

**SPECIAL MEETING**

**CRANSTON SCHOOL COMMITTEE**

**TUESDAY, JANUARY 22, 2008**

**WILLIAM A. BRIGGS BUILDING (REED CONFERENCE ROOM)**

**845 PARK AVENUE**

**EXECUTIVE SESSION: 5:30 P.M.**

**PUBLIC MEETING: IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWING EXECUTIVE SESSION**

**PUBLIC WORK SESSION: IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWING EXECUTIVE SESSION**

**PUBLIC WORK SESSION: IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWING PUBLIC MEETING**

**MINUTES**

**A special meeting of the Cranston School Committee was held on the evening of the above date at Cranston High School East in the student cafeteria. Please note the change of location for this meeting. Due to a large crowd, the meeting was moved from the William A. Briggs Building Reed Conference Room to the student cafeteria at Cranston High School East. The following members were present: Mrs. Greifer, Ms. Iannazzi, Mr. Lombardi, Mr. Stycos, Mrs. Tocco-Greenaway, and Mr. Traficante. Also present were Mr. Scherza, Mr. Nero, Mr. Votto, and Mr. Balducci.**

**The meeting was called to order at 5:37 p.m. It was moved by Mrs.**

**Greifer, seconded by Ms. Iannazzi and unanimously carried that the members adjourn to Executive Session pursuant to RI State Laws 42-46-5(a)(1) Personnel and PL 42-46-5(a)(2) Collective Bargaining and Litigation (possible Caruolo Action.)**

**Chairman Traficante reconvened public session at 6:45 p.m.**

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

**Chairman Traficante noted that Mr. Archetto was excused from this meeting.**

#### **I. Executive Session Minutes Sealed – January 22, 2008**

**Moved by Mr. Lombardi, seconded by Mrs. Greifer and unanimously carried that the January 22, 2008 Executive Session minutes remain confidential.**

#### **II. Public Hearing**

##### **a. Members of the Public (Agenda Matter Only)**

**There were no speakers on the agenda item.**

#### **III. Consent Calendar / Consent Agenda**

**TABLED RESOLUTION:**

**NO. 08-1-16 – RESOLVED, that the 2008-2009 Capital Budget, as recommended by the Superintendent, be approved.**

**CAPITAL BUDGET 2008-2009**

**BOND 04 – 25**

**Cranston High School West – Sprinklers \$2,400,000**

**Western Hills Middle School – Sprinklers**

**BOND 04 – 25**

**Cranston High School West – Bleachers \$ 150,000**

**BOND 427/529**

**Park View – Renovate Library \$ 100,000**

**Renovate Science Rooms \$1,700,000**

**Bain / Park View / Western Hills**

**BOND 04 – 25**

**Relocate and renovate four (4) portable \$ 400,000  
classrooms; 2 at Woodridge School and 2  
at Arlington School  
\$4,750,000**

**Mr. Traficante noted that the committee would not be addressing the Capital Budget this evening. It remains tabled until the February 11, 2008 School Committee meeting.**

#### **IV. Action Calendar / Action Agenda**

#### **V. Adjourn to Public Work Session**

##### **1. Discussion of Program and Facilities for 6th Grade Move to Elementary Schools**

**Mr. Nero asked the committee if there was any particular topic they wished him to speak about this evening. Mr. Lombardi stated that he received several follow-up e-mails after the School Committee's vote last week to address this issue. Predominant among the e-mails he received was the proposed overcrowding situation at Eden Park School. There has been a suggestion that the move to Eden Park School could not accommodate 6th graders that the space that is supposed to be available at Eden Park is really not space. They point to the basement facilities as being common among all of**

them whether or not there is classroom appropriateness down in the basement. He asked Mr. Nero to address those questions.

Mr. Nero stated that Eden Park has four classrooms, two of them downstairs. There has been some discussion about what they would do with the Waterman students, and at this time administration is not planning on moving the 6th grade Waterman students to Eden Park School. The proposal they had was to take the Kindergarten from Waterman School. He would love to make Waterman School a K to 6 school, but there is no way that they can do it. Even the thought of possibly putting a portable there will not work. There isn't enough room to do that. Early on as they went around to all the schools, Barrows is a problem; Waterman is a problem; and Arlington is a problem. One of the things they said was that if they moved the Waterman Kindergarten because there is just one AM and one PM class over to Garden City that has three classrooms, they are Kindergarten kids and are only there for three hours. They don't develop that attachment as being there all day and walking around the building necessarily as the Grades 1 through 5 have. They believe Eden Park has enough students for their grade 5 to go to grade 6 there. They would not be putting the students downstairs into the basement. At one time, there were classrooms in the basement. They can use it for art, music, and a reading room. As one walks into the main entrance of Eden Park, to the right there is a

reading room, and that can be moved to accommodate a classroom. At this particular point in time, administration is sticking to their original proposal which is move the Waterman Kindergarten, Eden Park remains a K to 6 school, and the Waterman Kindergarten goes over to Garden City.

