

**BRISTOL WARREN REGIONAL  
SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEETING  
MONDAY, JANUARY 9, 2012**

**The bi-monthly meeting of the Bristol Warren Regional School Committee was held on Monday, January 9, 2012, in the cafeteria of Kickemuit Middle School, 525 Child Street in Warren, RI. The Chairperson, John C. Bento, called the meeting to order at approximately 7:09 PM.**

**Present: John C. Bento, Chair, Paul Silva, Vice-Chair, William M. O'Dell, Treasurer, Karen A. Lynch, Secretary, Denise R. Arsenault, 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; and Mary N. Almeida, Director of Literacy and Title I**

**Absent: Diana B. Campbell**

**OPENING BUSINESS**

**All present were invited to recite the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag.**

**PUBLIC COMMENT / PUBLIC FORUM**

**Mr. Stephen Martel, of the Bristol Youth Wrestling Club, spoke to the Committee on behalf of community groups who use the high school and middle school for activities. Although they understand the District's reasoning for hiring supervisors, they feel the cost of \$64 per hour for the required staff of two custodians and two supervisors for their upcoming tournament, at which they expect 400-500 people, is excessive. Since the kids do the set up, take down and clean up, they are not sure where or why the supervisors fit in. This expense last year totaled approximately \$1500 for the club and 35% of the money raised through their fundraisers goes to the District; he said Pop Warner uses the fields at no cost. Mr. Martel asks that this fee be waived. Since the tournament is this weekend, the Director of Administration and Finance and the Director of Facilities will be asked to address the issue tomorrow.**

## **MT. HOPE HIGH SCHOOL PRESENTATION**

### **School Initiatives**

**Mt. Hope Principal, Mr. Don Rebello, stated that in the spirit of proactivity, Mt. Hope Administration has begun preparation for their next accreditation review by NEASC in 2013; NEASC requirements, including those for social and civil expectations, are always in focus. Practices of successful schools such as the Adelaide Stevenson High School, which utilizes mentors to develop a culture that is a true professional learning community, are emulated. The School Improvement Team compels the students to fulfill all social, civic and**

academic expectations, and students' support of each other is nurtured. Mt. Hope's graduation rate has had a slight increase recently to just over 88%; it has improved by nearly 14% over the past five years.

To foster a connection with school beyond the classroom experience, as a new initiative for next year, high school administration is proposing a requirement for participation in a school club or athletics, starting with the Class of 2016. The current 9th, 10th and 11th graders will have a similar requirement. Also, to enhance the social expectation, they would like to require an amount of time for community service in the Bristol and Warren communities.

Mr. Rebello introduced teacher Jennifer Cupolo, who has been instrumental in orchestrating workshops and fairs for students to make students aware of programs available to them at Mt. Hope. Ms. Cupolo explained she began preparation last May for the fair held this past fall, in which student peer volunteers showcased the over 40 sports, organizations and clubs available at Mt. Hope, the goal being to encourage ownership and further the connect of students to their education. The second piece of the plan was a second fair in November to exhibit different organizations in Bristol and Warren that need volunteers.

Ms. Cupolo said this is a NEASC-type foundation initiative, but personally, student have returned after graduating saying they regret

not being more involved.

Mrs. Lynch supports this initiative but it is contrary to a school committee policy that states if you don't pass you don't participate. Ms. Copeland responded to the Committee that the 10 hours of community service is over the four years and it further motivates students to stay on track. Mr. Rebello added they are starting slow and it is hoped students will want to become more involved and the minimum standard may be increased in the near future. Mrs. Rancourt suggested each club have a minimum requirement. Mrs. McBride echoed Mrs. Lynch's concerns; also, as a public school we have a right to make students come to school but we cannot force them to do things outside of the classroom; she suggested language such as "we encourage" or "may participate". Another concern to Mrs. McBride is the fact that some students must go to work after school to provide food for their families and this requirement could place an onerous burden on them; she feels the fairs are a good thing.

