

**CRANSTON SCHOOL COMMITTEE
MONDAY, FEBRUARY 4, 2008
WESTERN HILLS MIDDLE SCHOOL
400 PHENIX AVENUE
EXECUTIVE SESSION: 5:30 P.M.
PUBLIC MEETING: 7:00 P.M.**

MINUTES

A special meeting of the Cranston School Committee was held on the evening of the above date at Western Hills Middle School with the following members present: Mr. Archetto (arrived at 5:47 p.m.), Mrs. Greifer, Ms. Iannazzi, Mr. Lombardi, Mr. Stycos, Mrs. Tocco-Greenaway, and Mr. Traficante. Also present were Mr. Scherza, Mr. Nero, Mr. Votto, Mr. Balducci, Mrs. Lundsten, and Mr. Laliberte.

The meeting was called to order at 5:30 p.m. It was moved by Ms. Iannazzi, seconded by Mrs. Greifer and unanimously carried that the members adjourn to Executive Session pursuant to RI State Laws PL 42-46-5(a)(1) Personnel; PL 42-46-5(a)(2) Collective Bargaining and Litigation (Possible Litigation – Caruolo Action); PL 42-46-5(a)(4) Civil Investigation/Health Benefits.

Chairman Traficante reconvened the meeting at 7:03 p.m.

The roll was called and the Pledge of Allegiance conducted.

I. Executive Session Minutes Sealed – February 4, 2008

Moved by Ms. Iannazzi, seconded by Mrs. Greifer and unanimously carried that the February 4, 2008 Executive Session minutes remain confidential.

II. Adjourn to Public Budget Work Session

Moved by Ms. Iannazzi, seconded by Mrs. Greifer and unanimously carried that the meeting be adjourned to the public budget work session.

III. Public Hearing on Proposed Budget for 2008-2009

There were no members of the public who wished to speak on the budget.

Mrs. Greifer referred to page 138 of the budget and noted that there was an increase of \$124,000 in the fuel charge, and based on the district's usage with the understanding that fuel is going up tremendously, she asked why the figure is so large. Mr. Balducci responded that in this document it is going from a budget year to a budget year. The amount listed under the 07-08 of \$223,000 is

actually an area where they are going to be in a deficit position. He used as the base what he believed the district will be

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spending which is much more than \$233,000, and then moving that forward one year. It does look skewed because it is going from a budget amount to a full budget amount, and that is the reason for what appears to be a major increase. He has attempted to go from an actual spending to a proposed spending next year. They are spending much more than what is being budgeted this year.

Mrs. Greifer commented that customarily for all utilities a set figure is used across the board, and she asked Mr. Balducci what this approximate figure is for this year. Mr. Balducci stated that it could be a low of 5% to a high of 7%. He attempted to not go off the budget amount but to go off the most previous completed fiscal year because that is the year he had the actual dollars to go by. He moved that figure forward two years. It depends on the utility area; the factor was different in each case.

Mr. Lombardi commented that the Governor's proposed budget is to include level funding. Obviously, it is always contingent upon the Legislature what they do. That level funding in Mr. Balducci's presentation under assumption No. 1 would add back that \$1,067,000.

Mr. Balducci added that information came from the State this week

that even though the Governor is proposing level funding one of the categories of state aid is group home aid. Actually, Cranston took a hit of approximately \$105,000 in that category because it is based on the number of DCYF approved beds that are located in a particular community. The state funds those beds at \$15,000 per placement. In next year's proposed state aid calculation, it is listing that revenue source at \$15,000 as compared to \$120,000. So, somewhere someone looked at the number of beds available and made a determination that next year the district would have one bed available at a cost of \$15,000. The district is below level funding next year.

Mr. Lombardi commented that in the proposed budget there are line items for each school that is referred to as sewage. This is the sewer use fee that city administration had agreed to pick up this share. He asked if there had been any discussions about whether or not city administration would follow suit in 08-09. Mr. Balducci responded that he had a conversation with the Director of Administration for the City. He was of the opinion that he believed it was a perpetual agreement, and he asked Mr. Balducci's office to put something in writing requesting that this area be reviewed. He is waiting for Mr. Carlucci's response. It is approximately \$108,000 in next year's budget.

Mr. Traficante requested for the February 11th meeting that Mr. Balducci investigate some potential savings. He wanted some numbers extending the radius for bus transportation for elementary

from $\frac{3}{4}$ of a mile to 1 mile; for middle school from 1-1/2 miles to 1-3/4 miles and high school from 2 to 2-1/2 miles. He would like the potential savings in terms of drivers eliminated, monitors eliminated, fuel savings, maintenance savings and to include fringe benefits for any of those personnel.

