

**CRANSTON SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEETING**

**MONDAY, FEBRUARY 7, 2005**

**WESTERN HILLS MIDDLE SCHOOL**

**400 PHENIX AVENUE**

**PUBLIC SESSION: 7:00 P.M.**

**MINUTES**

**A public budget work session of the Cranston School Committee was held on the evening of the above date at Western Hills Middle School. Present were: Mrs. Greifer, Ms. Iannazzi, Mr. Lupino, Mr. Palumbo, and Mr. Traficante. Mr. Archetto and Mr. Stycos were absent. Also present were Mrs. Ciarlo, Mr. Scherza, Mr. Balducci, and Mr. Votto.**

**The meeting was called to order at 7:08 p.m.**

**The roll was called and the Pledge of Allegiance conducted.**

**Mr. Palumbo stated for the record that Mr. Stycos was absent because he was ill, and Mr. Archetto had indicated that he would be arriving late to this meeting. Mrs. Ciarlo added that Mr. Laliberte is not feeling well and won't be present this evening. In addition, Mr. Scaffardi is attending a very important College Board conference in Boston to discuss the new SAT and Advanced Placement exams.**

**Mr. Palumbo recognized Cranston City Councilman Jeffrey Barone who was in the audience.**

**Mr. Palumbo indicated that he would open the floor to public speakers regarding the proposed budget.**

**Valerie Schulie, Farm Street - She stated that she realized that the school district needs elementary teachers but the School Committee needs to remember that at Cranston West they don't get one or two extra students but approximately 100 new students at a time with no staff, and unfunded mandates. The school needs extra staff, and the committee needs to keep in mind that Cranston East and Cranston West can both get 100 extra students the day school starts. The high schools need the teachers and the staffing in order to meet the unfunded mandates coming up from the state and the federal government. At Western Hills, she reminded the School Committee about the conditions in the cafeteria. There are four lunches at this school. As time goes on and there is a certain requirement for minutes of education, the district won't be meeting the mandate. The committee must keep this in mind when building their budget.**

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**Mrs. Ciarlo responded to Mrs. Schulie that the committee and**

administration are aware of what she mentioned and will look at class sizes especially as these develop. Administration and the committee have always had to add fractional positions when new students arrive. With regard to the cafeteria, the district is already in violation with having four lunches. Administration is looking into ways to see if they could float a bond to have some money behind it to do something with the cafeteria. Not only would it meet with state requirements but also it would give more instructional time which they are looking for.

Mrs. Greifer referred to page 7 of the proposed budget. She asked what the difference was between secondary instruction, location 49, and high school instruction, location 57. She noted that it seemed to say in location 49 that portion is instruction, texts, and supplies, and location 57 is text replacement. In response, Mr. Balducci said that location 49 is all the common expenses that each of the high schools have. Location 57 is the individual high schools. It depends upon the type of expenditures. Some expenses are common to all three, including the Career and Technical Center, and some are for both East and West. He does not arbitrarily create these locations. These are in line with the State's accounting. Cranston and all the other school districts have to report on them at the end of the year. These are locations set forth by the State, and the school district in turn mirrors them when they set up their account structure.

Mrs. Greifer referred to the utility costs. She noticed that in some

cases, for example, water, custodial supplies and heat, in many cases they were budgeted with a 5% increase, and other locations, for example, electricity, there would be a big jump at some schools and smaller jumps at other schools. She asked Mr. Balducci for the rationale regarding this. Mr. Balducci responded that he looked at the most completed fiscal year which was 2003-2004 and looked to see what was spent on electricity at each school site. In some cases, as compared to what was budgeted this year, there won't be enough money. So that the same problem doesn't happen next year, there will be a larger than normal increase from this year's budget to next year's budget because he looked to see what was spent last year. He noted that this is the time of year when he looks at utilities across the board. In the next revision, the committee will see adjustments to some of the utility costs to get them in line to where it will be spent this year as to where it was spent last year. As an example, the district may have spent \$50,000 in one school last year, but this year's budget for that same school is only reflecting \$30,000. That will present a problem because if the trends continue, he will probably spend \$50,000 there this year. Not to have that same mistake happen again, next year it will be upped to \$50,000. It looks like a larger than normal spike because it is going from a budget of \$30,000 to a budget of \$50,000, but it is based on what was actually spent the year before. With the other schools, he did either a 5% or a 7% increase across the board.