Mrs. Greifer commented that she went to Eden Park today to take a tour of the school. She had been hearing originally from people at Waterman School who were very upset at the idea of the Kindergarteners going to Garden City School, but now she is getting more comments that they think the Kindergarten students should go to Garden City if that is the tradeoff for not sending the 6th grade to Eden Park. In her tour today, she could not picture that building with Waterman's 6th grade in it. She is glad to hear Mr. Nero say that administration is going to stick with the original plan. It is the most workable for everyone. Those Kindergarten parents who disagree are coming around to the idea that it is the best thing in not an ideal situation.

Ms. Iannazzi asked where the 6th graders from Eden Park will be housed. The parent there also expressed some concern about the portables there. She asked if they would be placed in the portables or if there would be enough room in the school. Mr. Nero responded that they won't be placed in the portables. There is enough room in their main frame. There is some reorganization because there is a reading room where they service some students but not a lot. They

**will keep them all up in the main part of the building and not use the portable and not use downstairs.**

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**Mr. Stycos asked what the portable is used for, and Mr. Nero responded that it is being used for art at the present time. It will continue to be used for art. Mrs. Greifer added that the principal told her that she would most likely relocate the library to the portable.**

**Mr. Stycos referred to Mr. Nero's recommendation to move Kindergarten to Garden City and asked if the two basement rooms at Eden Park are unsuitable for classrooms. Mr. Nero responded that Garden City has three classrooms in their main structure. They also have a portable as well. It became simply mathematical to administration that there is one AM and one PM class of Kindergarten so they need only one classroom, and Garden City is growing two 5th grades and two 6th grades so those would be the two classrooms and one would make it three. If this resolution had passed quite some time ago, Kindergarten children are pretty resilient, and a lot of school districts have Kindergarten communities or Kindergarten magnet type schools. In thinking that we would move the K students for three hours, kids don't mind doing that all that much when they are younger versus when they are older. It would be a move for one**

year, and with the original proposal, they would be keeping them together as a Waterman community at Garden City so that when they transition they will be pretty much with their same friends when they transition over to Grade 1 at Waterman School.

Mr. Stycos referred to the basement rooms and asked if there was a plan to use them for anything. Mr. Nero responded that they are used now for some Literacy, some testing, some meetings, guidance, and things of that nature. Mr. Stycos commented that in one of the e-mails he received parents thought that they were unsuitable for classrooms. Mr. Nero said that they are not considered basement as one would consider basement. They have full windows on one side, and when Eden Park was a K to 6 school, those rooms were utilized all the time. A lot of schools would like to trade off with those classrooms, and he understands that Eden Park has a very parent group. Again, administration feels they can house the students in the main portion of the building and not in those rooms; however, they are very usable rooms.

Superintendent Scherza indicated that he spoke with some of the Waterman parents before this meeting and asked them what some of their concerns were so that he could incorporate them into this discussion. Ideally, what the parents are looking for is to see if there is any possibility of making Waterman a community of Kindergarten to grade 6. He noted that Mr. Nero said that it was not possible. The question came up earlier about possibly locating a portable to

**Waterman and putting it in the court yard between the building and the neighbor, not on the parking lot side but on the opposite side. Mr. Zisseron had indicated to him earlier today that this couldn't be done because of the building codes of the City of Cranston because it didn't give the adequate 10 feet or more clearance from the building plus the considerations of not being able to locate another structure on the neighbor's property line because they have to be so many feet from the line. The answer to the question on the court yard that was asked, and he added that he would check on it further, he believed that they are not able to do that; it**

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**isn't that they don't have the will to do it. One of the parents mentioned the possibility of locating a portable where the current teachers' parking lot is, and he said that he didn't know the answer to that space wise. He will try to check it out, but he didn't have the answer tonight. Mr. Nero commented that Mr. Cowart, principal of Waterman, has called him at least 1,500 times in the last couple of months. They have looked at plans, and Mr. Cowart has become quite the architect because he has drawn plans and dotted lines. They have tried every which way; the square footage is clearly not enough to house it within the building. The building layout is pretty much the same way it is at a couple of other schools in the district when they were built at the same time which is a long time ago. There is no way they can accommodate a K to 6 there. They would**

get into a parking issue, and he is not so sure they would have issue providing enough parking for the faculty and on the streets. They have investigated this and still feel confident in the fact that a grade 1 through grade 6 school is the way to go with the Kindergarten going over to Garden City for the three-hour split in the day.

Mr. Traficante commented that there was only one way to get that portable at Waterman on the non-parking lot side and that is to ask the City for an exception; and they would have to go through zoning to get that exception which is quite a lengthy process.

Mrs. Tocco-Greenaway stated that she has received a lot of communication, and she has also expressed her own concern because her children excelled in the music program so she is concerned about the art and music time frame and how this move is going to affect the music program and the arts. She asked if administration could address this concern. She further commented that under one of the scenarios the art instruction time preliminarily would be drastically reduced as would the music. She asked to have a conversation about possibly not so drastically affecting the arts because it would definitely hurt the performance of the children in all other areas, not just the arts if one can cull them out which she didn't think they could. Mr. Nero commented that they could reconfigure the unified arts under any one of the scenarios and way they so choose. The bottom line is, and if that is the priority, they could do art once a week on a weekly basis versus doing it for one quarter. He

understood the continuity to it all. He had an impromptu meeting with Mr. Colozzi this morning, and that is not a problem. The issue is going to be that it will affect other unified arts. There isn't a lot of play room with all of this because of the foreign language issue. They would have to readdress the FTE's but financially it won't make all that much difference, and that isn't a concern because people want to see them every week. It is certainly very doable.

