

CRANSTON SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEETING

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 19, 2005

WESTERN HILLS MIDDLE SCHOOL

400 PHENIX AVENUE

PUBLIC WORK SESSION: 6:30 P.M.

IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWED BY PUBLIC BUDGET WORK SESSION

MINUTES

A public work session of the Cranston School Committee was held on the evening of the above date with the following members present: Mr. Archetto, Mrs. Greifer, Mr. Lupino, Mr. Palumbo, Mr. Stycos, and Mr. Traficant. Ms. Iannazzi was absent.

Mr. Palumbo convened the work session at 6:40 p.m.

The roll was called and the Pledge of Allegiance conducted.

I. Public Work Session

Presentation by Auditing Firm Concerning 2003-2004 Fiscal Year Audit

Mr. Balducci stated that Ms. Debra Mitchell, Manager of

Prescott-Chatellier-Fontaine-Wilkinson was present at this work session to give the School Committee a brief overview of the 2003-2004 audit. Ms. Mitchell would then entertain questions from the committee members.

Ms. Mitchell referred to page 1 of the report and noted that the firm had conducted their audit according to auditing standards accepted in the United States. She indicated that their auditing letter also indicated that in their opinion the financial statements referred to above present fairly, in all material respects, the respective financial position of governmental activities, the business-type activities, each major fund and the aggregate remaining fund information of the Cranston Public Schools as of June 30, 2004. Ms. Mitchell explained the audit report in detail. A copy of this report is available in the School Committee Office of Cranston Public Schools or the Business Office of Cranston Public Schools located at 845 Park Avenue, Cranston, Rhode Island. In her presentation, Ms. Mitchell noted that the total revenues were very close to budget with a positive \$19,000 and the expenditures were a positive \$1.2 million.

Ms. Mitchell entertained questions from the committee members.

Mr. Stycos asked Ms. Mitchell if her firm looks at any numbers over time. He realized that the School Lunch Program had lost money last year and asked if this was

something the committee should be worried about or because it was a small amount it should be of no concern. In response, Ms. Mitchell said that if money was consistently lost, then the auditor would put a management comment. If it looked as if there was enough surplus sitting there, and at the present time there is \$235,000 which would cover a couple of years, and if the number consistently went down, it would be a problem. Mrs. Ciarlo asked Mr. Balducci for some of the reasons there was a loss in the School Lunch Program. Mr. Balducci responded that one of the main reasons was the district's decision to increase the personnel at the elementary level to add another cashier so that elementary teachers were not doing lunch duty in the morning as far as collecting money for lunches. Administration knew that it would have a budget impact, but they did not want to pass the cost on to the students as far as increasing the cost of lunch. They knew they would incur a loss but also knew there was a sufficient balance to take care of it. Those positions have been taken care of so this trend will not continue in future years. Mr. Stycos asked when this was done, and Mr. Balducci said that it was done approximately two or three years ago. They tried to phase it in for the eighteen elementary schools at six per year. He believed it is a three-hour position per school.

Mr. Stycos referred to page 2 of the audit report and referred to the \$1.5 fund balance. He noted that it was broken down and asked Ms.

Mitchell to explain these items. Ms. Mitchell explained that the reserved for encumbrances are items that the school department has issued purchase orders from various vendors and the goods haven't come in yet so they are not considered taxable payables, but for budgetary purposes, they are kept as expenditures. Therefore, they are reserved; they will be used. Those that are unreserved can be further designated. Certain funds can be designated for certain things. In this case, \$250,000 has been set aside for self-insured Blue Cross, and \$650,000 has been set aside to be used for next year's budget. The undesignated is what is remaining, and the district can use it on whatever they want. The money can be used in the fiscal year 2004-2005 which is this year.

Mr. Traficante asked if the school department, similar to the city, gets a management letter where recommendations are made by the auditing firm and the school department would reply to it. Ms. Mitchell responded that the firm did not write a management letter this year because they saw no need to do it. Mrs. Ciarlo remarked that this was a very good sign for the school department.