**Ms. Iannazzi referred to page 60 and indicated that there is a deduction of nearly \$90,000. She asked if this amount of money was allocated into different line items throughout the budget or a reduction for a different area. Mr. Balducci responded that he would look into this as to why there was such a large decrease.**

**Mrs. Greifer referred to page 127, Director of Student Information. She stated that she assumed that this was the creation of a new position. She asked why there was jump of \$22,000 from this year to next year. In response, Mr. Balducci stated that the gentleman who is in this position has been in the position for this year. He was actually performing dual services. He was also one of the assistant principals at Cranston West and also in acting capacity of Director of Student Information Services. In that particular account this year, he needed \$65,000. Next year he will be doing the Student Information Services position all year so next year will be a full year's salary. For this year, a piece of his salary was paid as being the assistant principal at Cranston High School West and then the remainder of the year as the director of student information services. Mrs. Ciarlo added that Mr. Joseph Herbold retired in the middle of the year from this position.**

**Mr. Lupino commented that he read with interest today the fact that the Head Start Program through CCAP was awarded \$500,000 along with Newport and one other district. He asked if this would have any bearing on the district's relationship with them with regard to rent or**

improvements to the building where the district helps to house them. In response, Mrs. Ciarlo said that she hoped that it would be financially beneficial to the district. She can't speak to the rent because that was decided previously. Administration is hoping next year to be a partner with them to have integrated pre-school programs to help some of the special needs students. Instead of the district paying outside tuitions for those students, they could house them in Cranston where the district could work with Head Start and their staff to provide a partnership. Mr. Scaffardi serves on their board, and Mrs. Ciarlo will ask him about this funding.

Mr. Lupino asked Mr. Votto what the current salary and benefit package is for a first step teacher. In response, Mr. Votto said that a first step teacher's salary with benefits is approximately \$61,000.

Mr. Palumbo stated that a budget is a living document, and it does change. Even though the School Committee has not accepted the budget the school administration has put forth, he was happy to say that there are a number of things that are happening that are very favorable. In terms of health care, it has been brought to his attention through the Budget Sub-committee that Blue Cross has changed their projected percentage from a 15% percent increase down to an

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11% increase. If that holds true, that would mean that this proposed

**budget would be reduced by approximately \$677,000, which is very nice. Mrs. Ciarlo added that in presenting this budget and since administration first brought it forth, the Governor has come out with his budget, and the district is supposed to get \$913,000. Administration will go with the Governor's proposal and hope that it then gets better. That will be another adjustment administration will recommend on February 14th. Mr. Palumbo commented further that the committee will be making adjustments as they see necessary, and he hoped that they would be on the downside.**

**Mr. Traficante, as a point of clarification, indicated the bottom line the administration was asking for is \$110.6 million in city dollars. Since receiving the good news for health care and \$900,000 from the State of Rhode Island, that is approximately a little more than \$1.5 million. He assumed that the School Committee would be asking for approximately \$109 million in city dollars. Mr. Balducci added that there is a projected savings of \$677,000 right now.**

