent; Melinda L. Thies, Assistant Superintendent for Secondary Curriculum, Assessment and Instruction; Mary Cerullo, Executive Director of Literacy K-12, Elementary Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment; Jane F. Correia, Director of Administration and Finance; Leslie J. Anderson, Interim Director of Pupil Personnel Services, and Andrew D. Henneous, Esq., District Solicitor

Absent: none

OPENING BUSINESS

All present were invited to join in the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Ellen Estrella:

“Good Evening, I am Ellen Estrella and I am the nurse here at Mt. Hope High School. I requested to speak before you this evening regarding the superintendent’s recommendation to terminate the school nurses in the Bristol Warren School District. I am told that this is on the advice of the district’s attorney, Mr. Henneous. I will surmise that Mr. Henneous is rendering this advice based on the Governor’s proposal in his budget, Article 23, to do away with school nurses being certified as teachers.

The nurses in this district are responsible for caring for over 3400 students. We are baccalaureate prepared nurses, many of us with a Masters degree. While attending our various colleges of nursing we learned how to care for patients, disease processes, disease prevention, good health practices and much, much more to prepare us for a career in the health industry. What the college of nursing did not prepare us for was a job in the school environment. To become a certified school nurse teacher, we took courses not only to learn all the appropriate screening techniques for vision, hearing, scoliosis to name a few, but we took courses in education to better understand

the environment we are practicing in and the educational team of which we are an integral part. Special education laws are not taught in a traditional nursing education. Our certification requires special education courses, counseling and psychology classes that are not part of a nursing curriculum.

Are you aware, in order to be a school nurse you have to have at least 3 years of professional experience and be baccalaureate educated? The teachers come in directly from college. Certification has set the standard so that the nurse in the school is well prepared. You demand highly qualified teachers so shouldn't the nurses be qualified in their area also?

In this district we care for students with all types of health concerns, diabetes, seizures, ADHD, allergies, cardiac problems, cancer, muscular dystrophy to name a few. There are students with mental health problems, emotional and behavioral problems, socio-economical problems, and dysfunctional families. We don't just apply band-aids and pass out pills.

In months to come with the changes in Rite Care we will be medicating more students in school because of changes in the rules for prescription medication. That is just one change in healthcare in RI, for many, we are their only source of care and can anticipate the numbers increasing as the result of the economy of the state.

School nursing is as much a specialty as is cardiac, OB/GYN,

Psychiatric, Trauma or orthopedic nursing. Consider this as you make your decision on terminating a qualified nursing team. We practice alone in each building, not something most disciplines are comfortable doing. We bring to this district almost 150 years of nursing experience between the 6 of us. Do you want less qualified individuals caring for your children or the other children and adolescents in our schools? It was just two months ago you honored the Nurse from Kickemuit for saving a child's life. Her training, skills, experience, her vested interest and true compassion for school nursing helped her to understand the immediate needs of this particular child. To quote Mrs. Wollish 'We as school nurses have a finger on the pulse of our students. We know them, understand them and care for them. To be a school nurse you have to love students, our patients, and the more you know about their setting, home and school, the better you can serve them.'

Be bold, don't accept Dr. Mara's recommendation. Keep the well qualified school nurses of the Bristol Warren School district. Thank you for your attention."

Dr. Mara responded that the District is not terminating the school nurses, but laying them off; Dr. Mara does not want the nurses to think the District does not value all they do; the hope is to call them all back.

SUPERINTENDENT'S RECOMMENDATIONS

S2009-8 A-E: – PERSONNEL

A. SUSPENSION, NON-RENEWAL AND/OR TERMINATION OF CERTIFIED PERSONNEL: Based on the uncertainty of sufficient Federal, State and local funding for general and categorical programs for the 2009-10 school year, and program reductions, consolidation of classes, re-alignment of staff and elimination of positions to more efficiently and effectively use the school system's assets, the Superintendent recommends to the School Committee the termination/ non-renewal of the following listed personnel effective the last day of the 2008-09 school year:

[115 Certified Staff]

B. SUSPENSION, NON-RENEWAL AND/OR TERMINATION OF CERTIFIED PERSONNEL: The Superintendent recommends to the School Committee the termination/non-renewal, effective the end of current assignment and/or the last day of the 2008-09 school year, whichever occurs first, of the following listed teachers due to the return of teachers from leaves of absence and/or the non-renewal of the limited contracts:

[1 Certified Staff]