Moved by Mr. Lupino, seconded by Mr. Traficante and unanimously carried that the work session be adjourned to the public budget work session.

There being no further business to come before the work session, it was adjourned at 6:55 p.m.

II. Public Budget Work Session

Presentation of 2005-2006 Cranston Public Schools' Budget

Mrs. Ciarlo opened her presentation for the 2005-2006 Cranston Public Schools' Budget by stating that this was her budget with much input from teachers, principals, area supervisors, directors, central office staff, and the School Committee. As a part of this process, there are two members of the School Committee who have worked with administration in formulating this budget. Mrs. Ciarlo asked Mr. Traficante and Mr. Palumbo to make their comments.

Mr. Traficante stated that he and Mr. Palumbo met with City Council President Aram Garabedian a few weeks ago. He presented suggestions to them as to how the proposed budget should be presented to the City Council by the Cranston School Committee. Mr. Garabedian asked that the budget be listed by specific categories. He would like to see the current budget versus the proposed budget. Mr. Traficante told the committee members that if they had other suggestions with regard to the categories to please make him aware

of them. Mr. Garabedian felt that by using these categories the budget would be better understood by the City Council and that it would be for the betterment of the school department. Mr. Balducci is working on this format at the present time. Prior to meeting with Mrs. Ciarlo to discuss her proposed budget, Mr. Palumbo and Mr. Traficante felt they had to sit down with Mr. Laliberte and Mr. Scaffardi for several meetings to discuss the mandates for secondary reform, mandates for special education, and mandates with regard to the No Child Left Behind Act. They are concerned about how these mandates relate to the impact of the overall budget. If the committee is able to accept the Superintendent's budget, they will meet these mandates. The committee is also meeting the mandates regarding the testing requirements. The committee will also meet the mandates for technology which is three computers in each of the elementary schools and also addressing twenty-five computers at the middle school level. The high school technology situation has been addressed. With regard to resources, both Mr. Laliberte and Mr. Scaffardi convinced Mr. Palumbo and Mr. Traficante that there should be a resource teacher in each of the elementary schools. With regard to teacher assistants, the district is at 50% of its goal; last year it was at 32%. They are trying to cover the bases in the mandates areas. They have fulfilled their obligation with respect to special education. Mr. Traficante went on to say that they asked the Athletic Director that if he has his choice what he would like to see. He told both Mr. Palumbo and Mr. Traficante that he would like to see the high school sports properly funded before funding a middle school sports

program. The Athletic Director would like to keep the intramural program at the middle school level. They tried to address all the areas that are important. They did not try to scrutinize this budget line by line.

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Mr. Palumbo commented that Mr. Traficante explained the majority of the specifics of the proposed budget. He stated that creating a budget is never easy even under the best of conditions. What the committee is now experiencing is not the best of conditions. One of the most quoted lines that one hears is, "It is the best of times; it is the worst of times; now it is an age of wisdom and an age of foolishness." This comes to mind with what the committee is trying to do. The committee is being foolish if they let a good school system deteriorate. Logic would dictate a completely different way of solving the task confronting them. It would probably be that the state would give the correct figure for state aid. Secondly, the contracts of the seven unions are settled. Thirdly, knowing this, the school department created a budget and presents it to the City Council. That makes a very logical sequence. However, in this age of foolishness, a budget must first be created, then while negotiating with the unions, the committee presents its budget to the City Council; and finally they find out what the funding is from the state. The process is all

backwards and difficult. This might give the general public some idea of what the committee and administration is going through. They are trying to juggle all of these things at one time, and they are out of order.

Mrs. Ciarlo stated that it was always refreshing when there were people in administration who are extremely knowledgeable and talented, and it is gratifying to see people on the School Committee who are also so knowledgeable. Mrs. Ciarlo further commented that before presenting her budget for the 2005-2006 school year, she wished to take a few minutes to talk about where the school department is and what it has accomplished. A copy of Mrs. Ciarlo's and Mr. Balducci's power point presentation is available on the Cranston Public Schools' website, www.cpsed.net.

