

**BRISTOL WARREN REGIONAL
SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEETING
MONDAY, MARCH 14, 2011**

The bi-monthly meeting of the Bristol Warren Regional School Committee was held on Monday, March 14, 2011, in the cafeteria of Mt. Hope High School, 199 Chestnut Street in Bristol, RI. The Chairperson, John C. Bento, called the meeting to order at approximately 7:15 PM.

Present: John C. Bento, Chair, Paul Silva, Vice-Chair, William M. O'Dell, Treasurer, Karen A. Lynch, Secretary, Denise R. Arsenault, Diana B. Campbell, Marjorie J. McBride, Susan Rancourt and John P. Saviano; Melinda L. Thies, Superintendent; Mario J. Andrade, Assistant Superintendent; Pauline A. Silva, Director of Administration and Finance; Mary N. Almeida, Director of Literacy and Title I; Leslie J. Anderson, 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.

EXECUTIVE SESSION – 7:17 PM

MOTION: At 7:17 PM Mrs. Lynch motioned to go into Executive Session to receive legal advice from Attorney Henneous and for collective bargaining discussion from which Mrs. Arsenault will recuse herself. Mrs. Campbell seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

RESUMPTION OF MEETING – 7:35 PM

In Executive Session, the Committee discussed the topics mentioned above. Mrs. Arsenault recused herself from the contract negotiation discussion.

PUBLIC COMMENT / PUBLIC FORUM

Mr. James Dranchak spoke in response to the counter arguments made by administration to his public comment at the last meeting. Mr. Dranshak retorted the BEP mentions preparation for post-secondary options and most colleges offer Italian. He said he has been restricted from soliciting students for Italian I, even when the Program of Studies was delivered to eighth graders; he feels he is being stonewalled and offering Italian I is appropriate for this community which is mostly Portuguese and Italian; the BEP does not supersede the law. Regarding the point made by administration that 32 students signed up for Italian I and 22 actually matriculated, 2

students were pulled out because they required special services, 5 students left our school system so the decision to drop the course is not based on fair data; in actuality he lost only one student who was doing well; two other students refused to do any work. As far as saving a teacher's salary, those students would have to be enrolled somewhere; he himself does not require District health benefits because he receives them through the military. He thanked the Committee for their time. Mr. Bento thanked Mr. Dranchak for his comments.

Superintendent Thies thanked Mr. Dranchak for his advocacy for his program; he is a quality teacher and this is in no way an indictment of his practices; he is also certified in math and history; this streamlining will not affect Mr. Dranchak's current position. Mrs. Thies further explained the BEP mandates the minimum; we currently offer four languages and would continue to offer Italian II, III and IV. The extraordinary and unprecedented budgetary situation we are now facing require administration to examine class numbers—Spanish serves 281 students, Portuguese has 104 students; French has 91 and there are 63 in Italian. These are difficult decisions to make and we pride ourselves in offering a comprehensive program, but there is a price tag attached to everything. Mrs. Thies reiterated the Strategic Plan includes the development of middle eastern options because of the changing world.

Mrs. Lynch asked if one class instead of two sections was an option.

Mrs. Thies said the exigencies of scheduling require two section, even with 32 students.

Mr. Silva asked if the Program of Studies was officially approved by the School Committee; Mrs. Thies said it was not. Mr. Silva said it has been disbursed to students and he had been told there were no changes, yet Italian I has been removed; he asked why the course was not listed as one section, knowing there are drop outs. Mrs. Thies said the decision was made in concert with high school administration; the Program of Studies has not been formally approved because we do not yet have a budget so the decision was made to postpone formal acceptance of the Program of Studies to protect the District. Mr. Silva stated he was dismayed with students being told they cannot be interested in Italian I. The Superintendent said we can go back and recruit if we have to but it is important not to offer choices we cannot honor; administration has erred on the side of fiscal responsibility at this time.

Mrs. McBride voiced concerns about offering course and spending time scheduling them without knowing what we can and cannot offer.

Mrs. Campbell asked about the possibility of offering Italian I or even Chinese and Arabic through Virtual High School. Mrs. Thies responded that is absolutely a possibility. In response to Mrs. McBride Mrs. Thies explained the timetable—high school guidance

counselors meet with each eighth grade student individually in March, scheduling is done in April when course offerings will be firm; she agrees it is disingenuous to offer and not provide. Mrs. McBride commented that this year is not even near routine or traditional.

Mr. O'Dell said the issues go beyond the discussion of Italian; it comes down to where a department at the high school is going. He asked 1) how do you generate interest in a subject if you cannot sell it and how can you determine which class to eliminate if hands are being tied; and 2) if Italian is being eliminated to replace it with Chinese or Arabic, where is the monetary savings and is this interest driven? Mrs. Thies said the offering of those two languages is written into the Strategic Plan which was created by many different people from the community, and at this point in time administration is looking at what has been the trend in the past few years and Italian has been the least subscribed foreign language. Mr. O'Dell asked what the languages will look like in three years. Mrs. McBride said we could be working with \$3M less and this cannot be predicted. As members of a global society, Mrs. Thies said we are in a transition period and we most likely will not be offering five languages in three years but we must offer languages that serve a broad base of students.

Mr. Silva stated he does not disagree with the Superintendent; the real picture and the Committee's concern is the money, but how do we know where students' interests lie if all courses are not offered.