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Mr. Traficante stated that in the proposed budget there are salary and raise steps in the amount of \$3,322,505, and he would like the savings if the committee eliminated any proposed salary increase and the impact it would have for potential savings in terms of certified pension, non-certified pension, workers compensation, and payroll taxes.

Mr. Stycos stated that the presentation made clear that this budget if it were to be passed it would be a violation of the law because it would exceed the cap. He asked what the Superintendent wanted the committee to do with this budget. In the past, the previous Superintendent had always wanted the budget passed untouched. He asked Mr. Scherza how he would balance having the budget untouched at some levels and it being an illegal proposal. Mr. Traficante clarified for the public that the Superintendent has proposed a budget of approximately 9% over the cap which equates

to approximately \$8 million providing the Caruolo Act is successful and providing that the Mayor allocates the 5% which is allowable under the law so that \$8 million could very easily be \$16 million if the district is not successful. If all things are successful, the budget is at least \$8 million over the cap. Mr. Scherza stated that in his presentation he started it by apologizing to the community for trying to cut below what is really needed, and he cited state law, school department policy, and his employment contract as having to be the advocate for students here. He said that he would never again not tell the committee what is needed to run the district and do a decent job with it. With that said, he proposed the budget that came to the committee a week ago. If there are going to be cuts made, he is not the elected official in this district; he gets his marching orders on things like that from the committee. If there are valued judgments made on what programs to cut, then he has to get that direction from the consensus position of the seven people here who are elected. He has dumped a lot of it into their laps. Administration will work with the committee in every way they can, but it is not his job to cut it back; his job is to tell the committee what is needed. If the amount needed exceeds the 5% allowance for increased taxation, then he would suggest that this committee pass a budget that reconciles with that for now. In so doing, it would condemn them from going through a legal challenge next year to let the courts determine whether or not there is enough to operate the schools properly. He is looking at it in a different way. He is not just looking at the dollars and cents. He is looking at it as an educator and a program person. Of everything that

is in there, there is nothing that he would recommend to be cut out. He could give them options of what maybe considered by the committee, but that direction has to come from the committee.

Mr. Stycos said that there is an item in the budget for \$900,000 for new personnel, and the committee received a list today of what that consists of. That \$900,000 is an easy target for a cut. He asked Mr. Nero to go through these positions and explain why each is needed. Mr. Scherza explained that the district needs another ESL teacher; that is pure and simple; it is regulatory. It is to accommodate the number of students who are in the system right now. It is not a projection for growth; it is based on known cases that

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the district has in the way they break out at the various locations from elementary to middle and middle to high school. Mr. Nero explained that he would do an update on all the new personnel requirements.

Mr. Scherza pointed out that the Sanders Academy positions, the occupational therapist for both the Sanders and Horton Programs allow the district to save significant dollars. As an example, at Horton alone this year for the eleven students there, they spent \$186,000. At \$50,000 per student it would have cost \$550,000 had they kept them in placements out of district. These students are being educated in the

district, but the district has to provide the services here. As they expand Sanders and Horton Programs, they will be needing those teachers to provide those pieces so they can affect further savings. It amounts to spending some money to save a lot of money. Mr. Laliberte added that it also includes the Early Childhood Center. Mr. Nero clarified that the 1.5 FTE ESL teacher is a full time position at Bain Middle School and a .5 FTE at Gladstone School. To clarify the special education teacher, Cranston East has a planning room and Cranston West does not. It is for a special education teacher to run their planning room for their in-house suspension. He noted again that he would send a memo to the committee outlining all the new personnel requests.

Mr. Stycos asked if the Sanders and Horton Programs were anticipating increased enrollments at those schools. Mr. Scherza responded that they are in both cases expecting increased enrollments. Mr. Laliberte added that this year the district doesn't have all the itinerants needed for the Early Childhood Center, and they have been working short-handed there; and the teachers have worked with them in covering this.

Mr. Stycos asked if it is for an increase in enrollment or to cover the existing students. Mr. Scherza responded that it would be to help both. It will help with the increased enrollments as they expand those programs. This is the first year the Horton Program is bringing back students from out-of-district placements. They hope to expand it next

year, but they need the capacity to service those students.

Ms. Iannazzi asked Mr. Laliberte that if it is for some increased population could it possibly be a savings to bring students back from out-of-district placement. Mr. Laliberte responded that as they take students back into the district, Mr. Balducci is notified, and tuition payment stops. Two or three were stopped this year in mid year. Some of it will be reflected in this year's budget. When students come back as of September, it will be reflected in the new budget. Mr. Scherza referred to the bar graph that was sent to the committee last week; it was also a part of his budget power point presentation. It showed that the out-of-district placements had dropped but there is an increase at the middle and high schools in special education students.