Mrs. Thies assured the Committee that this Program is a draft and there is an option to edit the language. Mrs. Arsenault applauded the high school administration and thanked them for looking at NEASC recommendations over the School Committee and the state; she wished to note that by requiring participation in something other than academics you provide equity to students who wouldn't tend to participate; we are telling parents we value their students' social and

**civic development and for some, this is the only way to engage their minds. Mrs. Arsenault is proud of her husband for starting the environmental club, with no compensation, as it provides a place for students who may be academically challenged to come together. She was impressed with the students at the fair yet some students remain disconnected. She asked the School Committee to “look at the other side” and to provide equity; not following best practice is doing a disservice; it is her understanding that the Committee does not vote on the Program of Studies but is to be informed and given an opportunity to make comments.**

**Mr. O’Dell grapples with forced volunteerism; he questions the constitutionality of a government-run agency forcing a free people to do community service.**

**Mr. Silva thanked the high school administration for their efforts, commends their goals and is in favor of the fair; he recommended the service learning project and community service be dovetailed; he cautioned that forcing people to be involved in something sometimes ruins it for the people who want to be involved. Mr. Saviano, as liaison to the high school, and having known Ms. Cupolo for 12 years, complimented her for the positive impact she has had on the students and congratulated her on her outstanding job with the students; he is proud to know her. Mrs. McBride also has known Ms. Cupolo for a long time and recognized the effort and amazing job the SIT team does; she encouraged them to continue but not to force**

students because it sometimes does not work in their best interest, and she requested the language be adjusted. In response to Ms. Lynch, Ms. Copeland confirmed a large and fairly immediate increase in student participation after the fair.

Mrs. Arsenault pointed out that academic eligibility is not a School Committee policy, but is an item in the student handbook. Mrs. McBride said the Committee does vote on the curriculum as well as the handbook. Chairman Bento advocates Dr. Andrade's comment about insulating the student pipeline. Ms. Copeland stated she always seeks approval of an administrator as she does not have an administrative degree, however, there has been an increase in participation in student activities as well as communication with outside agencies.

Superintendent Thies thanked the high school's administrative team and staff for their forethought and especially Ms. Cupolo for her selfless service in the spirit of what is best for the students; she said it is our job as educators to guide the students. In her experience, students rise to the occasion when you raise the bar; it is important to provide opportunities for students and expectation of participation is a good thing, making it more than a casual choice; she feels some language could be crafted putting the onus on the student of participation in an activity. Mt. Hope is known as a leader in the State for innovative concepts and Ms. Thies feels we can move forward with this.

**Mr. Rebello added the focal point of SIT discussions is increasing the graduation rate to 100%; a study of 37 dropouts revealed 36 did not participate in any extra-curricular activities; this is corroborated by many statistics. Some students do not have intrinsic or extrinsic motivation. The SIT team endorsed a modification on the academic eligibility which is the most stringent in Rhode Island. Evidence is overwhelming, not only at Mt. Hope, that there is tremendous benefit to be involved in extra curricular activities; it fosters important relationships with both adults and peers and provides mentoring opportunities. In interviewing students, administrators heard students are not willing to risk their eligibility by taking an AP course; there has been no significant improvement in grades since the eligibility requirements were enforced two years ago. The SIT team unanimously endorsed the recommendation to go from one failing grade with academic probation, to two failing grades with academic probation; our standards would still be much higher than most of the Rhode Island schools. Although the drop out rate has been reduced, there are still many at-risk students. January 17 at 2:30 PM is the next SIT meeting when endorsement will be sought. Mrs. Lynch asked if the 36 students who dropped out did not participate in extra curricular activities because of their grades. Mr. Murgo said that is most likely, since most students who drop out have very poor grades.**

**Academic probation prohibits only game / formal activity participation; they are still allowed to practice until they raise the grade of one of the two deficient classes.**

**Comments from the Committee:**

**Mrs. Lynch – Cannot support dropping the bar after raising it so high; supports allowing students to continue to practice but does not support two failures; Barrington allows only one.**

**Mrs. McBride – This is disappointing; in total agreement with Mrs. Lynch; at the end of the day these children need to graduate and employers will not care if they are in a club if they didn't graduate; our basic assumption should be all children can pass; shame on someone who takes lesser courses so they can play football; failures are not acceptable on any level; we owe it to our students to expect they are all bright enough to pass their classes; cannot support the change and will never vote to go backwards.**

**Mr. Saviano – Since there is a new law that students cannot drop out until the age of 18 we should do everything we can to get these students back on track; he is not in favor of dumbing down the system, but at the same time, this is working, we have fewer kids dropping out; since the administrators are the experts, perhaps a year of probation should be supported.**

**Mr. O'Dell – Likes the idea; the best thing for a student who is frustrated with classes could be a coach and field activity.**