**Mr. Lupino stated to Mr. Calozzi, who is the Music Program Supervisor, that he was anticipating on Monday evening that one his colleagues, as he has invariably done in the past, will make a recommendation to cut the strings program. Mr. Lupino asked Mr. Colozzi how many students were currently being served in this program, and Mr. Colozzi responded that the number is close to 800 students. Mr. Lupino commented that when he first became a member of the committee the number was approximately 250**

students. Mr. Colozzi said that the program has grown considerably. There are four-time string specialists who are relatively maxed out at this point. If the program grows any more, he may have to consider cutting Grade 3 strings in order to accommodate more of the older students. At the end of last year, there were 788 students, and he anticipates that the number is even higher right now. Mr. Colozzi went on to say that if the district wants to accommodate the trend toward high school grades, he would have to cut a lower grade. Cranston East has an orchestra, and he anticipates having a full orchestra there. Cranston West is looking to have an orchestra as well. Mr. Palumbo asked what the cost factor would be if Mr. Colozzi wanted to keep strings in Grade 3, and Mr. Colozzi indicated that he would require a fractional position such as a .4 or a .5 FTE. Mrs. Ciarlo added that this is an area where a program had begun to die off because some of the teachers who were involved retired. The parents got behind this program, and the School Committee supported it for reinstatement. That is why she could never understand why anyone would recommend cutting a program that was so successful. In addition, a school district's responsibility is to educate the whole child.

Mr. Colozzi remarked that he received today a notice from one of his

teachers. He was encouraged to see such high numbers at schools such as Stadium and Gladstone. Mrs. Ciarlo added that much of it has to do with the fine work of the music teachers and Mr. Colozzi's leadership. The district appreciates all that is being done in this area.

Mr. Palumbo stated the committee is considering cutting staff in some areas and adding staff in other areas. He asked Mr. Votto and Mr. Scherza to explain some of the staff to be added. In response to Mr. Palumbo's question as to the reasons for adding a Grade 1 teacher, Mr. Scherza said that the numbers coming up at one of the schools would make it a requirement. Currently there is only one Grade 1 cross section at this particular school. Mr. Palumbo confirmed that the population would require the addition of another teacher. Mr. Scherza further commented that the numbers are already there for the present Kindergarten class who will be moving to Grade 1.

Mr. Palumbo stated that he was in agreement to hire an additional 1.5 reading specialists. He was curious as to why they would be hired. Mrs. Ciarlo responded that it has to do with secondary reform and the mandates that all students read and write effectively. This year they were focusing on two grades, and next year it will be Grades 7, 10, and 11. One grade is being added every year, and this is the reason for the additional staff in order to accommodate for the students. It is similar to adding one grade per year to the program, and hopefully

they will be able to do it within a two-year span and not have to continue it for the four years of high school. Right now it is necessary to do it in high school because it is a mandate. Mr. Scherza added that the 1.5 FTE positions are for two entire grade levels district wide for a population of approximately 1,000 students.

Mr. Palumbo noted that there is a .4 FTE position set up for a nurse. He asked if there was any connection to special education for the need for this nurse or was it for the regular population. Mr. Scherza responded that it is for both pieces. Administration wants to be able to re-deploy the district's nursing services. At the present time, school nurse teacher services must be supplied to certain students on school buses while they are being transported. There are also needs in the schools. With few exceptions, very few of the elementary schools even have a nurse every day or all day, and if fortunate enough, to have one for a half day. In one instance, the district has a medically fragile child who requires that a nurse be available in the school building at all times. This is most definitely mandated. Mr. Palumbo remarked that the district has no choice when something is mandated. Mr. Scherza added that four special education teachers are required district wide. This is based on population in the system, and this is a slight trend of increase. This is so conservative, and he knows that this is one of the areas

that both Mr. Scaffardi, Mr. Laliberte, and Mrs. Ciarlo are fearful of, and this number may not be sufficient for the course of the year. Mrs. Ciarlo commented that this has been a concern of hers for a very long time. Of approximately 2,100 students who have an IEP who are considered students with special needs, almost 1,500 of them are students who are classified to receive resource services. They are the least serious of the special needs population. She is determined to reduce the number of students who receive resource services. Therefore, with this addition of four special education teachers, it will guarantee that every elementary school has a full-time resource teacher so that the present population can be serviced but work more intensively to prevent the need for resource services in the future. Once a student gets into resource, it continues on through high school. The district should be determining the problem and trying to eradicate it or help the students so that the students won't need the services. These will be teachers who will pick up their present case load of resource students, and they would have time in their schedule so that they could work with other students so that they don't have to go into resource. If it can be prevented, the district could gradually reduce and use that staffing in others areas in more creative ways.