Mrs. Tocco-Greenaway referred to page 189 of the budget and noted that there is a nursing service contract line. She asked if this increase of \$44,000 reflects any

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increase in services because students were brought back into the district. Mr. Laliberte responded that this student has been attending Cranston Public Schools but requires nursing care. Mrs. Tocco-Greenaway asked why the increase is so high. Mr. Balducci commented that this number, \$16,000 for 07-08 was drastically under

budgeted. They are spending at the level of about \$60,000, but it is not reflected in this number. They do a budget to budget comparison, and it is skewed. He is building it off what will actually be spent this year and then move that number forward to next year.

Mr. Stycos indicated that the last actual was \$28,000 and asked what was causing it to go from \$28,000 to \$60,000. Mr. Laliberte responded that there is a second child who came in who is medically fragile. There is one student who needs a nurse all the time, and for that particular child, it depends on her attendance and whether or not she is able to attend school. The other student requires a nurse all the time. Some of the funding comes from the IDEA which is federally funded. They try to fund as much as they can out of the IDEA Grant, but if they don't have enough money in the IDEA Grant, then they have to take it out of Fund 1. Mr. Scherza added that they are seeing students who require a nurse to accompany them from the time they are picked up at their door, ride the buses with them, and that has taken up another bite that has increased this cost over the past year or two.

Mrs. Tocco-Greenaway asked if this particular line item for nursing services would include nurses who are riding the bus with the children. Mr. Laliberte responded that it does include some of those nurses. Mrs. Tocco-Greenaway asked if they were one-on-one situations or if it was plugging in a nurse for the ride and at the student's school service one child at a time. Mr. Laliberte responded

that if the district uses one of its own nurses, they don't require more than one nurse to ride the bus even though there may be two or three children on the bus that need the nursing services at any particular time. They have discovered that the contracted nurses now will only service one child at a time. They will not ride a bus where there are two children on there that require a special service. The district saves the contracted nurses for bus runs that require only assistance to one child, and they use their own nurses to ride buses where there are two or more youngsters who need nursing services.

Mr. Traficante stated that at the present time at Horton there are eleven students who were placed out of the district and have now been returned to the district. He asked if this number was increased could it offset the cost of some of this new personnel that is needed for this program. Mr. Laliberte responded that it would offset the cost. He further commented that they have a student who may be coming back to the district shortly from an out-of-district placement. In all of the out-of-district placements, a minimum cost would be between \$45,000 and \$50,000. Mr. Traficante stated that rather than add personnel to the budget that is extremely over-extended at the present time, he asked why the district wouldn't try to bring back all those students to the Horton Program to offset the cost of the new personnel. Mr. Laliberte responded that they are

doing that, but they can't bring them back before they are ready to come back. Some of them have to be gradually transferred to become a part of the program. They also have to keep track of the numbers of youngsters they have that they are bringing back. In most classrooms they can bring back no more than ten with one teacher and one teacher assistant. He asked the committee to keep in mind that one of the teachers there and one teacher assistant there is paid out of IDEA. The district is only actually paying for one teacher and one teacher assistant for those two classrooms. Mr. Traficante asked that with the relaxation in the special education arena statewide would it help to add additional students rather than having a ratio of one to ten would it be expanded. Mr. Laliberte expanded that they can't do it with this program because these are youngsters with emotional issues, and beyond eight or nine youngsters in a classroom, it would be unmanageable. Mr. Scherza added that since the district's two high schools are on watch, they may have difficulty reducing staff in the special needs area. The district has been told that not just for the high schools but any changes in the current pattern will have to be approved by the Department of Education to ask them to allow the district to change those numbers.

Mrs. Greifer commented that when they talk about these new positions at Horton or Sanders, this is almost an accounting in that the cost of these positions must be offset elsewhere in the budget by a decrease in outside tuitions. Mr. Balducci responded that if they

have already identified a student, then he will not move the budget for that student for next year. If he is hoping to avoid the need to place an unknown student out, that cost has not been reflected in this year's budget yet. It depends on which students they are looking at, whether they are looking at current students coming back into the program or avoiding placing a potential student to an outside placement and instead keeping that student in-house to one of these programs. It depends on how one looks at it.

