

**BRISTOL WARREN REGIONAL
SCHOOL COMMITTEE WORKSHOP/MEETING
MONDAY, OCTOBER 13, 2009**

The bi-monthly meeting of the Bristol Warren Regional School Committee was held on Monday, October 13, 2009, in the cafeteria of Mt. Hope High School, 199 Chestnut Street in Bristol, RI. The Chairperson, Paul Silva, called the meeting to order at approximately 7:14 PM.

Present: Paul Silva, Chair, Paul E. Brule, Vice-Chair, William M. O'Dell, Treasurer, Marjorie J. McBride, Secretary, Denise R. Arsenault, John C. Bento, Diana B. Campbell, Karen A. Lynch and John P. Saviano; Melinda L. Thies, Assistant Superintendent for Secondary Curriculum, Assessment and Instruction; Jane F. Correia, Director of Administration and Finance; Mary N. Almeida, Director of Literacy and Title I 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

None

PUBLIC FORUM

None

SUPERINTENDENT'S RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation #S2009-48: That the School Committee, upon the recommendation of the Superintendent, and supported by the Budget/ Facilities Subcommittee, approve the RISE energy recommendations for heating controls and motors for Buildings A, B, D, E and F at Mt. Hope High School as outlined in the energy report submitted by RISE.

MOTION: Mr. O'Dell motioned to approve. Mr. Brule seconded. Mr. O'Dell stated the cost of this project is \$336,396. Mr. Brule explained that to reduce costs the arts building was eliminated from the proposal. Mr. Saviano asked if that should be stated in the recommendation. Mr. Silva responded it was stated in the report and Mr. O'Dell stated it for the record; also, Mr. Brule was instrumental in getting the number down to where it is. Mr. O'Dell wished to make it clear this was just a first step in dealing with the heating situation at the high school, there are other buildings that need addressing and eventually the boilers. The motion to approved passed by a vote of 9 to 0.

Recommendation #S2009-53: That the School Committee, upon the recommendation of the Superintendent, and supported by the Budget/ Facilities Subc, approve the RISE energy recommendations for lighting upgrades at Mt. Hope High School as outlined in the energy report submitted by RISE.

MOTION: Mr. Brule motioned to approve; Mrs. McBride seconded. Mr. O'Dell said the total cost to the District is \$121,193, which includes a savings of \$40,822; he originally was not in favor of this project but learned that the manufacturer will not be making the lights that we use any longer. In response to Mrs. Arsenault, Mr. Silva said some of the lights in the building have already been upgraded, this will replace all that have not. The motion to approve passed unanimously.

Recommendation #S2009-55: That the School Committee, upon the recommendation of the Superintendent, and supported by the Budget/Facilities Subcommittee, award the bid for the site work for the Colt playground area.

Recommendation is withdrawn.

Recommendation #S2009-56: That the School Committee, upon the

recommendation of the Superintendent, and supported by majority vote of the Budget/ Facilities Subcommittee, award the bid for the Mt. Hope High School fields drainage, redesign and permitting project.

MOTION: Mr. O'Dell motioned to approve; Mrs. McBride seconded. For clarification Mr. O'Dell stated the original vote of the Subcommittee was 2 to 1; although at the time he had reservations, he is now comfortable with recommending Maguire for \$65,000.

Mr. Saviano said:

“I have gone to almost all of your subcommittee meetings with the exception of one this year and I find this motion very disconcerting. Suppose you spend that huge amount of money and then find out the problem is spring-fed while fooling with mother nature and that it is worse than estimated, or that you have to spend another \$300, \$400, \$500 or \$600,000 besides to complete the job—what will you do then?

School Committees since this high school was built have pondered the drainage problem but never directed any consequential amount to the problem, probably because of the huge expense, the possibility of failure, and that it does not present itself as an educationally based item. School Committees in other districts also have similar circumstances on their fields and do the same thing we do—use other available fields in town. All our sports are being played without spending this huge amount of money.

What happens when the public, the Councils and the Joint Finance

Committee see us spending a huge amount on a low value educational project? Our taxpayers, who are suffering already with high property taxes, losing homes, losing jobs, losing health care and losing their cars, are counting on us—the biggest user of property taxes, to do the fiduciary responsibility that we were sworn to uphold.

When we streamlined things in the past five years, it was to improve values to education. Now, because this Budget Subcommittee is hell-bent on spending the savings (described by one of you as “cookie jar money, stale money, spare cash”) before it is taken away by someone. The public is demanding real educational value and this expense does not fit into that category.

What about requesting stimulus money for the drainage and the renovation of a closed school and an addition to take care of what the Task Force may come up with next year? What about better labs, more AP courses, our list of five-year priorities? What if the Joint Finance Committee wonders if they have given us too much money in the past few years—could they contest our request and be able to go below the legal level funding?