In her closing remarks, Mrs. Ciarlo indicated that when she was talking about building a budget she would be remiss if she didn't acknowledge the help she received from everyone. Mr. Scherza, Assistant Superintendent, met with all the building principals and goes over the proposed figures. This proposed budget has already been pruned from the first proposal to what she would like to have and still run the organization. She thanked Mr. Scherza for his valuable help. She thanked Mr. Votto, Executive Director of Human Resources and Public Relations for his help with human resources. The heart of the business is program, and Mr. Laliberte and Mr. Scaffardi have been very much a part of helping administration not

only with the Power Point but also in helping run the school system as far as the educational instruction and curriculum. This is so critical to the organization of this system. She has a great team that she wished to acknowledge. Mrs. Ciarlo also acknowledged a great School Committee. She commented that Cranston Public Schools should be cooking with such a great administration and School Committee.

Mrs. Ciarlo acknowledged Senator Hannah Gallo who was in the audience. Senator Gallo referred to the math coaches that Mrs. Ciarlo spoke about in her presentation and asked if their salary was \$90,000. In response, Mrs. Ciarlo that the amount includes

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benefits, certified pension and salary. This year a top step teacher with a Masters Degree earns approximately \$83,000 with benefits. Sometimes people look only at the salary, but with every salary goes a benefit package. Mrs. Ciarlo thanked Senator Gallo for attending this hearing.

Senator Gallo referred to the Charter School tuitions and asked if the amount for tuition was a partial or a full tuition rate. In response, Mrs. Ciarlo said that part of the budgeted amount is due to the fact that they are going to a senior class next year. They have gradually been adding a class each year, and basically Cranston Public Schools

owns these students. If Cranston's per pupil expenditure is \$10,000, it owns the \$10,000. By partnering with the state, the district gets almost 1-1/2 or closer to \$15,000. This helps the district because in some cases it runs short in some areas, and there is an additional 5% to work with. For every student who goes to the Charter School, the district is picking up another one-half of the per pupil expenditure. Cranston's problem is that its per pupil expenditure has not grown as they anticipated it would, and the state bases their fee on what Cranston has for a per-pupil expenditure.

Mr. Traficante asked what Plant/Transportation Operations meant. Mr. Balducci referred Mr. Traficante to the detailed budget under Locations 43 and 45. Location 43 is the entire transportation area, and it accommodates all the expenses associated with running the transportation program. Under Plant, all the expenses associated with running the plant division are included in this section. The \$271,000 was an increase in supplies. Gasoline is a major factor of the increase both in running the regular transportation program as well as for the special education fleet. As everyone knows, the price of gasoline has risen considerably.

Mr. Stycos referred to Senator Gallo's question regarding new personnel. He asked if the new math coaches being considered would be a top step math teacher and that person would be replaced by someone on a lower step. Mrs. Ciarlo responded that the district would still have benefits to pay the teacher. Mr. Balducci added that

administration felt that because they would have to replace math teachers, they took the top salary in replacing them. Mrs. Ciarlo commented that it is difficult to replace certified elementary math teachers. Secondly, people would have to have a special certification. The district may have to hire them at a higher step. Mr. Stycos asked where these numbers were coming from because they are higher salaries. Mrs. Ciarlo responded that they have to be experienced teachers. Mr. Balducci commented that he has a matrix prepared for each position with salary and fringes, and he will make it available to the School Committee.

Mr. Stycos questioned hiring a psychologist intern for \$12,000, and Mrs. Ciarlo explained that they are graduating students. They would receive no benefits. They work under the supervision of a psychologist.