Mr. Nero indicated to the committee that Mrs. Matoian Heard was present at this meeting. She is the principal/director of the Sanders Program. He commented that there was a student in the beginning of the year who would have required an outside placement. This student had an advocate who asked Mr. Nero what he had to offer this student. He offered the Sanders Program to the student, and after the advocate and student spent a day at that school, the advocate came back to Mr. Nero and asked if he ever thought of selling this program outside the district because this is a grand slam. Mr. Nero asked the advocate if it was worth \$50,000 to \$60,000, and the advocate told him that he would definitely pay \$50,000 to \$60,000 to have his students come to a place like this. Warwick came to Cranston a couple of years ago to duplicate this program in Warwick. One of the things they could look at in selling this program to make money is they would have to establish a break-even point as to when to bring staff in. There are approximately twenty students in that school, and the savings is astronomical in terms of what it would cost for

out-of-district placement. There is a

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.2 FTE art teacher going there because Mrs. Matoian Heard is working on making sure that the students in her program meet the PBGR's for those students completing high school.

Mr. Stycos asked that when the list is put together where these positions are to include the "why" for these positions. He was sure it would be nice to have an extra math teacher at East and West, but he was also thinking that the district was doing okay this year; something has to be cut so they should cut the new stuff.

Mr. Lombardi referred to the health-related costs from the power point presentation in the amount of \$4.7 million. It is his understanding that the district has already piggy-backed the city's buying power with health care costs so the district has already taken advantage of volume discount. If the district transfers all health insurance to a United Health plan versus a Blue Cross plan, and he understands that this is a contractual issue, he asked what the savings would be. Mr. Balducci responded that administration has met with a representative from United Health to look at some figures. Because the district is self-insured, the district pays a provider to act as a third party administrator. United's state plan is approximately

\$23 per person per month. The district's current Blue Cross plan is approximately \$46 per person per month, so it would make sense that there is savings to be had if the Blue Cross population was taken and potentially moved to a United population.

Mr. Lombardi commented that throughout the budget he noticed for each of the schools an account called "driver athletic ps". As an example, on page 78, there is Park View driver athletic ps. He found others as well. The number jumps from budgeted item for Park View from \$3,000 to \$8,000, at Western Hills from \$3,000 to \$9,000; and it applies to all the schools. Mr. Balducci explained that this is a budget service account. Mr. Zisseron, whenever possible, will provide in-house busing to transport the middle school athletes to and from games. Unfortunately, when the schedules conflict between when he needs a bus versus when a team needs a bus the district has to go to an outside vendor. That is what that account is used for. He would have to look to see why it is jumping so much. The purpose of the account is to accommodate when the district has to call an outside vendor for athletic transportation. Mr. Lombardi noted that there was a significant jump in one year, and Mr. Balducci explained that this may have been the year when middle school sports were not in existence.

Mr. Lombardi asked if the School Committee would be getting an explanation on the health care, and Mr., Balducci responded that Mr. Walsh would be attending a committee work session in March to

explain the health care. He will be reporting to the committee on other topics as well.

Mr. Archetto stated that \$140,881,281 is an enormous amount of money to pay. However, the district was level funded this year, and this was taken into consideration,

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and that is why the district needs additional funding for next year. He did not perceive the committee getting everything they want in this budget. This is a wish list. What this committee needs to do is think out of the box and devise ways to raise revenue that doesn't come from the local property taxpayer. There is only a certain amount that any home owner can pay. As it was disclosed earlier, this budget violates the cap. There is only a certain amount of money that the city can allocate to the school department. It is this committee's job in the next several months to devise ways to make some cuts and find ways to increase revenues. He had a suggestion last year, and he is going to look into it further this year, that in California they are advertising on the outside of school buses or on the inside of school buses. He knows that there is a state law that prohibits this in Rhode Island, but perhaps something could be done about it in the General Assembly that major corporations could get involved in paying for advertising. He also felt that the committee should look into philanthropic activity to see if Alan Shawn Feinstein wants to get

involved. He believed there was a time when he wanted to name the Norwood Avenue School after himself. He would be willing to write him a letter; Mr. Traficante indicated to Mr. Archetto that he is the committee's liaison to the General Assembly, and he has the committee's authority to go forward. Mr. Archetto further commented that he and Mr. Stycos had brought it up previously that if there was any dormant property that the school department has perhaps it could be turned over to the city to have them sell it and turn over the money to the school department to offset the budget deficit. The committee needs some creative ideas in order to raise some revenue.

Mr. Traficante referred to Mr. Lombardi's earlier comments regarding the middle school sports and asked Mr. Balducci to give him the exact number of the potential savings for the elimination of middle school sports in terms of bus transportation, personnel, officials, etc.