**Mrs. Arsenault – Has seen high school administration agonize over**

**the matter; we need to recognize the whole child; not all kids are lucky to have good parents and it is our duty to move all kids up; the administrators are looking for ways to give students some spirit and hope; she supports the change.**

**Mrs. Rancourt – Is a huge proponent of civic responsibility; she cannot support the new policy; we are here to educate kids.**

**Mr. Murgó pointed out that although the graduation rate has improved, the failure rate has stayed about the same at approximately 7%, and the reason these students end up graduating has to do with staying after school in such programs as extended day and YES; there is strong evidence that participation in extra curricular programs motivates students to work harder; he and the SIT team is of the opinion we need to provide alternative pathways while holding high standards. Mr. Rebello added the current policy has not diminished the failure rate; many at-risk kids become ineligible; a policy should improve student achievement and this one has not.**

**Mr. Silva – A reason for change should be because something is detrimental; most initiatives take more than three years to show improvement; we make concessions for the athlete who has problems in the classroom, but what about the student with no problem in the classroom but has social issues.**

**Mr. Murgó said there is always an appeal process; club participation**

often raises the ability to get along with others; counselors are available to work with at-risk kids; students with various emotional conditions are granted exemptions; the new policy would allow a 12% increase in participation.

Mrs. Lynch – Students should not be allowed to participate in games and concerts while failing classes; you have to do a lot to fail a class; if a student does everything they are supposed to do, it is hard to believe a teacher will fail that student; participation is a privilege, not a right; agrees that more than two years are needed to assess the success or failure of a policy; we owe it to our students to raise the bar.

Mrs. Arsenault – a student can pass all their classes and not get into college without extra curricular activities; her own child learned how to be social because she pushed him out of the house; we are breaking kids' spirits when we tell them they cannot participate; the current policy has proven unsuccessful.

Mrs. McBride recalled an experience that Mrs. Campbell has shared -- two students told her they used to think the eligibility policy was bad, but now they are passing all their classes.

Mrs. Thies thanked everyone for participating in the dialogue; this issue is controversial and complex and needs further discussion; all Committee members are invited to the SIT meeting. Mrs. Thies feels

**broader language should be developed; the engagement of at-risk students in extra curricular activities needs to be looked at; we have the talent and commitment of people to do this.**

**Mr. Bento – Supports any kind of activity that involves teamwork and sportsmanship and provides a carrot for students to perform and make them competitive for scholarships; he suggests a compromise and development of a small test-bed pool; get input from students; he likes this initiative and will continue to support it.**

**Mrs. Thies feels we need to have faith and trust in our team of professionals at the high school who truly care about the students and deal with them on a daily basis; they should be given latitude to go back to the drawing board and perhaps develop a smaller scale change.**

**Mr. Bento reiterated the SIT meeting is Tuesday, January 17 at 2:30 PM in the library classroom.**

### **Program of Studies**

**Mr. Rebello called upon Ms. Jennifer Copeland, Assistant Principal for Guidance, to present the outline of the Program of Studies. Ms. Copeland said the changes are relatively minor:**

- The omission of Italian I is an error, it is being offered.**
- The civic expectations for the Class of 2016 are being taken under advisement.**

- Honor Roll will be based on a cumulative grade, so a student getting all A's and one C+ can be on the honor roll.
- Course selection deadlines are revised to prevent changing classes several times; this will help students make prudent choices.
- Course descriptions will explain the distinctions between course level designations; RIDE requested this.
- World History has been more aptly renamed Western Civilization.
- The deletion of International Finance, and Parenting are due to low enrollment.
- Computer Application 1A/1B changes to Broadcasting; Algebra 1 Part 1/ Academic Numeracy become Intensified Algebra 1; and Food and Nutrition will take the place of Independent Living.

Mrs. McBride expressed pride in Ms. Copeland and her accomplishments as well as those of Mr. Jaime Crowley; has concerns about the student whose entire grade is forever diminished due to one bad test score. Mrs. Lynch agrees with the honor roll change and is impressed with the new course offerings.

Mr. O'Dell favors the separate word descriptions for course levels.