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Mr. Lupino referred to the budget categories that Mr. Traficante distributed to the committee. He noted that these were suggestions from Mr. Garabedian. Mr. Traficante explained that when he and Mr. Palumbo met with Mr. Garabedian, he suggested that the committee present the budget in categories similar to the method used several years ago in the 1980's and early 1990's. Mr. Traficante went back to one of his prior budget documents, and the categories were listed

this same way. Mr. Lupino asked Mr. Traficante if there was a particular reason Mr. Garabedian wanted energy and utilities as two separate categories. Mr. Traficante responded that he wanted to separate the utilities and the energy in terms of gasoline and fuel. This makes it much clearer to the person listening to the presentation. Mr. Lupino asked if Athletics would include extra-curricular athletics and if it would not include physical education. In response, Mr. Traficante said that they would be separated.

Mr. Lupino referred to page 4 of Mrs. Ciarlo's power point presentation regarding the out-of-district placements. He believed this was the third year running the Sanders Academy Project. He asked if there were any projections or if a number was known as to what this program has realized in savings. Students have been brought back from out-of-district placements, and there is a cost associated with what is being done and what is being saved. Mrs. Ciarlo responded that she didn't think the cost analysis had been done yet. She has been looking at how many students the district has been able to accommodate. In the first year, the school district had to have the building comport with what was needed. She believed there was a savings to the district. Mr. Balducci commented that under the Sanders Program located in section 59 of the budget, not counting benefits because benefits are budgeted elsewhere in this budget, he is projecting to spend \$492,000 for the Sanders Program next year. This number divided by 20 students would cost

\$24,000 per student. The lower end of an outside placement for behavioral students is approximately \$35,000 to \$38,000. He felt that the district was doing a better job both educationally and fiscally. These are the behaviorally challenged students.

Mr. Lupino referred to page 8 slide 15 of Mrs. Ciarlo's presentation regarding the district's statistics on attendance and graduation rate. He asked if the Charter School gets factored into these figures. In response, Mrs. Ciarlo said that she believed they have their own attendance rate, but they have not had a graduation yet. Mr. Lupino commented that it seemed to him that they would be much more accountable because of the regulations for a Charter School versus the regular education program. Parents are much more accountable. They have to attend the program in order to stay in the program.

Mr. Lupino referred to page 9, slide 17, of Mrs. Ciarlo's presentation. He asked what a reading consultant does. He asked if they work with students or if they consult with other reading teachers. Mrs. Ciarlo responded that they are teachers who are certified to work with students, teachers and administrators. She noted that she was the first

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reading consultant in Cranston. Mr. Lupino asked if it is specified as to how many hours they work in the classroom, and Mrs. Ciarlo said

that it would not be noted necessarily. They do report on a monthly basis to the Director of Reading as to how many demonstrations they conducted, how many conferences they attended, how many students they serviced, and that is how the record is kept.

Mr. Lupino expressed his thoughts on asset protection, and the committee has consistently hit that account. They have never financed more than \$500,000 since he has been on the School Committee. He asked if the general asset protection items were at the request of the buildings principals or the plant engineer. In response, Mrs. Ciarlo said that every year the schools submit a list of their requests, and some of them are long standing. Principals have other items in addition to this list. Administration felt they would take the most critical items and try to take care of them. Chalkboards and playgrounds are both critical areas. Basically it is the principal requesting it. Sometimes it comes from the principal, the custodian who notices something, or Mr. Zisseron. Mr. Lupino asked if Mr. Zisseron meets with the principals to quantify the list. Mrs. Ciarlo said that Mr. Scherza meets with the principals to check the lists. Mr. Lupino reaffirmed his feeling that the committee should not be under funding this portion. He would like to look at a base line for this portion of the budget to be added to by savings from the potential energy savings to this portion of the budget.