How about tabling this motion until we have the final results from Karen Lynch’s Task Force. If we don’t spend the money on the drainage and the high school windows we might be able to financially respond to using Byfield School or some other building with a small

addition, bought and paid for in part with the extra savings we have accumulated. What a great testimonial to our Committee! If you vote this in tonight, you will be committing us to legal and financial repercussions if we later, with more factual information, want to reverse this decision.

In closing, this money is not yours or mine, it is the taxpayers', who are suffering right now; they deserve a break, they have been very loyal to financing our endeavors, so this would be a great act on our part. Thank you for your patience.”

Mr. Brule said he does not believe there has been a committee more frugal than this one; we take care of our school buildings and these fields come up as a request every spring; lacrosse can no longer be played at Colt State Park. Mt. Vernon Group did a study a few years back, we have spent a little money here and there and we never finished. We put out \$15,000 to Gifford Design Group to begin the study and the only way to find out the true cost is to follow through with this project; this will provide us plans for now or for the future. Sports are a part of education. Mr. Brule does not disagree with Mr. Saviano, but this Committee has never hurt the tax payers and spending has been frugal; we now have to get the blue prints, and find out once and for all what we are going to do.

Mr. O'Dell appreciates Mr. Saviano's comments. It was he who used the term “cookie jar money”; this Committee has been very diligent

with spending and rather than let our savings hang around and let it go for increases in salaries, he'd rather see it go for something for the children. Regarding the reaction of the Joint Finance Committee, when we renovated the Mt. Hope Auditorium there were the same concerns, and the auditorium is now being used by the Joint Finance Committee. We have heating, lighting and window issues and we are addressing them; when outsiders look at our district they look at what we are offering—what do the programs look like inside and what does the outside look like. Mr. O'Dell agrees with Mr. Brule, the time is right to find out what it will cost to fix the fields.

Mr. Saviano replied the auditorium is part of the facility that is used on a daily basis by students and faculty; we are talking about something frivolous. Taxpayers are facing losing homes, cars and jobs—in times like this you do not spend your money on non-educational items. It is like a boat in the water, a place in which to throw your money. We have never had to have the students sacrifice a sport. Mr. Saviano stated he knows he is in the minority and when the public finds out about this, he is sure there will be repercussions.

With all due respect, Mrs. Arsenault appreciated the diligence the Budget Facilities Subcommittee gave to this as well as other issues; she was very concerned about the windows at the high school and that is being addressed; the high school building is old and issues are being addressed. As for the fields, Mrs. Arsenault believes the

entire campus must be considered; it is more and more important what goes on outdoors. Drainage is a huge issue; the work we do will benefit the surrounding area as well; she requests the conversation remain open with the Town of Bristol as we move forward; it is known where the springs are, how the watershed operates and why we are impacted the way we are; this will be a win/ win for us and the Town of Bristol. We are doing something to benefit the entire community.

Mr. Saviano then said that as a member of the School Committee Association Executive Board of Directors, he questioned a number of other districts if they have all their sports played on school property; only two out of nine do all sports on their own property. He questioned what happens if RISE tells us to put separate boilers in each wing to more efficiently control the environment. He is voting against it.

Mr. O'Dell commented that pay back for replacing boilers at the high school will take 86 years. Mr. Saviano argued the inefficiency of those boilers is a huge waste of money.

Mr. Bento stated he learned about the spring fed issues from engineers; although he sympathizes with Mr. Saviano's points, he has concerns about throwing good money after bad. Getting this project off ground is important, and what will be learned is something we need to know.

The motion to approve passed by a vote of 8 to 1 with Mr. Saviano opposed.

BUDGET FACILITIES SUBCOMMITTEE

Mr. O'Dell reported the Subcommittee meeting will be October 19, at 6:30 PM at Oliver.

POLICY/ COMMUNITY AFFAIRS SUBCOMMITTEE

Mrs. Campbell said a meeting was held last week; the next Subcommittee meeting is scheduled for Monday, November 2, 6:30 PM at Oliver. On the agenda will be two items the public may be interested in—Chemical Health Policy and Student Outreach.

Wellness Committee – Mrs. Campbell, as Chair, wished to report the group has had their first meeting of the year; anyone interested in attending or being part of the Committee are welcome and should give their name to the clerk.

PERSONNEL/ CONTRACT NEGOTIATION SUBCOMMITTEE

Mr. Saviano reported everything to be calm and peaceful.

FUTURE ENROLLMENT AND FACILITIES TASK FORCE

Mrs. Lynch announced that the next meeting is rescheduled from October 20 to October 27, at 6:00 PM in the Oliver Administration

Building Conference Room.