Ms. Iannazzi referred to page 181 of the proposed budget, and indicated that there is a proposal for \$25,000 for an auto mechanic. She asked what it is since she knows it is not an auto mechanic. Mr. Balducci responded that he believed this was a possible error; he will look into it.

Ms. Iannazzi stated that the committee had discussed what they were going to budget for raises in the upcoming budget. She referred to the principals' salaries and noted that the technical center director is supposed to get a \$20 increase while other principals are getting

anywhere from \$900 to \$1,200 raises. Mr. Balducci responded that it was the case of the 07-08 salary not listed, and this year some are over stated and some are under stated. The problem lies with this year's budget and not next year's. When one looks at a particular administrator's account, it does reflect that they are getting a raise when in fact they are not. It is a problem of one year versus another.

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Ms. Iannazzi referred to the group formerly known as CAMS who are now individual employees, and there appears to be pay raises projected in the budget for them. Mr. Balducci noted that this is the same situation as well.

Mr. Stycos said that he did follow up on the city wide utilities bills and what the projected increases are. He believes there is a policy that was passed when the committee hired the energy manager that states that the buildings won't be heated at any more than 72 degrees, and then there is a cooling temperature in the 60's. He is thinking of proposing that 72 degrees should be changed to 68 degrees, and he would like to know if there is any reason they shouldn't do that. Mr. Scherza responded that the district takes their cue from the energy auditing company and follows their advice. They have been turning the temperature down during non-use times to 55 degrees. As far as

the upper and lower limits, with some of the old buildings with old systems, they are difficult to regulate, but they take their cue on a case-by-case basis from the EEI recommendations. Mr. Stycos asked Mr. Scherza to ask EEI about lowering the temperature. If he were running an energy conservation program, the first thing he would not do is lower the temperature because everyone would hate the energy conservation program. However, he would shut off the computer-type things at night. If it was looking at the choice of thirty students in a class or twenty-five students wearing sweaters, he would go for the students wearing sweaters.

Mr. Stycos remarked that in a number of schools the district has a separate hot water system that is not tied to the boiler. He asked if some schools could operate without hot water coming out of the bathroom taps. If there is a heating system based on hot water and tied into the hot water on the taps, he would think that technologically they can't save anything; but if there is a separate hot water heater, and there are some in some of the schools, that they not have hot water in the bathrooms. Mr. Scherza responded that this is a regulation of the Department of Health. Technically, he can't open a school building on a day when there aren't operational sanitary facilities which include hot water, and they do check and monitor this.

Mr. Stycos asked if this had to do with hand washing or if it had to do with the kitchen facilities, and Mr. Scherza said it was for rest rooms. That question has been asked in the past.

Mr. Stycos referred to page 194 of the budget and mentioned that in the budget there is approximately \$206,000 for energy supplies, and he asked what these supplies were for and if this amount included the staff person. Mr. Balducci said it does not include the staff person; she is listed a couple of accounts below that at \$74,000. The figure Mr. Stycos is referring to is a purchased service account. It is a contract the district has with Energy Education, Inc. or EEI. It is a four-year contract, and each year the district pays them out of this \$206,000 approximately \$201,000 which is their fee. There is \$3,000 set aside for the energy manager to attend one or two conferences a year. She is educated on the new techniques to save energy, and then there is a small component which is a licensing fee for the software which is proprietary in nature. At the end of the

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four years, the district owns the software, but for the first four years the district has to pay a licensing fee for it. He believed the district is going into its second full year with energy savings. Mr. Stycos asked if the contract is successful. Mr. Balducci responded that the energy manager showed him a document recently showing where the district is at with all utilities, and it is an approximate 19% savings. It is referred to as a cost avoidance. The district would have spent 19% more for utilities if they did not institute the energy savings techniques used to date. Mr. Stycos commented that his question is not whether or not the energy manager thinks its working but whether

or not he thinks its working. Mr. Balducci responded that he believes the program is working. The energy manager meets on a periodic basis with a number of different consultants whose expertise is in certain areas. It is a great company to work with. The reports are showing that it is working.

Mr. Lombardi commented that it seems a little inconsistent to him that with regard to electricity a building such as Cranston East on page 22 is requesting approximately \$100,000 for electricity which represents a \$15,000 increase and Cranston West's increase is about \$6,600. A school such as Bain is \$24,989, and Park View is \$29,870, and the increases at the high schools are approximately 50%. Mr. Scherza responded that Cranston East has a new library media center which is an additional 45,000 square feet which plays a part in that. Mr. Lombardi responded that even with East being so massive, the increase is only \$15,000 whereas Park View has a \$70,000 which represents a \$30,000 increase. Mr. Scherza responded that Park View is the least efficient because sometimes the windows fall out. Some other schools such as East over the years have been insulated and brought up to date. Mr. Balducci added that having an energy manager on staff will allow the district to put their arms around district wide utilities in order to account and budget them in a more accurate manner than has been done in the past.