C. SUSPENSION, NON-RENEWAL AND/OR TERMINATION OF

CERTIFIED PERSONNEL: The Superintendent recommends to the School Committee the termination/non-renewal, effective the last day of the 2008-09 school year, of the following listed teachers due to their lack of permanent certification in the required area and/or the non-renewal of the limited contracts:

[4 Certified Staff]

D. SUSPENSION, NON-RENEWAL AND/OR TERMINATION OF CERTIFIED PERSONNEL: Based on the Superintendent's belief that there exists more qualified teachers available for their positions, the Superintendent recommends to the School Committee the termination/non-renewal of the following listed non-tenured personnel effective the last day of the 2008-09 school year:

[2 Certified Staff]

E. APPOINTMENT: That the School Committee confirm the recommendation of the Superintendent to appoint the following applicant to the position of Secondary Mathematics Teacher as listed below:

1. Caitlin Booth Mathematics Teacher (3/5 Time to Full Time)

- Mt. Hope High

Effective: February 9, 2009

Reason: To fill a new position

(Math Intervention Specialist)

Funding: Title II

Mr. Silva commented that preparing this list of potential victims of the budget crisis is a job the Committee does not enjoy. Mr. Silva wished to make it clear to everyone, especially the nurses, that this action is a necessity and is taken out of an abundance of caution from legal counsel.

MOTION: Mr. Saviano motion to accept Superintendent's Recommendation #S2009-08, Sections A – D. Mr. Brule seconded.

Mrs. Arsenault commented:

“At this time legislation is pending at the state level which could achieve some financial relief for all districts in the state. This includes but is not limited to cost savings for transportation, school food services, health care for staff and purchase of supplies, as well as salaries.

At this time legislation is also pending at the federal level (known as the Presidents stimulus package) which would increase or at least maintain funding for Title 1, special education, and Early Childhood programs and funds for professional development for teachers is also anticipated.

Based on this information, I consider it prudent to wait before risking the loss of high quality and experienced teachers who may leave before their potential recall.

I mention recall, because I find it hard to believe we can function as a high performing, or even performing at all, district, without the teaching positions we will eliminate in this vote.

I have several questions to ask Dr. Mara, and I did meet with him earlier to allow him the courtesy of preparing for them.

Dr. Mara, Is it possible for us to maintain the present quality of education in this district without the 120 positions currently filled by the teachers we will lay off in this vote? Dr. Mara responded that it would not be possible to maintain the high quality we have; it is the impossible March 1 date we would like to change.

Am I correct in my understanding that there is currently legislation pending that would allow us to notify teachers by June 1 of a potential layoff rather than March 1? Dr. Mara said legislation has been proposed for the past seven years; if something doesn't pass soon, the March 1 deadline will pass; he does not hold much hope for that.

With the loss of high school teachers identified on this list, can we fulfill the staffing obligations of the Program of Studies we passed just 2 weeks ago? Dr. Mara: No, some of the new courses would be taught by teachers being laid off.

With the loss of the elementary level and middle school level teachers on this list is it possible that we will exceed class sizes to a potential

30 plus students? Dr. Mara could not say that number would be accurate, but it is conceivable that class size would increase.

For the record, I cannot in good conscience approve of a move which so seriously impacts the education of our students and threatens to undermine the excellent progress we have made to date. With all due respect Dr. Mara, and understanding the difficulty of your position, I cannot support your recommendation.

I value the expertise and efforts of these 120 teachers too much to tell them prematurely that we may not need their services. I do not want to risk losing them to other districts or states which will recognize their highly qualified performances and their departure from a high performing district.

It is my sincere belief that as a board and a district we find a different solution to save necessary dollars, when we know what the true nature of our finances is.”

Mrs. Campbell asked Dr. Mara if other towns must also go through this charade. Dr. Mara stated every single district is going through this same thing, budgets are just not known until June; this year we have had to drill down farther than ever before, all in an effort to be fiscally responsible to the District. Mrs. McBride echoed these statements; she questions why the legislators have not taken the time

to move forward with the funding formula, leaving us no choice but to lay off people we respect and want to keep. Mrs. McBride's message to her esteemed colleagues in Rhode Island legislature is: "Get moving now; this is not the way reasonable people do business." Mrs. McBride is also concerned about the nurses; she has a deep appreciation for our nurses considering her granddaughter's ordeal in her elementary school; because no nurse was present when she injured her arm, her granddaughter sat in class for five hours with a broken arm; requiring a teaching degree makes it difficult to hire substitutes for our nurses; she believes the State needs to move toward a concept of school nurses. Dr. Mara commented that we are one of the few districts that has a nurse in every building—we are blessed; we have every intention of recalling every school nurse, they have done a wonderful job.