Mr. Stycos stated that he is also very concerned about the music. Mr. DeCristofaro had explained to him the way the schedule works, and it does seem that if it isn't done once a week all year somehow, the program is going to suffer. He also gets the feeling that it isn't quite as important with art with regard to the continuity. There is some importance, but if they want to have flexibility in the schedule, it seems that they could have art twice

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a week for one-half the year as opposed to once a week for the entire year and come out approximately equal. He asked if there were disagreements about this. If there are ten periods, three are gym, four are foreign language and one is music, they are down to eight with two left; and it would make sense to have a class twice a week for half the year rather than two classes once a week. Mr. Nero responded that he didn't perceive it to be a problem but asked Mr. Potemri, assistant principal at Park View, to comment. Mr. Potemri

**explained that with offering art for half the year twice a week opposite a technology class twice a week for half the year, FTE wise and schedule wise it would work out the same way as having it once a week for the entire year. Part of the concern is how much time will be offered in art for the entire year, twice a week for the entire year or twice a week for the semester. One of the concerns that was brought up to him personally was the opportunity for kids to go for art achievement awards because that is already done. Kids who have art all year long have already submitted to getting the silver and gold key awards. Those kids who have it in the second semester may not have those same opportunities. There are a lot of pros and cons to both sides. It is a matter of sitting down to see what will be best. As far as scheduling wise and FTE wise, it will figure out to the same, once a week or twice a week for a semester.**

**Mrs. Peck, program supervisor for art, commented that there would be a difference in access to students having it one half of the year and not the other half of the year. For 8th graders, it would be better for them to have it the second half of the year because those students who elect it in high school would have closer continuity to the subject matter going into the 9th grade whereas for 7th graders it would not necessarily be as detrimental having it the first half of the year.**

**Mr. Stycos commented to Mrs. Peck that she was saying that it would be better for the 8th graders to have art in the second half of the year so that when they went into 9th grade they would remember what**

they had in 8th grade whereas if they had it in the first half of the year, by the time they got to 9th grade, they would have to start all over again. Mr. Nero asked Mrs. Peck to explain the configuration when it was a junior high model. Mrs. Peck responded that in junior high all students took art two days a week for one year. In 9th grade, a student was able to elect it for five days a week.

Ms. Iannazzi asked that as a follow up to Mrs. Peck did she think that as far as flow of instruction wise would it be more beneficial to have art instruction one day a week year round or two days a week for a semester. Mrs. Peck responded that it should be half a year for two days a week rather than one day a week for a full year.

Mrs. Tocco-Greenaway referred to the key awards' competition and asked if students would be precluded from entering those competitions to have their work judged if they took it at a different part of the year. Could teachers teach with the same goals in mind, and that particular art portfolio wouldn't be submitted until the time rolled around? Mrs.

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Peck responded that it is possible. Competition is over for this year, however, any work that is done after January is usually held for the following year for the 7th graders.

**Mr. Traficante stated that he received a number of e-mails as well from the music, art, family and consumer science, and technology coordinators. The School Committee is going to express their thoughts tonight along with their suggestions and recommendations to the administration. The Superintendent in turn will meet with staff and coordinators of various departments to come up with a reconfiguration of what the 6th grade will be offered along with the 7th and 8th grade not only for those students taking world language but also those students who won't be taking world language. The committee will look to the expertise of the Superintendent and the entire staff to give the committee direction as to what they think the best case scenario is. Tonight all the committee is doing is probing and asking questions and hopefully making some recommendations to them for consideration.**

**Mrs. Greifer asked Mr. Colozzi if he had to choose between music once a week for the whole year versus twice a week for half a year, in his opinion what would be the better scenario realizing that he doesn't think that either one is very good. Mr. Colozzi responded that there has to be a distinction made between general music and instrumental music instruction. For general music, it was always once a week for the entire week. That enables them to have continuity particularly in the area of proficiency where a lot of the proficiency work is done in the middle school. With instrumental music, there is a lot of concern with scenario No. 4 where they would**

**lump those kids into three huge classes – one wood wind class, one brass class, and one percussion class. The numbers at Western Hills as an example would be well into the 50's. These are classes that require a lot of individual attention. Under the National Standards for Music Education and the district's present curriculum, those classes should be no more than eight to ten students. He knows a lot of people in the general education area frown upon the size of those classes, but it is a totally different type of instruction that requires a lot of individual attention. It is similar to a special education classroom. He is concerned that once per week per grouping would result in three huge classes.**