Michael Cardarelli, Jr., 53 Fairfield Road – He thanked the Chairman for opening the meeting to public comments. He thanked

Superintendent Ciarlo for an excellent presentation and for the job she does as well as that of the administrative team, teachers, faculty and staff. The scores show a remarkable success story day in and day out for Cranston Public Schools, and everyone should be proud of the job the teachers and staff do. However, there are some somber notes, and this is the reason for coming to this hearing. He came to this meeting to talk about the remarkable progress that has been made in this school system during Superintendent Ciarlo's tenure as superintendent in the whole area of reading. People in Cranston have seen the reading scores go through the roof, and every child has benefited full range in this system including his son. He asked the School Committee that when they begin budget deliberations and begin looking at priorities, he felt they needed to consider that every child has achieved that benchmark. It is true that there is still a segment of children who need to reach that benchmark and achieve that standard. However, there is a huge gap in math, and the committee needs to be sure that every child is a multiplier before going into other areas such as middle school sports. There are some seriously sagging scores in mathematics, and as the father of an elementary student, he could tell the committee that as one looks at the mathematics books for elementary schools and see what the investment has been in mathematics over the years, the committee needs to make a push in that area. Look how difficult those mathematics exams are compared to what the students are being tested in in other areas. If the committee has 100% funding, they should be funding everything. The students need to be well

educated.

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Mr. Cardarelli remarked further that he hears comments from the parents in the schoolyard at Waterman School. When the parents see those numbers go up in every single school, the numbers for mathematics are always lower. The children should be challenged with the best consumables and handouts. The consumable area is always cut, and it should be funded fully.

Mrs. Ciarlo commented that one of the things that administration put into new personnel are three math coaches. If the district has them plus a full-time resource teacher in every building, administration knows that where a resource teacher doesn't have thirty students they will have training in mathematics so that they can begin to use their time to service those students in math. The only way change is made is to invest in it. The district started with three reading people years ago. She believes that this is a good start for mathematics, and the district has the materials to begin to do this. With a combination of people, it can be done. If a child starts to fall behind, there will be someone in the building to service that child in order to catch it in the beginning. In response to Mr. Cardarelli's question as to what location in the budget the mathematics books are designated, Mr. Balducci said they were in location 48. Mr. Laliberte explained that the district has all the math modules now. They have in-serviced all

grades 3 through 5 teachers in six of the nine modules, and the K to 2 teachers have been in-serviced; and they are currently working in three of those modules. Mrs. Ciarlo added that the district is well on its way. Mr. Cardarelli stated that the district has the new books and asked if they have the consumables that match them. Mr. Laliberte responded that they do have the consumables.

Mr. Stycos referred to page 13, slide 26 of Mrs. Ciarlo's presentation. He noted that Mr. Balducci had indicated earlier that on health related costs he was projecting an additional enrollment of thirty people. He asked Mr. Balducci where those thirty people were coming from. In response, Mr. Balducci said that this coincides with the thirty projected retirees this year. He needs to continue to budget for their participation in a health plan, and the district will be replacing those thirty teachers with thirty new teachers who must be provided health care. Whether it is a continuation of budgeting for the retirees or the cost associated with new teachers, it must be budgeted. Mr. Stycos asked if there are retirees who would be switching from the district's health care plan to Medicare, and Mr. Balducci explained that there is not a large enough number of retirees who are 65 and over who would affect the budget. Mrs. Ciarlo added that the largest number retiring are between the ages of 52 to 57, and they are covered until they turn 65. There may be more teachers retiring, but she doesn't know the exact number. The district pays for a single plan for the retirees, but that teacher may be replaced by someone who requires a family plan which would be an extra cost to the district. Mr. Stycos

responded that there must be retirees who are turning 65 and who will be off the books and going on Medicare. Administration needs to look to see how many will go off the books.

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Mr. Stycos referred to the health insurance for this current fiscal year and asked if administration has talked with City Hall to inform them that the school department's projections are under funded. Mrs. Ciarlo responded that at the last meeting she had with the Mayor she indicated that administration was concerned that the district could be going into a deficit area. As soon as administration had a firm handle, they would let City Hall know. Mr. Stycos stated that city administration needs to know that as soon as possible because the school department doesn't want to end up paying for this year's health insurance in next year's budget.