CHAIRPERSON'S INITIATIVES

Student Outreach

Mrs. Campbell provided a summary of this initiative that was started over a year ago; she and Mrs. Thies met with Mr. Rebello and Mr. Murgo to talk about a proposal and came up with three areas for consideration:

1) Communicating with students through school committee agendas which are posted in the high school; "Hot Topics" will be brought to students' attention through ex-officio student members of the Committee. Nothing controversial; when the Chemical Health Policy was discussed, it was posted and students did participate. There were no concerns from the Committee on this topic.

2) Office Hours – Were very successful last year and were conducted on an every other month basis; one representative from the School Committee and one from administration were present; students sign up ahead of time with Mr. Murgo; sometimes he recruits them; quite a few students came in during their lunch hour to talk about issues that concerned them.

Mr. Silva had concerns about "recruiting" students, stating if students are given the opportunity to raise concerns, they don't need

to be recruited if they have a concern. Mrs. Campbell replied that a better word would be guided or suggested. Mrs. Thies added that initially there may have been some recruiting until the process came into its own.

Another concern of Mr. Silva's was giving the wrong impression to students about the proper protocol and procedures for voicing concerns and bypassing high school administration and district administration to come directly to the School Committee. Mrs. Thies said they absolutely support the protocols and that is the reason a high school administrator sits in the sessions. Mrs. Campbell added the students are told this is not the place to complain about a teacher.

Mrs. Arsenault said when she sat in a session, she did not feel the students were coerced and she and Dr. Mara learned a great deal; conversation flowed freely and a fair number of different kinds of students came in; she feels each Committee member should have the experience. Mrs. Campbell asked for a volunteer for the November session; Mrs. McBride volunteered.

3) Having students participate on the School Committee—In Massachusetts, students are elected to attend meetings and give a brief report. The group had discussed having an elected student from each grade; this would require a policy. Mr. Rebello and some students were excited about the idea but Mrs. Campbell would like to know the Committee's feelings before they spend too much time developing a policy.

Comments:

Mrs. Lynch—They do not vote? Mrs. Campbell confirmed they are ex-officio, will not attend executive session and are not compensated. Can they join in all discussions? The Committee can decide.

Mr. O'Dell—Not overly excited about this; with public forum and public comment on the agenda there is a time and place for them to come and chat.

Mr. Saviano—Student Council and class officers know procedures and can bring issues to the Committee; no need for another venue.

Mrs. Arsenault—Regarding student involvement in discussions, it is sometimes difficult with nine adults; this is done around the nation and it is not that complicated; sometimes we need a fresh view from the other side and students could give us a different perspective; it is very educational for the kids, an exercise in civic government; it would not be just one more thing we are doing, but would have great significance.

Mrs. Thies – Agreed with Mrs. Arsenault; it is our responsibility as adults to be role models in terms of civic responsibility and civic engagement; involving them and creating that sense of engagement will last a lifetime.

Mrs. McBride—Agrees with Mr. Saviano and Mr. O’Dell, we do have things in place that allow children to come here and they do not come; with the number of things to encourage student to come when they have something to say, it is enough.

Mr. Bento—If Administration is backing this, he has no problem; it benefits the Committee in a few ways—increased awareness, a better pulse on what students are thinking; young adults will become adults in the near future and getting them to think about politics is a good thing; they can enter the military before getting out of high school; it is worth looking into.

Mrs. Lynch—When kids have an issue that affects them, they have no problem coming before the Committee stating what they feel; however, because Mrs. Thies supports this, she would be interested in seeing what the Policy Subcommittee comes up with and to take it from there and give it a try.

Mr. Brule – No position at this time.

With that, Mr. Silva suggested drafting some type of policy and seeing where it goes when it comes back to the full Committee. Mr. Silva asked the clerk to send some correspondence to each of the classes at the high school and to the Student Council letting them know their attendance and ability to voice their opinions here is welcome and we are inviting them to come and join the Committee at any time they have an issue. This puts out a small invitation while the

policy is being developed.

Mrs. Campbell appreciated the comments; the Policy Subcommittee will research other districts' practices and poll some School Committees and civics teachers then report back. Mr. Silva will gladly place this discussion on a future agenda.

EXECUTIVE SESSION - 8:14 PM

MOTION: In accordance with Open Meeting Laws 42-46-5(a)(1)-(9), 2(b), Mrs. Lynch motioned to go into Executive Session at 8:14 PM for legal advice. Mrs. Campbell seconded. The motion passed unanimously. No action will be taken.

RESUMPTION OF MEETING – 8:34 PM

In Executive Session, the Committee discussed the items noted above. No action was taken during Executive Session.

ADJOURNMENT – 8:35 PM

MOTION: There being no further business to discuss, Mrs. McBride, seconded by Mr. Brule, motioned to adjourn at 8:35 PM. The motion was unanimously approved.

Respectfully submitted,

Marjorie J. McBride, Secretary

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