

Warwick School Committee Minutes
Meeting of March 11, 2008
Open Session

The Warwick School Committee met in Open Session at Winman Jr. High School on March 11, 2008. Chairman Friel called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m. with the following in attendance:

COMMITTEE

Christopher Friel, Chairperson
Lucille Mota-Costa, Vice Chair
Bethany Furtado, Clerk
Joyce L. Andrade
Paul Cannistra

ADMINISTRATION

Peter P. Horoschak, Superintendent
Victor Mercurio, Director of Secondary Education
Rosemary Healey, Esq., Director of Compliance & Human Resources

MOTION 2008-46: Moved by Mrs. Andrade, seconded by Ms. Mota-Costa, to go into closed session for discussion and/or action regarding those items of business exempt from open meetings under General Laws of Rhode Island 42-46-5(a)(1) and (a)(2).

MOTION PASSES (3-0)

Christopher Friel - Aye Lucille Mota-Costa - Aye
Joyce L. Andrade - Aye Bethany Furtado - not present for vote
Paul Cannistra - not present for vote

Meeting reconvened at 7:10 p.m. with the following in attendance in addition to those listed above:

Robert T. Bushell, Director of Elementary Education
Richard D'Agostino, Director Special Services
Leonard Flood, Director of Business Affairs
David E. Small, Director of Buildings and Grounds

Chairman Friel announced that there was a vote of 5-0 taken in Executive Session regarding an employee hearing accepting the recommendation of the Superintendent.

Student Comments – Students from Tollgate Nicole Verdi, Arielle Spelum, Nora Palandjian Nicole (a Senior at Tollgate) reported that positive things have taken place, a mock trial, the academic decathlon, history day. There were up coming events: faculty/senior basketball game, talent show, dancing with seniors, spring rally day, and that the school improvement team have changed things. Arielle (a senior at Tollgate) commented about the graduation requirements, saying she was not arguing against it, but she felt there was a lack of organization, guidelines were ambiguous, and teachers were not informed how to help students. She felt that the time would be better spent receiving help from guidance counselors for college applications. Nora (a senior at Tollgate) thanked the administration and her principal for allowing the mural that had been taken down a couple of months ago to be painted again right outside the main office.

Motion to keep minutes of March 3, 2008 Executive Session private:

MOTION 2008-47: Moved by Mr. Cannistra, seconded by Ms. Furtado, to keep the Minutes of the March 3, 2008 Executive Session private.

MOTION PASSES (5-0)

Christopher Friel - Aye Lucille Mota-Costa - Aye
Joyce L. Andrade - Aye Bethany Furtado - Aye
Paul Cannistra - Aye

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Approval of Minutes

MOTION 2008-48: Moved by Ms. Mota-Costa, seconded by Mr. Cannistra, to approve the Minutes of the Open Session for February 14, 2008.

MOTION PASSES (5-0)

Christopher Friel - Aye Lucille Mota-Costa - Aye
Joyce L. Andrade - Aye Bethany Furtado - Aye
Paul Cannistra - Aye

MOTION 2008-49: Moved by Mrs. Furtado, seconded by Mr. Cannistra, to approve the Minutes of the Executive Session presented for February 14, 2008.

MOTION PASSES (5-0)

Christopher Friel - Aye Lucille Mota-Costa - Aye
Joyce L. Andrade - Aye Bethany Furtado - Aye
Paul Cannistra - Aye

Approval of Transfers:

MOTION 2008-50: Moved by Mr. Cannistra, seconded by Mrs. Furtado, to approve the transfers presented to the Committee.

MOTION PASSES (5-0)

Christopher Friel - Aye Lucille Mota-Costa - Aye
Joyce L. Andrade - Aye Bethany Furtado - Aye
Paul Cannistra - Aye

Approval of Warrants:

MOTION 2008-51: Moved by Mrs. Furtado, seconded by Mr. Cannistra, to approve the warrants presented to the Committee.

MOTION PASSES (5-0)

Christopher Friel - Aye Lucille Mota-Costa - Aye
Joyce L. Andrade - Aye Bethany Furtado - Aye
Paul Cannistra - Aye

Professional Personnel Items:

Appointments:

MOTION 2008-52: Moved by Mr. Cannistra, seconded by Mrs. Furtado, to that the appointment of **Kim Carson**, Special Education Department Head at Gorton Junior High School, be approved.

MOTION PASSES (5-0)

Christopher Friel - Aye Lucille Mota-Costa - Aye
Joyce L. Andrade - Aye Bethany Furtado - Aye
Paul Cannistra - Aye

Classified Personnel Items: Appointments:

MOTION 2008-53: Moved by Mrs. Andrade, seconded by Mr. Cannistra, that the appointment of **Mary Ann Tucci** to the position of 36-week bus driver be approved.