**Mr. Stycos asked that if music was once a week for the whole year, would the schedule solve that problem. Mr. Colozzi responded that it has always been once a week for the entire school year for instrumental and general music. If it remains once a week for general music, it would be much more viable. Mr. Stycos asked that if the instrumental music was once a week for the entire year would it work, and Mr. Colozzi said the students take instrumental in place of general music. Mr. Stycos asked if there was a scenario where there would be these big instructional classes even though they would be taking it once a week for the entire year, and Mr. Colozzi said that is the way it was proposed in scenario No. 4. General music is for anyone not taking instrumental music. They go into a general music class. That is for all 6th and 7th graders in the school. That would meet three times a week for one quarter so they will lose one**

worth of instruction and have material crammed down their throats with little hope for retention. Mr. Stycos asked that if general music is once a week for the entire year as it is now, it would work better but does that have an impact on how instrumental music is offered, or is instrumental music, the way instrumental music works totally separate from the way general music works? Mr. Colozzi responded that instrumental music works the same way except that there are much smaller groupings. For example, 7th grade flutes, 7th grade clarinets, and 7th grade trumpets. Now they would group all wood winds, all brass, all percussion into three huge classes that would meet once a week instead of numerous small classes that meet once a week. That would allow for a reduction in staff by doing general music in such a manner, but by having it the way they have always had it, which is the best way to have it, they would not be reducing staff any further. They have already incurred three staff members cut in the past four years. It is on the table to cut an additional 1-1/2 positions.

Mr. Nero asked Mr. Colozzi what instrumental was running for those kids who get pulled out for instrumental who don't go into general music at Western Hills. Ms. Kim Magnelli, assistant principal, responded that there are 18 sections of instrumental with anywhere

from 3 to 19 students in each section. Mr. Nero added that at one time it was considerably lower. Ms. Magnelli added that the smallest class is 3 students and the largest is 19; most of them are approximately 10 or 11. Mr. Nero added that the music would be cut one staff member from three to two to service it. Mr. Colozzi noted that there is a .5 FTE strings person. Mr. Nero commented that there are three full-time music people at Western Hills right now. The three has nothing to do with the strings right now; that hasn't been cut so the strings would still be there; but they are going from three to two teachers to teach orchestra, chorus, and general music. Mrs. Cole indicated that this was correct. Mr. Nero wanted to make it clear that this is not cutting the strings program at all; they still have the 3-1/2 teachers.

Mr. Nero asked Mr. Potemri how many students were in the Park View instrumental music instruction, and Mr. Potemri responded that the smallest class is 8 or 9, and the instrumental classes run approximately 15 or 16 students. There is one section of wood winds, one section of brass, and one section of percussion at each grade level. Mr. Nero commented that district has incredible music and arts programs, and he has a lot of respect for them. Those sections are small with 8 to 12 students when there are teachers with 25 to 30 students. Right now there are two full-time music teachers and at Park View it was cut to 1.5. That is not strings; that is music.

Mr. Nero noted that Park View had two teachers and is dropping to

1.5, and Bain has 2.5 teachers and is dropping to 1.5 with a little less in student population. It is not cutting the strings.

Mrs. Tocco-Greenaway referred to the instrumental instruction and to Mr. Colozzi's previous comments. She asked if the district is stuck with three very large instrumental

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groups where the students will not get the quality instruction which makes the music program so successful for the students at the middle school because she is concerned that if they are wed to this enormous model where she knows from her own children taking trombone or trumpet and then tuba over the years that that small instrumental instruction is crucial to the success and proficiency and the excellence. She is concerned that this is not destroyed. She asked if it can be addressed or were they wed to these three large sections of instrumental.

Ms. Magnelli referred to scenario No. 4 which had music scheduled for three days a week for one quarter; art scheduled for three days a week for one quarter; and technology for two quarters three days a week. If they went with that scenario, they don't have the time in the schedule to allow for those one day a week instrumental classes. They can't have them during the unified arts periods so they are looking during the period one block, that five days a week period one

where band meets for 7th and 8th grade three days a week and 6th grade two days a week, they are going to have two days a week for the whole ensemble to meet and three other days where it will be broken up into instruments – one day for brass, one day for woodwinds, and one day for percussion. They would have to lump all the 7th and 8th grade students into one brass class, all 7th and 8th grade students into wood winds, and all 7th and 8th grade into one percussion. If they run it the way they always have with music once a week, then it would not affect the instrument classes. Mr. Colozzi added that if they retain staff that they now have it would not affect the program. In order to service what they have been doing, they need to retain the staff. Mr. Nero noted that they are eliminating one-third of the students in the school; they are making it proportionate. Mr. Colozzi explained that if they have separate classes like they always have and run general music the entire year once a week, they could not do with the loss of staff as proposed which is one full person at Western Hills. The other concern he has is who it will be. If they lose the strings specialist because she is the low person, they will have someone else who will pick it up.