Mr. Stycos said that the capital budget for the upcoming year has not been acted on yet. In the capital budget there is \$1.7 million for

middle school science rooms and the library at Park View. It is his thinking that because there is a tremendous problem with the operating budget and there will continue to be a big problem with the operating budget that that money would be better spent on energy conservation projects so that the district can lower its energy costs. He would like the administration to consider this. He will look to the administration as to where those improvements can be made, but it would make sense to spend money to save money. He was sure the science rooms and the library could use improvement, but the energy conservation should take a higher priority.

Mr. Traficante referred to the Epic Program and that the cost for this program is \$467,000. He asked if any of this money is grant affiliated or if it was strictly Fund 1. Mr. Laliberte responded that it is a Fund 1 operation.

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Mr. Stycos commented that the committee received some information on the Alternate Education Program, and a chart was included with this information. Mr. Balducci explained the chart in detail to the committee. Mr. Stycos asked what would happen if the committee stopped the subsidy and they would have to operate on revenue and grants. He believed the School Committee made that decision approximately six years ago. Mr. Balducci responded that this

program would have to seek additional funding or look at the expenditure side of their operation to determine what expenses they can do without. Mr. Stycos commented that it is two separate programs, the Alternate Education Program for people who are in high school and it is just not working for them. They attend the program to obtain an education for a high school diploma. The second part of the program is adult education for those people over 18 years of age. Mr. Nero added that there is a third part of the program that is run out of the Alternate Education Program which is the AIES Program for students who have disciplinary problems and are being suspended beyond ten days, and they have to be provided with an education. The State has taken a hard line on some things such as home tutoring so they are educated there as well. Mr. Nero asked the Assistant Director of the Program to shed some light on the programs there.

Mr. Traficante referred to the Adult Education Program only and commented that he assumed the district charged each of the students for attending the Adult Education Program in the evening. Mrs. Dzekevich, the Assistant Director of the Program, explained there is one program at night which is the same program that runs during the day which is the AEP or the High School Program. Any student who comes at night who goes to East or West full time pays \$160 a course. There are approximately eighty students enrolled in this program. Some of them take two courses and some take three courses. There is the GED Program which is federally funded

through a grant. They do now charge \$20 for an assessment test, and there is a \$55 GED testing fee when the students start taking their test. All of that is part of the revenue Mr. Balducci spoke about. She went on to explain that there is a Vocational Training Program as well.

There are four programs in this program which are the Certified Nursing Assistant Program, Phlebotomy, Medical Office and Dental Skills Program. For those courses they charge \$325 for each student.

Mr. Traficante asked what kind of revenue is generated from these programs, and Mrs. Dzekevich responded that last year they generated approximately \$110,000. Mr. Balducci added that the \$65,000 identified as the Fund 1 revenue is understated, and going by last year's figure, it should be increased by \$35,000. Mrs. Dzekevich added that for each student who comes to the day program, if they are not in the AEP Program, chances are they would end up dropping out of school and that revenue would be lost to the school department. She commented that the committee could look at it this way also.

Mr. Traficante requested a breakdown of these programs at the Alternate Education Program to include the students involved and the revenue generated. Mrs. Dzekevich

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also commented that in the AIES Program they have approximately

fifteen students, and they have already had some come and go and another ten students have come and gone.

Mr. Archetto referred to page 147 of the proposed budget and asked how many PPS, resource, and speech and hearing teachers this includes. Mr. Laliberte responded that he would get this information for Mr. Archetto.

Mr. Archetto referred to page 146, EL Secretary Conference/Travel \$5,200. He stated that because of the budget situation, he asked if the administration should put a moratorium on travel expense. Mr. Scherza responded that they have frozen it district wide. They have to have a minimal amount and such things are required by RIDE. Some are contractual as well. He believed that it is a necessity. All of the ones the Superintendent has control over have been frozen for this year.

Mr. Archetto asked for the page in the budget for the special education administrators' salaries. It was his recollection from last year that there are five. Mr. Balducci responded that there are three directors and two assistant directors. They are noted on page 194 in the amount of \$471,581.

Mr. Archetto asked if there was a line item for central administrators' salary increases next year. Mr. Balducci indicated that it is located on page 190 in the amount of \$7,496 under administrator performance. It

includes the assistant superintendent, himself, Mr. Votto, Mr. Laliberte, and Mrs. Lundsten.