MOTION PASSES (5-0)

Christopher Friel - Aye Lucille Mota-Costa - Aye
Joyce L. Andrade - Aye Bethany Furtado - Aye
Paul Cannistra - Aye

Coaching appointments:

MOTION 2008-54: Moved by Mrs. Furtado, seconded by Mrs. Andrade, that the following coaching appointments be approved: **Robert Pacifico**, assistant coach girls' outdoor track at Warwick Veterans; **Peter Fitzpatrick**, head coach boys' tennis at Pilgrim; **Christine Beltrami**, assistant coach softball at Pilgrim (pending receipt of coaching certificate); **Robert Sherburne, Jr.**, assistant coach boys' volleyball at Toll Gate for one year only (pending receipt of coaching certification); and **Clement Soscia**, head coach boys' outdoor track at Tollgate for one year only.

MOTION PASSES (5-0)

Christopher Friel - Aye Lucille Mota-Costa - Aye
Joyce L. Andrade - Aye Bethany Furtado - Aye
Paul Cannistra - Aye

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School Redistricting/Consolidation Advisory Committee Update and Recommendation

Superintendent Horoschak: I was charged by the School Committee earlier in the school year to look at opportunities for expenditure savings due to the current financial situation and to specifically look at possible school closings. The Advisory Committee consisted of 15 members. The Superintendent encouraged everyone to contact their legislators to support flat funding. The recommendation was to close Potowomut, Drum Rock and Rhodes Elementary. The decision has not been made by the School Committee, and hearings will be held on March 18th and March 19th. Factors considered for school consolidation were: redistricting all schools occurs when schools are overpopulated; keeping same junior/senior high feeder pattern; maintenance programs that meet the expectations of state and federal mandates; number of students in school being closed; student space available in receiving schools; Title I literacy schools; busing routes; location of school relation to other schools; community programs (boys and girls club); number of special education classes/programs that will have to be relocated; resources available for special needs; uniqueness of school attendance pattern; future airport expansion.

All 111 Potowomut students would be moved to Cedar Hill. The breakdown for Drum Rock students would be 39 students to Greenwood, 63 students to Robertson, 75 to Scott and 76 to Wickes. In order to accommodate numbers and get the best balance, 23 students from Greenwood would be transferred into Wickes, 27 students from Scott would be transferred into Robertson. For the Rhodes consolidation, 41 students would go to John Francis, 33 students to Holliman, 62 student to Norwood, 67 students to Wyman. Class size at all schools involved would largely remain similar with the biggest increases coming at Robertson and John Wickes, an increase of four to five students per class for a maximum of 22 students.

Mr. D'Agostino commented that preschool programs at Cedar Hill and Greenwood could be moved to Drum Rock as well as the Rhodes special kindergarten program, the child outreach program at Lippitt and the VOWS program at Winman. Drum Rock is fully handicapped accessible with air conditioning and a safe playground. Drum Rock will stay open and remain in use as an Early Childhood Development Center that would house pre-school and special education programs. We are in the process of moving out of district preschool programs back in house, and only two are left, being Wise Owl and West Bay programs. Elimination of tuition costs to these programs would save \$380,000.

The estimated savings of closure is \$2.7 million – but with budget gap of \$5.9 million (assuming the school department receives the 5% increase in appropriation from the city and level funding from the state, neither of which is a guarantee) the department still has to find \$3.2 million in activities and programs to cut. With the closure of Potowomut three teachers would be laid off, two itinerant teaching positions would be eliminated, and the principal, secretary and custodial positions would be removed as well as some lunch aides for a total savings of \$690,408. Approximately \$53,000 of that would come from money saved from building maintenance and utilities. Total net savings is projected at \$623,909 as it takes into account the cost of buses to transport students to Cedar Hill. Approximately cost to put a bus on the road is \$57,229. There will be costs to “mothball” the building.

With consolidation of Drum Rock, a total of five additional teachers would be needed, one at Robertson, two at Scott and two at Wickes. The consolidation of Rhodes would result in the addition of one to two teachers at John Francis, two teachers at Holliman and two teachers at Wyman. Cedar Hill would need between three and four additional teachers to accommodate Potowomut.

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If Drum Rock and Rhodes were closed, six teachers at each school would be laid off as well as three itinerant positions at each school. Both principals and secretaries would be removed, some lunch aides would be cut and most of the custodial staff at both schools would be eliminated.

Taking into account maintenance and utilities savings, the estimated combined savings of both schools closing is \$2.4 million. After accounting for buses and "mothballing costs" at each building, the net savings is \$2,059,515.

Mr. Cannistra asked as part of the analysis were local day care centers contacted regarding changing routes to accommodate students. Mr. Bushell said the principal will contact and tell them of closing and relocations.

Chairman Friel said that in terms of the airport expansion, it seems that a "northerly" direction would impact Holliman. He also wanted to know what distinguishes Rhodes from Holliman. Mr. Bushell responded if Holliman was closed now, it would limit options in the future when the school department must address what will happen with airport expansion. If airport expansion proceeds north, the department would have to revisit consolidation. If additional schools needed to be closed due to declining enrollment because of the expansion, there wouldn't be anywhere to send the children that would keep them in the same elementary/middle/high school feeder pattern. Holliman enrollment is 300 plus and Rhodes is 200 plus. Holliman also houses five special education programs, which if closed, those classes would have to be relocated. With the consolidation, it would be impossible to find five classrooms for those special education programs.