Ms. Iannazzi stated that she had asked Mr. Nero if it was possible to look at the FTE's and analyze how many FTE's would be affected in music if the schedule changed to instruction for one day a week all year around. She asked Mr. Nero if he was able to bottom line how many FTE's would be affected in music. Mr. Potemri responded that purely on numbers going to one day a week for each of those three

areas rather than having it for one quarter because they are singles and offered one day a week, there was an opportunity to reduce the FTE's in technology and art even less than what they proposed in the original scenario. There is no way to tell for music instruction exactly how many kids will be in those instrumental classes. They do not know if there will be six kids or 25 kids; it is very hard to gauge. It would be within .5 of an FTE. Mr. Nero commented that if this was a status quo year and the administration didn't do anything, the art of scheduling is a very tricky thing. If none of this happened and he was a principal doing projections, he would still not know. One doesn't know until they get

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closer to September. Many times there are discussions about a teacher's schedule because of an influx of students during the summer months. When they come with a budget, the same number of students can fluctuate. Looking at Bain's numbers being different from Park View's numbers where they have significantly more kids, their music FTE's is not substantially equal or is equal to it. It is the nature of the best in scheduling in how it is done in a particular school. In the best of circumstances, even if the committee didn't do anything and didn't act on this resolution, they don't know what will happen with certain situations; it is not an exact science. In some areas with the best estimates, they are still in uncharted waters.

**Ms. Iannazzi asked Mr. Potemri if there would be further reductions from the proposed scenario No. 4 as further loss of FTE's in art, music, and technology were each offered one day a week all year round. Mr. Potemri responded that with offering three times a week, there is the opportunity to juggle when and how it is done. One of the things that Mr. Nero had asked him to consider was to look at scenario No. 4 with one day a week scheduling to have that continuity with art, music, and technology all year round. Before they had 1.5 FTE's because they had the opportunity to have twenty periods a week and twelve periods a week so they needed that 1.5. Mr. Potemri fully explained this.**

**Mr. Stycos commented that he didn't understand why, given the fact that today's 6th graders and 7th graders are going to be next year's 7th graders and 8th graders, why they couldn't put together a perspective schedule on this one day a week idea for music and see how the instrumental classes came out based on this year's 6th and 7th graders, and then they could see if what Mr. Colozzi is worried about is worth worrying about or maybe it's not accurate. Mr. Nero said that in one month from now he could look at the schedule. He would ask that question of Ms. Anderson, Ms. Magnelli, and Mr. Potemri. He asked if they could get a general idea based on the staff how many students would be in there. Ms. Magnelli said that with the information they have now for the 6th grade and the 7th grade knowing those students are moving up, they would have a pretty good idea. Mr. Nero asked them to get this information for him**

**tomorrow.**

**Chairman Traficante stated that the Superintendent is not operating in a vacuum. He is working not only with the staff but also with and meeting with CTA officials to make sure everyone is rolling in the same direction. The School Committee and the administration appreciate the cooperation of everyone involved.**

**Mr. Stycos remarked that all the scenarios call for the elimination of family and consumer science classes. He realizes that there is a shortage of periods, but he feels that it is a valuable curriculum. He would like to urge the administration to look at a schedule where if they can't put in enough time for that so that there is some choice there and keep that available so that kids get a taste of it in middle school, and then they can decide when they get to high school whether or not they want to take more**

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**courses. He also feels the nutritional segment of that curriculum is very important. He asked if this was a possibility. Mr. Traficante stated that he concurred with Mr. Stycos.**

**Mr. Scherza indicated that some materials were just handed to the committee for their perusal. He has not had an opportunity to read it**

yet. The last two pages proposes to do some pieces although it is scaled back from a traditional family and consumer science program. They felt there were some things that would be beneficial for students in keeping with the district's mission. He doesn't know how it can be worked in; he received it this afternoon. The administration has been working with the area coordinators as they have with other subject areas. He would like to digest it to see where they can go with this. He would like to speak with the middle school principals, and most importantly, the assistant principals for scheduling to see what is doable.

Mr. Stycos commented that he is concerned that if every student is made take a foreign language, and some kids really don't want to be there, that those kids will disrupt the class for the others so that it will be damaging not only to the kids that aren't paying any attention to the instruction but also to the rest of the class. In the same vein, there are a number of students who have a basic ability in a language, particularly Spanish. If they could be allowed to opt out of that or test out of that middle school program if they already know the language from being around their parents or grandparents, then the district could get them doing something that is more meaningful than the very basic things that are learned in the beginning of a language. He asked if this is something that could be looked at.

Mr. Scherza responded that administration could look at it, but at first blush and he hasn't given it much thought, he doesn't necessarily

that there should be a lot of electives at the middle school level when they know there are areas they want to strengthen. The idea of students who have a strong grounding in a language other than English would allow for those students to take an additional language, or often times if they are ESL, to really strengthen the English language through the Read 180 and a number of other programs in Literacy programs. He would be amenable to looking at it. With regard to students being disruptive right now, he wouldn't expect them to be any more or any more less disruptive than they are currently because a lot of electives are not offered at the middle school now. He will see how it can be worked in and come back with some options. Mr. Nero added that he agreed with Mr. Scherza because right now 100% of the students, except for the students who need Read 180, are in world language. As a former middle school principal for a number of years, they had a program when he first became principal where they would dump students into it who didn't like world language, and that was more of a grounds for discipline because students in world language are heterogeneously grouped. When they are like that, they basically behave pretty well. Secondly, eleven years ago when he was an assistant principal, there was a young man from the Dominican Republic who was very aggravating and the Spanish teacher was throwing him out every day. This student told

him that he spoke Spanish fluently, and Mr. Nero told him he grew up in the United States, speaks English pretty well and took English for twelve years of English going through school. He understood what Mr. Stycos was saying but cautioned when they move to too many electives they may get themselves in a position where they will need a .6 FTE of this and a .4 FTE of that and may not be able to hire someone who is interested in the partial part of a job. He wanted to make sure that everyone had an understanding as they move forward and come up with a proposal.