Mr. Stycos referred to the teachers returning from leave figure, and he stated that he found it very difficult to track this information. It is put in the budget in the beginning, and as they return from leave, they fall out of that category. He asked for some historical data on what the experience has been in this area. People return from leave, but other people go out on leave and the district saves money on those people. He asked why it wasn't a wash from one year to the next. He would like to see an analysis of this. Mr. Balducci responded that he went

line item to line item. Where teachers return from leave, the dollars follow the teachers wherever the school is. The figure goes from \$0 to \$225,000, and that is why it shows an increase of \$225,000. Mr. Stycos stated that as a School Committee member there is no way of tracking returns of these leaves and whether or not it is costing the district money. As far as he is concerned, it would have implications for negotiations with regard to whether or not the leave policies are getting used more than they use to, whether or not it is costing hundreds of thousands of dollars, or whether or not it is about the same every year.

Mr. Stycos noted to Mr. Balducci that he had stated the annual order allocation for the schools was going up 4%, and Mr. Balducci indicated that it was going up district wide 4%. 75% of that total budget is allocated to the schools, and 25% is kept in reserve accounts. Elementary, middle, and high schools are all receiving a 4% increase.

Mr. Stycos asked how many students the charter schools' tuition represents. Mr. Balducci responded that he is budgeting for a total population at Cranston's Charter School of 150 students next year, and he is budgeting approximately just over \$50,000 to accommodate Cranston residents attending charter schools outside the community.

Mr. Stycos remarked that the \$200,000 is \$200,000 more than was spent this year. Mr. Balducci added that this is for all charter school students, whether they would be attending the Cranston Charter

School or outside the district. Mr. Stycos indicated that each time a student goes to a charter school, the district pays one-half of its per pupil allotment which is about \$8,000. Mr. Balducci explained that the 2003-2004 In\$ite data projects Cranston's per pupil expenditure being \$10,629 so there is an increase of where it has been in the past in the amount of \$9,300. 5% is taken off the top and the difference is just under \$10,100, split that in half, and half comes from Cranston Public Schools and the other half comes from the state. By taking \$5,049 x 150 students, that makes Cranston's obligation \$757,000 next year for Cranston's charter school. Add on

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top of that what he has to spend for Cranston residents attending schools outside the district which is approximately another \$50,000, brings total charter school obligations to \$807,000. If that is compared to what is budgeted for this year, that is a \$221,000 increase. Mr. Stycos asked for the number of students at each of the charter schools. Mr. Palumbo noted to Mr. Stycos that the district has been building a class each year at its charter school.

Mr. Stycos suggested looking into the feasibility of having students at Cranston East taking RIPTA buses rather than Cranston Public Schools' buses. He would like to determine whether or not it is logistically possible from a financial sense. He knows that this is what Providence does. This year for the first time there were RIPTA

buses running from the Gladstone and Edgewood areas into Cranston East. He doesn't know if this has been successful or not. As a parent who continually drives back and forth down Park Avenue, he feels that if the school department could get more students to ride RIPTA buses, there might be the possibility of having a late bus on and have better service to be used not only by the students but also the general public. He suggested to the committee that Mr. Zisseron, himself and whoever else have a meeting with Mark Therrien from RIPTA, who is one of his constituents who does the planning for RIPTA, to answer these questions. Mr. Stycos would come back to the committee with the results of that meeting. Mrs. Ciarlo commented that if there was any way to save money and improve the service, she would be willing to do that. She would ask Mr. Scherza to set up a meeting with Mr. Therrien, Mr. Zisseron, and Mr. Stycos.

Brenda Carbone, 23 Red Oak Drive, Parent and Member of Hope Highlands PTO – She thanked the School Committee for all their hard work, and everyone appreciates all they do for all the children in this city. Hope Highlands School does support a fully funded budget, and they have signed a petition that the committee should have received last week at the School Committee meeting. The parents try to show their support for the children and the schools by attending the School Committee meetings. Hope Highlands School has been experiencing large class sizes, especially this year in second grade. They had hoped tonight to see an additional teacher to help reduce these class

sizes for grade 2. Everyone knows the benefits to smaller classes. Hope Highlands has had to deal with cuts, and they can no longer ignore this issue for another teacher. She has a 7th grader at Western Hills, a 5th grader at Hope Highlands, and a 2nd grader at Hope Highlands. The itinerant services her older children received are nothing like what her youngest child receives. She is afraid for her 2nd grader because services have been cut. She stated that she was asking for an additional teacher. She feels that her youngest child is behind compared to her other children. She asked the committee to consider the parents' request. She thanked the committee for their concerns and opening the hearing to public comments.