Mrs. Andrade commented that Potowomut has been targeted for closing for many years. You mentioned the boys and girls club, if we close Potowomut they will have no public building. Even if the students were moved to Cedar Hill, possibility that the building be used for preschool or special education programs. Mr. Bushell said that when you consider it takes 20 to 30 minutes to get to Potowomut by car, and take into accounting stopping to pick up students on the way by bus, it would take an hour to an hour and a half and three-year old kids would be gone all day. She also asked about the lunch aides, would sending students to other schools increase lunch aides needed.

Chairman Friel asked why Potowomut was included in every scenario and the Superintendent said due to Potowomut's small enrollment, it was included in each option for examination of school consolidation. If the school were not closed, only two elementary schools could be closed without violating the WTU's contract with regard to the amount of layoffs in a given year.

The chair asked about educational quality and keeping all the programs that we have. Mr. Bushell said this matter was not approached from an angle of strictly dollars and cents. We looked at the possibility of managing and keeping programs that we have for kids. We cut to the bone last year and now we're breaking the bones. 88% of the budget is fixed with salary and pensions, so we looked at which we can live with academically, physically and what's best for the kids. Initially consolidation was looked at but the department didn't want to go down that path, however when it came to choosing between preserving programs and activities for students and preserving buildings, consolidation had to be revisited. These cuts will hurt, the cuts that will really hurt will be the next phase of cuts to make up the remaining \$3.2 million, which would more than likely come out of programs and activities.

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2008-2009 School Calendar: Students' first day August 27 (staff development August 25th and teacher orientation August 26th); two Jewish Holidays in October (October 1st and October 9th), last day of school June 15th. Mr. Landri commented that the WTU always looks at the calendar before public session. Mr. Holtzman said the calendar was sent over, and there was no room to make any changes or adjustments, and he wanted it on the record that it was sent.

MOTION 2008-55: Moved by Mrs. Andrade, seconded by Mrs. Furtado, to approve the School Calendar as presented.

MOTION PASSES (5-0)

Christopher Friel - Aye Lucille Mota-Costa - Aye
Joyce L. Andrade - Aye Bethany Furtado - Aye
Paul Cannistra - Aye

Bids:

Mr. Flood recommended that the bid for classroom furniture in the amount of \$14,588 be awarded to Equipment Environment as per the bid tabulation. Mrs. Andrade commented there have to be 14 tables out there if we are closing 3 schools. Mr. Bushell said these tables are replacing tables that have safety issues and are dangers. Superintendent Horoschak remarked that even though we are going to have good tables left over, this is budgeted to take care of safety issues. We have to follow through with this plan of replacement. Mr. Cannistra suggested taking the \$15,000 to buy books.

Chairman Friel suggested tabling this bid for a month.

MOTION 2008-56: Moved by Ms. Mota-Costa, seconded by Mr. Cannistra, to **table** the bid for classroom furniture.

MOTION PASSES (5-0)

Christopher Friel - Aye Lucille Mota-Costa - Aye
Joyce L. Andrade - Aye Bethany Furtado - Aye
Paul Cannistra - Aye

Public Comment: John Latierre thanked Ms. Furtado and Mr. Cannistra for coming to Drum Rock. Sharon Oliver said we need to get rid of this attitude of where will the kids go and look seriously at what can be done. Warwick Neck is approximately two miles from John Green and one mile from Oakland Beach. Ms. Landri asked how extending our deadline for the senior project put a flaw in our system. She had concerns that AP chemistry would not run next year if there wasn't 15 students to take the class. Tracy McDermott proposed allowing the incoming seniors to set up their mentoring time during the summer. Mr. Sam Holtzman stated that at the March general membership meeting a motion was made and approved "no confidence" in the redistricting/consolidation committee and he commended those who voted not to close any schools. Roger proposed consolidation of the city and school departments' non-academic departments (such as HR, payroll, finance). Chairman Friel said he had met with the Mayor to begin looking at consolidation of certain functions. Mr. Ginolfi commented that we've heard a lot of talk about numbers, but there was very little discussed about educational aspect, and impact on students and effect on the community, and asked why someone hasn't been held accountable for the whole process being rushed. He said he thought that the decisions were made awhile ago, and the whole process was smoke and mirrors. George Landri said that the appointment of a special education department head at Gorton was going to make a lot of people happy. Mr. Flanders asked how long before the City comes calling for the property that is being mothballed. Chairman Friel said there is no time frame, but we cannot sell the property.

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MOTION 2008-57: Moved by Mr. Cannistra, seconded by Mrs. Furtado, to adjourn.

MOTION PASSES (5-0)

Christopher Friel - Aye Lucille Mota-Costa - Aye
Joyce L. Andrade - Aye Bethany Furtado - Aye
Paul Cannistra - Aye

Meeting adjourned: 10:35 p.m.
Bethany Furtado, Clerk
Betsey Snipes, Secretary