Mrs. Tocco-Greenaway said that she is also looking at this proposed revised curriculum for family and consumer science. She agreed with Mr. Stycos; she knows that from watching her own children that a lot of what they learned in the programs concerning particularly nutrition and wellness really stuck with them. She remembers her son coming home and reading the ingredients on every box and asking her questions. She cooks and comes from a family that cooks. She feels she is pretty astute in how she raised her children to be aware. These habits have stuck with him; he is now going on 20 years old and is in college. He switched to whole grains and started reading labels. It reinforced all the things he learned through athletics and with what she has taught to be a healthy lifestyle. It is very important because the kids now are having a bigger problem with obesity and lack of activity than the children were when her 19 year old son was in middle school or even her 17 year old daughter had. She felt that the inactivity and the fast food are affecting the children. The program

has value for a number of reasons, and with the push to wellness and trying to teach these lifestyles to the children, she felt it would be good if there was a piece in the middle school because this is where they learn their habits. This is where, even if the best things aren't being served in the home, children become aware. They become more independent and start to think about what they want to do and how they want to live their lives. In those ways, education can help transform a child. No one wants to see these kids grow up to have Type II Diabetes before they are 30 years old. It ties into the district's educational mission as well as the real push for wellness that is coming down both federally and from the state. This district has been ahead of the curve in a lot of ways with health and wellness. With regard to teaching about credit and identity theft, that too is a very real skill; and it could be done with efficiency and also in a way that would pay off to educating the whole child. She would like to see the district work with this if possible.

Mr. Traficante said that he would encourage the Superintendent and the Assistant Superintendent to seriously consider incorporating some of this program into the curriculum. Mr. Scherza said that he does think that for too long people have been turning their heads to these things. They have had curriculum in health and in family and consumer science, but people's actions have not matched their rhetoric. They try to teach kids about these things, but French fries are still served along with Coca Cola and ice cream. No matter what anyone's feelings are, it is hurting kids. They have to start

demonstrating that what they say in trying to get them to do follows along with what is taught in the curriculum. As far as the obesity is concerned, people talk about self-

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esteem. Parents use this as an issue with the grade configurations, but self-esteem comes with the obesity issues, the health issues, and the bullying issues. He asked if they can fit it in to the extent they did in the past, and he said probably not. With the revised curriculum that was presented by Mrs. Guttin this afternoon, he felt it was worth considering, and they have to start modeling as a district to the kids what they are told. It is the same as telling them not to smoke and then going out and smoking ourselves and offering them one. The adults have to stop doing these things and do what is best for them. Right now through the hidden curriculum they are being taught or they are developing their lifestyles and their personal values. He agreed with Mrs. Tocco-Greenaway that he will do everything in his power to at least get something in here that will address her concerns.

Mr. Nero commented that he served on the Wellness Committee for a couple of years, and Mr. Stycos won him over. He doesn't know what hurt him more, giving up a \$35,000 soda contract when he was principal or losing 35 lbs. in the last year to be in better health. Looking at the family and consumer science issue, one of the things

he would personally prefer to do is to strengthen the high school program even more. Personally he would do less at the middle school to give more at the high school especially as they are looking at programs to help kids exit. They talk about kids going off to college with credit cards, and they are putting themselves deeply in depth. It would seem to him that if they were to tackle the foreign language earlier, if they were to get their four years of a foreign language out of the way and had their senior year open he would look to that part. The part that makes him nervous or concerns him regarding family and consumer science in place of the foreign language, there would be an access equity issue. There are a lot of kids who will go on to college and living in a dorm who will be in the foreign language program in the 7th and 8th grade and not have the opportunity to take this. The family and consumer science program that was developed by Mrs. Guttin and Ms. DeSimone is a phenomenal program, and that is his issue. One of the things they want to do is get kids ready to be literate with the digital portfolio for when they get to high school. He doesn't want to lose sight of that as they move forward.

Ms. Iannazzi commented that she knew that a lot of elementary schools currently do a lot of formal teaming. She knows that Garden City and Orchard Farms do it. She asked if administration would either encourage informal teaming to be done at the elementary level or alternatively, and this is a suggestion she received from a teacher who is also a constituent, when they involuntarily transfer the middle

**school teachers to the 6th grade, if administration can ask for volunteers first with a subject preferred so that they can strengthen math at the 6th grade level. Mr. Flynn, President of the Cranston Teachers' Alliance, explained that elementary certification is not subject specific. Any teacher who has that certification does not have a specific content area. Those positions are open to any number of teachers. No one knows who will end up in these positions. Mr. Nero said that informally teachers get together; they have their**

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**strengths in a content area. The 3rd, 4th, and 5th grade teachers at Hope Highlands took advantage of this. One teacher was very strong in algebra, and for those students who had her and another teacher, they flipped classes between English and algebra; and it worked out very well. Administration does not discourage this at all.**