Mrs. Ciarlo asked Mrs. Carbone if Hope Highlands has some teacher assistants in the 2nd grade. Mrs. Carbone responded that they had one that was taken from them. There

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are two at the present time. Mrs. Ciarlo pointed out that up until this year Hope Highlands, because it is a high performing school, would not have had a chance of having a teacher assistant. Administration changed the rules for teacher assistants after the district was cut back so severely. Administration did look at class sizes. It wasn't based just upon need or Title 1 schools. Administration does recognize the need, and that is the reason Hope Highlands has two

three-hour teacher assistants to assist those teachers. Sometimes administration can cluster, but no one wants to leave Hope Highlands. Administration and the committee will keep her request in mind. A parent stated that the 2nd grade classes are 25, 25, and 25. Part of these concerns is the fact that these students have been in these class sizes since Kindergarten. The school lost a guidance counselor, one day of reading services each week, and a 2nd grade teacher assistant. Mrs. Ciarlo responded that those are two more than they would have had. Administration will certainly look into the other services. She thought the reading services were back to what they were previously.

Mr. Palumbo commented that he personally fought very hard to get the teacher assistants back that the committee had to cut. He told Mrs. Carbone that there was no one on the committee that didn't agree with what she said. The lower the numbers in the classroom the better it is for the students. If the parents stick with the committee, hopefully the school department will get what it needs this year.

Ann Hanson, 16 Edgewood Avenue – She stated that she is a very satisfied parent of four children in Cranston schools. She is the Chair of the Cranston Educational Advisory Board. They have been having a great year. They have been talking a lot and sharing a lot. The Cranston Educational Advisory Board stands firmly behind these are essentials for learning. She was told that one could come to this

meeting to say what it is they would like that is currently not in the budget. It may be more of a contractual issue than a budgetary issue.

She had a document with her that analyzed ten years of study on parental involvement and the impact of schools, families and community connections to student achievement. The district has taken out of the contract one of the key elements which is parent teacher conferences which is no longer a part of the structure. Title I schools get them because they receive Title 1 funding for the conferences. Very aggressive parents get them because they know the system and know how to push. She can request a conference with her children's teachers, but there is a whole group of parents who are intimidated to start with who don't know how to go about making it happen. It is one of the greatest moments for a parent and a teacher even at the middle and high school levels to come together to commonly plan. She asked the committee to bring this back to the table during contract negotiations. Any teaching professional worth their salt wants to sit with a parent, and the parent often wants to sit with their child's teacher.

Mrs. Ciarlo responded that there are still parent conferences. A teacher has an obligation to meet with a parent if the parent requests it or there is a need to have a

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conference. A few years ago there use to be a parent teacher

conference for the first marking period, and the child's report card would be withheld if there was no parent teacher conference. Administration tried to use paras at the time for substituting time. While many teachers could work it in before or after school, for some parents it was not convenient. Administration tried having the conferences in the evening, but the teachers had to be compensated. At the time, it was approximately a \$40,000 item, and the amount would have been increased by now. She would not want a parent to think they could not meet with a teacher. More needs to be done with this. It was one of those nasty cuts that had to be made. It was difficult to see the parents who should be seen. Administration could estimate for the School Committee what it would cost to reinstate it. She felt it was very important to have these conferences and felt very badly cutting them.

Mr. Stycos stated that he would like an estimate of what it would cost to reinstate parent-teacher conferences.

Mr. Palumbo stated that no school system is successful without parent involvement.

Mr. Lupino added that the lower performing schools throughout the state are the schools where the parents don't show up for the conferences.