Mr. Stycos referred to the textbooks and noted that there were large numbers for textbooks in this budget. He asked if they were real numbers or the usual supplies and accounts shell game. Mr. Balducci responded that is not the usual shell game. They are going from a "0" budget this year to a request from Mr. Laliberte for district wide purchases. The reason one sees such large increases is again from a budget-to-budget comparison. This year it is "0", and next year it may be over a \$200,000 request. Mr. Stycos indicated that the elementary textbook account on page 153 is \$166,000. He asked if this was a reading series or something else. Mr. Laliberte responded that right now that is for K through 5 music textbooks. He noted that this is the fifth year they have requested it in the budget, and it has been cut out every single year. With regard to the reading series, of this number \$10,000 is for additional pieces to the reading program that has been put into place K through 5.

Mr. Stycos requested a breakdown of the high school account, middle school account, and the elementary school account as to what those books being proposed are. That is \$1/2 million. He would like a priority list from the administration with regard to this.

With regard to the textbooks, Mr. Stycos said he has been told by a constituent who sent one of her children to private school that there isn't a very aggressive effort to get the textbooks back once the districts gives out the textbooks. He asked if this information was accurate or not. Mr. Scherza assured Mr. Stycos that the effort was very aggressive. Mr. Nero added that this week he had a meeting with Mrs. Magiera who handles Medicaid at the Horton Building where the textbooks are housed. The system has been revised, and the non-public school parents are not going to be very happy. The district will be notifying the parochial schools as to when they can drop off and when they can pick up their books. They will be told that unless they drop off the old books they won't get any new books. They will be more aggressive this summer, more so than they have in the past. He applauded Mrs. Magiera's initiative on this. Some of the issues with the students are that they don't bring back books or they bring back broken books. The administration is addressing this, and they will have a better policy in place for this summer.

Mrs. Tocco-Greenaway asked how this compares with the policy for the Cranston Public Schools' students if a student loses a textbook or ruins a textbook. Mr. Nero said that when he was principal of Western Hills, he would hold students accountable by telling them that they wouldn't get their report card until they paid for their book or buy a new book. Someone took him to task on this, and it is illegal

to do that. The only thing the district can do is withhold a student from attending the graduation ceremony but cannot withhold the diploma. The district loses thousands of dollars because the parents say that nothing can be held over their heads. The Department of Education backs the parent every time. There is not a whole lot the district can do.

Mrs. Tocco-Greenaway asked what happens because a private school orders new books because they know they are getting paid for. She felt it was unfair to have the students in this school district using outdated books that are in bad condition, and the students in private school getting new books. Mr. Scherza stated that he couldn't agree more. It is something that he has brought up before to the committee. They can't go to the same extent for the Cranston students that they have to go for the students outside. They have to provide any book that is requested as long as it is on the state approved list. The list is literally voluminous. If a private school wants the most recent addition, the district has to provide it. It is inherently unfair that they can't do it for their own students. There was a case this year where the wrong book was requested. The district bought the wrong book which was requested, distributed it, and the district was told it had to buy the right book when the private school realized it had ordered the wrong book and had to purchase a second set. They do seek reimbursement from the state, but it is not dollar for dollar. It is one of the things that he complains about every year for the Cranston students. A few minutes ago Mr. Stycos asked

a question about the middle school textbooks. If you look at the last three years before this one, it has been cut out of the budget. The district is supposed to be on a five-year cycle for the various subjects, and it has been four or five years since they have been on the cycle

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much less stick it. The district is so far out of whack that they have a lot of texts they are ashamed to give to the students. Mrs. Tocco-Greenaway stated that it is very important that the state representatives are on board about this because it is not equitable or right, and it should be challenged. If the district is on a five-year cycle, it is the cycle that should be applied. Otherwise the state requirement is an unethical formula. The time is right to go for that change. She urged the administration to look into it.

Mr. Stycos suggested to Mrs. Tocco-Greenaway that she sponsor a resolution to this effect. Mr. Traficante suggested that she add not only textbooks but also transportation for special education for non-public school children. The price is quite enormous.

Ms. Iannazzi stated that she has had this conversation numerous times with our legislators, and the response that she gets is that there is not a politician on Smith Hill willing to take on a fight with the Diocese. Maybe the School Committee can persuade them. Mrs.

Tocco-Greenaway responded that she would look into this situation.