Mr. Saviano wished to point out the crux of the problem is the requirement for the District to present a budget to Joint Finance by March 1 and the State's fiscal year beginning on July 1. He reiterated that no one wants to give these notices, but we must in order to insure for the District we are not making a mistake; synchronizing the budgets could save a great deal of frustration, anger and sadness.

Mrs. Arsenault feels that if we need the bulk of these teachers to operate education in this District, by the time we recall them, they may have taken positions elsewhere, and many of these teachers are mobile; we can do many things differently to save money, but we

can't teach without teachers.

Mr. Bento asked if the Committee should rethink their normal proposals due to the potential mass exodus of our senior teachers given the Governor's recent proposal. Mr. Silva responded that we cannot do lay off notices based on expected retirements.

Mrs. Lynch said she is as discouraged as the rest of the Committee; although certificates don't make you a wonderful nurse and we should keep the best of the best and get rid of the ones who are not.

Mr. Saviano moved the motion.

MOTION: Mrs. Arsenault motioned to table the vote on Superintendent's Recommendation #S2009-08, until such time as we receive crucial information regarding both federal and state funding for the district. There was no second; the motion failed.

The vote on Mr. Saviano's motion to approve Superintendent's Recommendation #S2009-08, Sections A – D passed by a vote of 8 to 1 with Mrs. Arsenault opposed.

MOTION: Mr. Brule motioned to approve Superintendent's Recommendation #S2009-08, Section E; Mrs. McBride seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

Mr. Silva wished to comment for the record he spent a great deal of time signing letters, it was not a pleasant thing to do; he hopes and prays we receive funding to recall these teachers; this is being done all over Rhode Island and in fact some communities sent their letters out a week or two ago.

SUPERINTENDENT'S CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT PLAN

Per policy, Dr. Mara presented his plan for the school year which he has been moving forward with since September. Mrs. Campbell mentioned this came before the Policy Subcommittee because the process was not clear; however, in order to approve or disapprove, the School Committee must have their own goals in mind. Mrs. McBride pointed out that the Superintendent's goals are for 2008-2009, the School Committee's are from 2007; she wondered if the issue should be referred back to the Subcommittee to straighten out. Mrs. Campbell suggested adopting Dr. Mara's goals as their own for the next six months and work on setting the Committee's own. There was no objection.

Mrs. Campbell asked Dr. Mara for some clarification and expansion on his goals. Page 1, item 1, enunciate "the gaps"; Dr. Mara: in student achievement. Item 2, Dr. Mara said we added tutorial in the afternoon. Page 2, Mrs. Campbell would like to see a percentage goal, as well as a website goal. Mrs. McBride would like to see a mid-year progress report. Mr. Silva said he will set up a workshop

later in the spring for the Committee to discuss their goals for next year.

MOTION: Mrs. McBride motioned to accept the Superintendent's Continuous Improvement Plan for 2008-2009; Mr. Saviano seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

BUDGET/ FACILITIES SUBCOMMITTEE

Mr. O'Dell said the budget will be worked on over the next few weeks; it would be more productive if all the School Committee members could attend the Subcommittee meeting tomorrow night, 6:00 PM in the Superintendent's Office—one of the most important Subcommittee meetings of the year.

PERSONNEL/CONTRACT NEGOTIATIONS SUBCOMMITTEE

Mr. Saviano reported no new updates except negotiations with Council 94 are upcoming. Mr. Silva reported mediation continues on the teachers' contract; he is hoping to report a conclusion at the next meeting.

POLICY/COMMUNITY AFFAIRS SUBCOMMITTEE

Mrs. Campbell said there are a number of first readings for the next full Committee meeting. The next Subcommittee meeting is March 2 with HIV and field trips as agenda items.

COLT ANDREWS CONSTRUCTION SUBCOMMITTEE

Mrs. McBride and Mr. Brule had nothing new to report.

EXECUTIVE SESSION - 8:24 PM

In accordance with Open Meeting Laws 42-46-5(a)(1)-(9), 2(b), Mr. Brule motioned to go into Executive Session at 8:24 PM for a discussion on Administrators' contracts. Mr. Silva said no action will be taken in the session or when open session resumes.

RESUMPTION OF MEETING – 9:05 PM

In Executive Session, the Committee discussed administrators' contracts. No action was taken during Executive Session.

ADJOURNMENT – 9:06 PM

There being no further business to discuss, Mr. Brule, seconded by Mr. O'Dell, motioned to adjourn at 9:06 PM. The motion passed unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,

Marjorie J. McBride, Secretary

/c