Mr. Lupino referred to page 11, slide 22. There is a 9.54% increase

over the 2004-2005 budget. He believed that last year's budget was approximately an 8% increase. Mr. Balducci commented that the budget proposed by the Superintendent last year asked for a 10.17% increase. Mr. Lupino responded that it was mysteriously spun to 17% by certain members of the city administration. Mr. Balducci added that the total budget is increasing by \$10 million or 9.54%. It is noted in the Executive Summary of the budget that administration is asking for approximately \$11 million more in city dollars as compared to this year which is a 15% increase. That percentage may be out there for discussion. When one is looking at city dollars from one year to the next, administration is asking for a 15% increase in city dollars. Mr. Lupino added that if one were to take the last five years, the district was either level funded or under funded. If those years were projected out, the increase would be much much less. The percentage means nothings because the district has been level funded or under funded. To the Hope Highlands' parents, Mr. Lupino commented that this is not a-typical. It snowed tonight, but if there was no snow, the number present would be approximately thirty-six people. The Mayor is also conducting a Tax Summit this evening. He thanked the public for coming to this hearing. The school portion of the total budget is a good health portion, and this is not a good turn out. This is why it is so difficult when the committee speaks to the public eight months from now. The troops must be rallied to support this budget. Mr. Palumbo added that he agreed with Mr. Lupino. The committee is discussing millions of dollars, and they don't see the public listening and asking questions. He encouraged those present

to continue attending these hearings. He asked the public to

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help the committee get the message across to the City Council. The committee is working for the students in Cranston Public Schools. Parent involvement is extremely important in helping the committee get the money to do what is needed to be done.

Mr. Lupino referred to the number of students in classes and commented that the committee has stayed away from the "R" word for a few years. The new school had to be up and running first. He asked if there were plans within the near future to develop a redistricting plan for the district. In response, Mr. Palumbo stated that this was something he would have to look into. It would depend on budget and numbers. There are neighborhood schools in Cranston, but if there are drastic cuts again in the budget, the committee will have to look at it. Mrs. Ciarlo added that she would like to do it Kindergarten through Grade 12. She is limited at the middle school level because there is no room. Park View Middle School needs an addition, and Western Hills Middle School is a disgrace with a trailer park in the back of the school. Cranston High School West is 100 students over its capacity, and Cranston East is land locked on Park Avenue. Once children are moved, they go to different schools for middle and high school. Something has to give.

Right now neither Park View or Bain can accommodate any more

students. Not only is there a need for an addition at Cranston West, one is needed for Park View; and the district needs a significant bond for Western Hills. It needs more classrooms and an auditorium. This city certainly should be ashamed of its most recent middle school with portables outside. It would be nice to have all-day Kindergarten and a lottery for some pre-schools. There are so many nice things to do if there were reasonable people of good will to talk with. She does not have a death wish to start redistricting right now, but it should be considered.

Mr. Lupino asked if there should be a redistricting sub-committee, and Mr. Palumbo responded that it should not be done just yet because he felt the committee wasn't ready. The committee has to look at the budget and negotiations are about to start.

Mr. Traficante reported that he attended a conference today. Even though the focus was on charter schools, there was a panel discussion consisting of state legislators and the focus turned to state funding for public education. He commented that Mr. Balducci had level funded the amount for state aid. The legislators commented, and they were cautiously optimistic, that they were addressing this issue so that hopefully the school districts will receive a larger appropriation this year. Mr. Traficante asked if the School Committee planned on meeting shortly with the state legislators. In response, Mr. Palumbo said that this is in the forefront.

Mrs. Ciarlo added that she would speak with Mr. Jacquard. Mr.

Lupino commented that the committee has met every year with the state legislators since he has been on the School Committee.

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Moved by Mr. Lupino, seconded by Mr. Traficante and unanimously carried that the budget work session be adjourned.

**There being no further business to come before the work session, it was adjourned at
8:58 p.m.**

Respectfully submitted,

**Anthony J. Lupino
Clerk**