Mr. Palumbo remarked that most of the personnel being added is due to mandates. There are a few here and there that aren't. Some of them are in the area of mathematics. He stated further that he felt very strongly about these particular areas. The committee has to strengthen the mathematics program, and if they do and set it up as

**Mrs. Ciarlo has tried to create this type of situation, the committee will see the mathematics scores go into orbit just as the reading scores are; but the district must have these math teachers. Mrs. Ciarlo explained that most elementary teachers graduate from college very prepared to teach language arts, reading, writing, etc. One majors in mathematics only if there is a great interest in teaching mathematics, and those are middle and high school teachers. That doesn't mean that there aren't fine elementary teachers who can't teach mathematics. One of the reasons for Cranston's success in reading is that since she has been Superintendent she has pushed to have a full-time reading person in every building, and as long as she is Superintendent, she will continue this push. Mathematics is a subject that is not taught as much as students are exposed to reading. This is all the more reason why the district needs to do this. Teachers are now teaching math in a different way than they were taught. The district needs to help the teachers and also needs to help students do well in math because it is no longer acceptable to say "I don't do well in math." This type of investment will pay off in the math scores. There are a number of students who have not met the standard, and math is one area students shy away from. Administration is looking, as part of the Professional Development Institute, to train teachers in mathematics so that they will be available to teach in five or six schools each, and they will be responsible to work with the teachers in**

professional development so that they in turn can work with students who have difficulty in math. It will pay dividends and will be valuable in the long run. She hoped the committee would support this endeavor.

Mr. Lupino asked Mrs. Ciarlo if she anticipated a down turn in some of the math reporting for a couple of years because this new program is a progressive type of program which has been started in some of the fourth and fifth grades. It will take a couple of years for the concept to catch on. In response, Mrs. Ciarlo said that the state assessments in mathematics are based upon this new thinking approach. Most students don't understand why they are learning math. She hoped that the scores will not go down but rather the district will see some increases. There are nine modules to the program, and it was recommended that all nine not be introduced at once. They try to prepare the teachers and provide the services to them and teach three modules each year. The district is also trying to connect elementary math with middle school math. Mr. Nero and his staff at Western Hills were talking about what they could do with their math scores. She hopes that as a result of this the district will do better in their math scoring. As a former superintendent once told her, "You are only as good as your last test scores."

Mr. Palumbo commented that the district has an excellent teaching staff and administrative staff. It has been shown time and time again

with the way the students have scored. Julia Steiny in her Providence Journal article on Sunday said that Woodridge School in Cranston is the first school in the state that had 100% of its students achieve proficiency on not one but two subtests of the state testing program. This is the first school in the state, and Cranston has that school. If people are saying that teachers have to be held accountable, Cranston's teachers are accountable, and they are getting the results. Hopefully the committee can put enough muscle into this budget to give the teachers the necessary tools to continue to work with the children to get the same results they have been getting in the past few years. Mrs. Ciarlo stated further that she was very pleased that Julia Steiny recognized the fact that it isn't just her, but it is the staff who works with administration. The principals in the buildings make a difference. They work with their department chairs and teachers. They are the ones who come up with the ideas. Mrs. Ciarlo further said that she has been invited to visit with the state legislators, and at that time, she plans on telling them that instead of holding teachers accountable, why don't they recognize and fund those who are accountable. With a little more money, the district could make the world of difference. Because Cranston doesn't have as much poverty as an inner city and doesn't have the affluence of some of the suburban communities, the district is right in the middle. She is most proud that they recognized the contribution of Cranston's staff, and that is what makes working in Cranston fun.

**Moved by Mrs. Greifer, seconded by Mr. Lupino and unanimously carried that the public budget work session be adjourned.**

**There being no further business to come before the meeting, it was adjourned at 7:45 p.m.**

**Respectfully submitted,**

**Anthony J. Lupino**

**Clerk**