Mrs. Thies said Mt. Hope High School has frequently offered sections with lower enrollment; 2014 graduation requirements stipulate proficiency in English, writing and math; a number of students are not near that and cannot graduate so we have offered extra math classes; should we offer a personalized educational experience? Mr. Silva argued that we are selecting for the students and he suggested we determine how many students would be interested in the class before we eliminate it. Mrs. Thies said Mr. Silva's point is well taken; we are attempting to change past practice of running lower enrolled sections.

Mrs. Arsenault offered another piece of history—there was controversy when Latin was dropped. There are not large numbers of students leaving our school speaking a second language; she is willing to go with the enrollment numbers. Being involved in the formulation of the Strategic Plan, Mrs. Arsenault believes we need to look differently at what we offer and how we offer it; the BEP is the law.

Mr. Saviano asked if it is possible to poll students who were not notified to see how many might be interested in Italian I. That information plus the possibility of funding from the Italian Association might help in coming to a decision. Mrs. Thies said Administration is open and flexible and would be interested in learning if the Association could meet our needs; eighth grade students could be polled on a personalized level. Mrs. Thies hopes

the Committee can acknowledge Administration is going to have to make some decisions.

Mrs. Lynch pointed out that many incoming ninth graders may want Spanish II because Spanish is the only language offered at the eighth grade level, but after a few years of Spanish they may wish to switch languages so other grades besides the incoming Freshmen should be polled.

Mr. Bento thanked Mr. Dranchak for coming forward and putting up a good fight and also Mrs. Thies for answering the questions; Mr. Bento believes language and culture is a necessity but budget is a big issue.

Mr. O'Dell asked when the Program of Studies will come before the School Committee for acceptance. Mr. Bento responded April.

SUPERINTENDENT'S RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation #S2011-08: That the School Committee, upon the recommendation of the Superintendent and supported by the Budget/Facilities Subcommittee, award the bid for a new bus.

Mrs. Silva explained the bus is a DATTCO three-quarter length bus with a chair lift and wheelchair anchors to be used primarily for special needs children; the bus qualifies for a DEM rebate for energy efficiency and will be paid by ARRA funds; the cost is \$91,787.80.

MOTION: Mrs. Campbell motioned to approve; Mr. Silva seconded. Mrs. Campbell said the bus will allow us some flexibility with after school programs and summer programs. The motion passed by a vote of 9 to 0.

Recommendation #S2011-09: That the School Committee, upon the recommendation of the Superintendent and supported by the Budget/Facilities Subcommittee, award the bid for District Bond Counsel.

Mr. O'Dell reported the recommendation is for Cameron & Mittleman at a rate of \$200 to \$395 per hour.

MOTION: Mrs. McBride, seconded by Mrs. Campbell, motioned to approve.

Mr. Silva added this rate is a reduction from what we paid in the past. The motion to approve passed unanimously.

Possible Legal Action Re: "Smithfield Public Schools v. RIDE, et als., CA No. 11-1110 RI Superior Court"

MOTION: Mrs. McBride motioned to support Smithfield Public Schools v. RIDE et als. Mr. Silva seconded. Attorney Henneous explained litigation has been filed by Smithfield Public Schools with other districts against RIDE and the RI School for the Deaf who are claiming funds they are not entitled to. The nature of the law suit is to

recoup some money. The motion passed by a vote of 9 to 0.

MOTION: At 8:30 PM Mrs. McBride motioned to adjourn.

Budget Presentation

Mrs. Thies reported on the work that has been done for the budget presentation to Joint Finance and the outreach to stakeholders—public meetings, meetings with the Commissioner, outreach to Town Councils, Per Pupil Cost Workshops and Uniform Chart of Accounts Workshops, even a presentation to a Warren Town Council member at his home. Mrs. Thies implored the public to attend the Joint Finance Committee Meetings, on Tuesday, March 15 at 7:00 PM in the Mt. Hope High School Auditorium and on Tuesday, March 29 at 7:00 PM in the Kickemuit Middle School Auditorium. The Superintendent is confident in our programs and policies, it is now up to the Town decision makers.

Mr. O'Dell clarified that the money needed to operate with the same programs as last year will require \$1.9M more, but factoring in the expected decrease in revenue brings the total amount needed to \$2.9M.

Mrs. Campbell complimented the Superintendent on her various presentations and explanations of the complexity of UCOA; she encouraged the public to come out and show their support of

education.

Mrs. Arsenault echoed Mrs. Campbell's sentiments; the level of participation and information dissemination is unprecedented; we are seeing legislative action, people are listening. Mrs. Arsenault feels the District is getting a lot for their money under Mrs. Thies' leadership and it is appreciated. She also encouraged the public to attend Joint Finance and advocate for our children.

Mr. Bento reiterated what had been said; he thanked the entire staff and urged the public to get involved because our students are our most precious resource. This great community is a web that goes out and pays dividends in many other ways, impacting real estate, taxes and businesses. Mt. Bento added he is part of a great team going to the Bodacious Bee.

ADJOURNMENT – 8:44 PM

At 8:44 PM Mrs. Arsenault seconded Mrs. McBride's motion to adjourn. The motion was unanimously approved.

Respectfully submitted,

Karen A. Lynch, Secretary

/c