**Mr. Stycos asked if there is a way that the administration can encourage the teachers who are willing to do this not only between the 6th grade teachers but also between other grades such as the 5th and the 6th grade teachers. Mr. Scherza responded that administration can certainly encourage it, but he didn't think that under the certification standards in the collective bargaining agreement, they can mandate it. There are many situations where informal teaming goes on, but to encourage it, he would say yes, but**

to make it across the board to do it in every 5th and 6th grade class, he wouldn't be able to promise that it would come to fruition. Mr. Stycos asked how it could be encouraged, and Mr. Flynn responded that one of the reasons it works better in some places than others is due to the fact that there is an opportunity for common planning time where teachers can get together to do that. He doesn't know what the itinerant schedules will be. They would have to free up the time in order to plan. There would have to be an incentive for common planning time to facilitate those kinds of discussions. They would be more likely to want to do that than not. Ms. Iannazzi asked if the elementary teachers have some form of common planning time, and Mr. Nero responded not necessarily. They have planning time.

Mr. Stycos asked Mr. Flynn if he was suggesting that with the 6th grade, when the schedule for the itinerants come along, administration should try to schedule the art teacher to have her class with one 6th grade class at the same time the music teacher is having it with the other 6th grade class or that there be more itinerant time which would be more cost in the day and add to the current prep time to make common planning time. Mr. Flynn responded that they would be looking for an incentive. If the committee wants them to do something above and beyond, they would have to give them an incentive. There would be additional clerical responsibilities of correcting, etc. Mr. Stycos commented that this would be a cost issue because someone would have to cover the classroom, and Mr. Flynn responded that it would be a cost issue.

**Mr. Scherza remarked that he would like to go back to the administrators because something was sparked in this conversation as a possibility on a limited basis that they might be able to accomplish this. He has not discussed it with anyone yet, and he doesn't know how it will work.**

**Mr. Stycos indicated that the committee received an e-mail which raised an interesting question of the child who is currently in 6th grade who is not going to 7th grade. The letter writer was making a point that this child would now be told to go back to the elementary school. He asked if this has been thought about. Mr. Nero responded that, unfortunately, being a middle school principal, he or she is faced with retention, and he**

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**responded to a School Committee member who forwarded it to him. The issue of that child was not being socially ready in the 6th grade as well as the fact that the child was not doing well academically. That was one of the issues that came up when they first moved to middle school, and that is why one may see more retention, although it is not great at 6th grade versus what it was at the elementary level. He would discourage the retention of a student that would end up going back to the elementary school; that child who has issues now would not serve the self-esteem of that child at all. It is always**

difficult being in that position. If it is status quo for 6th, 7th, and 8th grades, and he is facing a student and his family whose child is at risk of staying back, generally what the research tells him is that students who repeat are more than likely not to graduate high school.

If they have difficulties now and looking at the fact that they are a year older and repeating the same grade, he very rarely finds kids who are retained that they go forward. He would recommend to the principals on an individual basis that this child go to summer school. Many times they are looking for the incentive for the student to get him to the next grade because sometimes it is puberty, maturity, and a lot of different things; socially they are not ready for it. He would sit with the principal to determine what it would take to get the child into summer school courses to get him academically ready. If the child totally gives up, he or she will repeat the grade, but he doesn't advise that they go back to the 6th grade.

Mr. Scherza commented that he was in agreement with Mr. Nero. He asked one of the middle school assistant principals who schedules how many students in his school were in that category last year. He believed the answer was either three or four. At another school it was one. There are approximately 900 students at each grade level. If they are trying to worry about what is going to happen with four students, they can deal with it on an individual basis. That should not be something that guides whether or not something is moved. They can deal with those issues when speaking about five or six students district wide out of 900. The district can provide them the services.

**The research overwhelmingly shows that after the real early grades retention is a negative piece in terms of predictors for graduation and for success. It is unlikely that a student by staying back at twelve or thirteen is automatically going to pick up everything they resisted and didn't learn the year before. That is dealing with the exceptional minority of cases, and those students can be given individual attention.**

**Mrs. Tocco-Greenaway referred to Mr. Scherza's and Mr. Nero's comments and asked if administration has the resources to help the families in those situations because a small amount of students are being addressed individually. Some may be quite needy and asked if there are pieces to help the family help the student succeed so that they can move forward. Retaining a child at that level can be devastating. Mr. Scherza responded that every case is a little different. The district has multiple resources to deal with the specific types of problems that would lead to that, and they would take a holistic approach as they do now to keep them from going through that experience.**

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**Mr. Nero added that if he has a student who has an F in middle school, and if a student fails two courses, they have to take two but only pass one. If a student has an F- and an F, he feels they should**

be responsible to pay for the summer school for the F. He has been in situations for students in high school where the guidance counselor has said they can't afford to go to summer school, and they explain the reason why; he would then find the money for the student. He does not want to make it Carte Blanche. Parents should be responsible somewhat for students.

Mr. Scherza stated for the record that it would depend upon the nature of the situation. If it is a child who just out and out was refusing to cooperate and refusing to study, they would deal with those psycho-emotional issues as they would with any student. If that were the case, the district wouldn't be looking to pick up the tab. If there is a student who is failing two, three, or four courses at that age level, they would be questioning if that student was at risk in some other way or special needs. In those cases, they would be referring that student and looking into it immediately.