Mr. Silva is a proponent of the elimination of courses only after a few years of low enrollment; he asked if attempts are being made to expand concurrently enrolled classes to more than just CCRI and Johnson & Wales. Ms. Copeland said they are exploring an EEP program through RIC and a writing program with URI. Mr. Silva would like to see these expanded. Ms. Copeland explained staffing for these

**classes can be tricky as agreements require very specific criteria.**

**Mrs. Thies said attempts are being made to expand virtual high school offerings and acquire a number of additional seats to offer more AP courses and to offer advanced course work to the middle level. Mr. O'Dell asked if the psychology course is Freudian or evolutionary; Ms. Copeland said it is general psych.**

### **JOINT FINANCE COMMITTEE TASK FORCE**

**Mr. Bento said Bristol Town Council Chair Marshall chose Mr. Labonte as the community member to serve on the Task Force, and Warren Town Council Chair Stanley selected Mr. Brule. Mr. O'Dell commented that a community member should be in a uniquely different category from the other members, who are from the Town Councils, Administration and the School Committee, and the Warren person is a former School Committee member and therefore, not uniquely different; Mr. O'Dell questions if this selection is in keeping with the spirit for whom they are to represent. He raises objection as this choice is not in keeping with the description of community member and Mr. Brule should be disqualified. A second problem with the selection is that one of the charges of the Task Force is to find a better way to do business and not with the same acrimony; this individual made it a point to embarrass and ridicule a member of our administration at a Joint Finance meeting. If Mr. O'Dell was to be the School Committee representative to this Task Force, he would find it**

difficult to sit at the table. It is public record that this individual dishonored a School Committee member at a Warren Town Council meeting. Mr. O'Dell feels there are "three strikes" against this person and he asked that someone else be considered. Mr. Silva cannot disagree with Mr. O'Dell; it will be awkward but since the goal is admirable, he will attend the meetings with a positive outlook, although it may prove difficult. Mrs. Lynch believes it is shameful that the Warren Town Council Chair chose a community member who was a former elected official when several parents asked to be considered. Mr. Bento will take these comments to the Warren Town Council Chair. Mr. O'Dell asked if there was consensus of the entire Committee to speak to the Warren Town Council Chair. Mrs. Arsenault declined inclusion saying it is not going to get us anywhere. Mr. O'Dell suggested Mr. Bento could state there are varied opinions; it is in our best interest to be keenly aware of appointees and Mr. O'Dell is somewhat suspect of this appointment.

## **FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS**

### **School Calendar**

Mrs. Arsenault reported that questions about next year's calendar and the possibility of a March vacation came up at Rockwell. Mrs. Thies said the notion of a March vacation has been discussed across the state but there is no consensus at this time; because many services are shared, it would be problematic to have a March vacation on our own.

## **School Committee Liaisons**

**Mr. Bento is changing the report-out of liaisons to April or May, after budget; he reiterated his intent for pro-activity by attending meetings, walking the school with the principal, and bringing back to the School Committee highlights of the school and identifying two things they feel need improvement, after sharing this information with the Superintendent. The Chair feels this will provide an opportunity for another form of communication.**

**Mr. Silva commented to the Committee he has the privilege to sit as advisor to the Colt Andrews Student Government; other members may wish to attend their next session on Friday, January 20, when Chartwells will be present to address questions from the students about “why they have to eat the ‘crap’ they are served.”**

## **Superintendent’s Evaluation**

**Mr. Bento charge Mr. Saviano and the Personnel Subcommittee to move forward with the Superintendent’s evaluation and calculations, as well as conclusions and assessment of the process.**

**Chairman Bento would also like to address:**

- A review of the chain of command**
- A review of the responsibilities of the School Committee**
- The Superintendent’s impression of charter schools and their**

**impact on the District**

**EXECUTIVE SESSION – 9:38 PM**

**MOTION:** In accordance with open meetings law 42-26-5(a)(2), at 9:38 PM Mr. Saviano motioned to go into Executive Session for a collective bargaining update an update on Smithfield Public Schools et als v. RIDE CA No 11-1110; Mr. O'Dell seconded. The motion passed unanimously. Mrs. Arsenault will recuse herself from the collective bargaining update. No action will be taken during the session or when open session resumes other than to adjourn.

**RESUMPTION OF MEETING – 9:58 PM**

**Mr. Bento reported that no action was taken in Executive Session.**

**ADJOURNMENT – 9:59 PM**

**At 9:59 PM Mrs. McBride, seconded by Mr. O'Dell, motioned to adjourn. The motion was unanimously approved.**

**Respectfully submitted,**

**Karen A. Lynch, Secretary**

**/c**