Mr. Stycos asked about the technology curriculum. He noted that there has been talk about the digital portfolio. He asked what administration sees as the crucial elements in the technology curriculum and what are the things that are less crucial that are being taught in technology. Mr. Scherza responded that he wouldn't speak about the things that are less crucial because the district doesn't go far enough. One of the things they are trying to do is to be able to turn out a better product from the middle school. That is the only way they can strengthen the high schools to make them stronger going in.

He hasn't seen a mission statement in any of the schools he has been in not only in this state but also around the country that doesn't in some way allude to the need or use of technology. There is a much greater need in the world today. What administration would like to do at the very least is to get the students indoctrinated, oriented, or educated to the portfolio system that they now begin to do in grades 9 and 10 at the high school so that students entering from middle school would have that under their belt. They would have their passwords and know how to download things. Some of the great artists, musicians and talented people in other ways could put some of their pieces from middle school into their portfolio to meet the standard toward graduation.

Mr. Boyajian, program supervisor for technology, stated that it is a state requirement that all students upload their digital portfolio to learn how to make files and to scan anything to enhance themselves. It is a state requirement that students have a digital portfolio. The district needs to get the 8th graders more prepared to hit the ground running in the 9th grade. They do not want to take away from the students what they are learning in technology. The district lost four technology teachers. The unified arts teachers respect each other. They are not here to cut anyone's position. They want the students to get a well rounded education. The state is mandating the portfolio piece. There is a lot of work that goes into the digital portfolio. The only way to get the kids prepared is to get them to use the proper technology that is out there to enhance their

work. If they get the practice and do those pieces and show the application that is needed, it will help in all their classes and not just in technology. They have to save their pieces of work. When they get to the high schools, it is not a waste of time. They are teaching kids before and after school. Instead of doing it before or after school or trying to find a computer somewhere within the school, the teachers can give those students an opportunity at the middle school level to be more proficient in 9th grade in high school.

Mr. Stycos asked Mr. Boyajian to explain what the current curriculum is in technology for grades 6, 7, and 8. Mr. Boyajian indicated that each school varies a little bit. They do some Desk Top Publishing, on-line communications using the internet, robotics, math skills that go along with the robotics program for engineering, doing research, and CAD. One can walk into any technology education class, and the kids are enjoying it. They are able to branch out a little bit. Mr. Stycos asked if the curriculum is up to the teacher, and Mr. Boyajian explained that there are guidelines to be followed. He noted that they also do bridge building for engineering.

Mr. Nero added that having a little familiarity, he wrote many of the curricula. The 6th graders would take computer aided drawing as well as introduction to technology. In the 7th grade, they have

graphics communication and on-line communications as a part of that. There is a full gamut of courses that they take. In a perfect world he would be looking for this, and he has discussed it with Mr. Boyajian and this committee and long before the Middle School Reform Committee. His preference was scenario No. 3 which had a lot of technology in it. One of the things in a perfect world would be every 8th grader take technology twice a week for the entire year. In the beginning of the 8th grade, they would be looking at keyboarding and functional skills working with Microsoft Office where they are able to understand Word, Excel, etc. When they get to the second half of the year, they would get their license for a half year, and this is worked out with the Department of Education to obtain their password. Every student would be proficient by the time they left the 8th grade. Every quarter at the high school each student has to put in two pieces of digital portfolio worthy work. If this was done in the 8th grade, by the end of the 8th grade each student for each course they have would have one piece of digital portfolio worthy work as well as one reflection. That would serve that in every course they have in the second half of the year they would have that experience of doing that sometimes six or seven times because they have four majors and their unified arts. Also, a student's portfolio is on line to the teachers who have his or her portfolio password so that when the student goes to the high school, his 9th grade English teacher can look at his 8th grade portfolio worthy work and begin to make assessments in judgment on what his strengths and weaknesses are. That would be his dream to get that done, but it would require two classes of

technology throughout the school year. That is one of the reasons he likes one of the scenarios because it had four per week and would meet the requirements of computer literacy and make it to fit.

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Mr. Scherza stated that it would be a better use of the resources because the students don't begin doing any of these things until grade 9 now. If all students were proficient going into grade 9, they would be able to take an additional course such as family and consumer course, art, music, another math or science course. The students would be proficient the day they come in rather than taking keyboarding all over again which many of them know by the time they get into high school any way. It would be a better use of the community's resources and would get students ready a year sooner than the district traditionally has.

Chairman Traficante advised all of the area coordinators, principals, and assistant principals to be ready to be called to the Superintendent's and the Assistant Superintendent's office during the next week to formulate a plan to present to the School Committee.

The Superintendent has indicated that he will get back to the committee within one week to ten days with a proposal. He would be ready to work with them to come up with a plan that will be viable for all students in the 6th, 7th, and 8th grades.

## **VI. Adjournment**

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

**There being no further business to come before the work session, it was adjourned at 8:15 p.m.**

**Respectfully submitted,**

**Andrea M. Iannazzi**

**Clerk**