Mr. Lombardi referred to the textbook account and asked if this line item on pages 162 to 217 was affected in any way by the recent resolution to move the 6th grade to the elementary level or did this number contemplate just 7th and 8th grade textbooks. Mr. Laliberte responded that it could be affected. That \$217,000 was to cover science textbooks for grades 6 through 8. They were due to replace the science textbooks. When they purchased science textbooks several years ago they never purchased enough for all students so they recycle them throughout the city based on topics. With regard to the K to 5 music textbooks, not only do they not use updated textbooks but also they are still using in many cases vinyl records which is an education in itself for some of the students.

Mr. Archetto indicated that on page 197 of the budget it indicates Human Resources Director at \$74,000 and on page 200 it indicates Executive Director of Human Resources at \$102,000. He asked for the difference in those two positions. Mr. Balducci explained that one position is Mr. Votto's assistant in the Human Resources Department, and the other one on page 200 is Mr. Votto's salary.

Mr. Archetto referred to the Administrative Advertising account in the amount of \$53,000 and asked what the district advertises as a school department. Mr. Balducci responded that his office advertises bidding requirements that have to be advertised in the newspaper,

the School Committee meeting agenda that must be advertised, and the employment postings are advertised.

Mr. Archetto referred to page 199 of the budget, Fiscal Secretary Salaries, in the amount of \$361,000. He asked how many people this includes. Mr. Balducci explained that it includes several positions, and he would get the exact number for him.

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Mr. Stycos referred to page 192 of the budget and asked if this budget contemplates anyone being laid off. Mr. Scherza responded that the budget presented to the committee is based on the current model and current staffing levels. They did build in a number of retirements to the budget. Mr. Balducci further explained that Mr. Stycos was looking at the Unemployment Compensation line item and explained that they are working on a budget-to-budget comparison. The \$100,000 identified in this year's budget has been grossly under funded. The district is in line to spend between \$200,000 and \$210,000 this year. He moved it forward based on actual spending. He believes this is a result of positions that were laid off last year for this fiscal year. The district is, unfortunately, continuing to pay unemployment benefits. The district does receive a bill each month from the Department of Labor and Training. The summer months are not as expensive, but once September kicks in, the district does spend a little more. Mr. Stycos asked if it is based on whether or not

people are collecting, and Mr. Balducci said it is. It is the existing pool of employees who are still collecting that were laid off the beginning of this year who are continuing to receive benefits. It is existing bodies. Mr. Stycos asked how someone was collecting off the school district if they were laid off effective September 1st or July 1st of last year. Mr. Balducci responded that he would have to look at the detailed report to see which names show up in the summer months and get back to him. When one looks at a budget-to-budget comparison, that is the reason why there is such a large increase. They are not anticipating but rather accommodating the existing obligation.

Mr. Stycos referred to page 191, line item Budget Reconciliation, in the amount of \$1.6 million. Mr. Balducci explained that the district is going through its first budget revision to say in line with the city's \$126 million appropriation. That was the amount of money he had to identify as what he refers to as a budget reconciliation amount to keep in line with the City Council's appropriation. After he adjusted all the salary accounts as requested by the consultants, the budget was approximately \$1.6 million more than what the City Council appropriated to the district this year. It is the district's goal to stay in line with that appropriation, and this is his attempt at identifying an amount of money that has to be reconciled out by the consultants when they seek an additional appropriation from the city. Mr. Scherza added that this was done at the recommendation of the district's fiscal consultants. Mr. Stycos asked why the amount was \$1.6 million

and not \$3.8 million. Mr. Balducci explained that the only accounts hew as required to adjust were the salary accounts. There are other areas in this budget where budget savings are being identified by the outside consultants but there are budget short falls as well. Those other accounts are not adjusted right now. The State Aid account wasn't adjusted. The district is \$1 million in the hole there. Vocational School Tuition is another problem account for the district this year.

Mr. Stycos indicated that Mr. Lombardi had asked about the principals' salaries and how some went up a little and some went up a lot. Mr. Balducci explained that the \$1.6 million will be adjusted accordingly because the salary accounts will be corrected, and

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the offset will be to the \$1.6 million, and he wasn't sure if it would be up or down at this point but probably down. Mr. Stycos commented that he thought all the salary numbers had been adjusted. Mr. Balducci responded that they were adjusted, but this particular salary area was missed in the first revision. He will bring it to their attention as a part of their final budget reconciliation for this year. He was referring to adjusting the principals and the assistant principals in some areas. Mr. Stycos commented that the \$1.6 million should be reduced to reflect that those line items are correct. He asked about other salary line items and asked if it had to do with only the

principals. Mr. Balducci responded that he believed they captured all the other ones, but this is one area where every time he meets with the consultants they review this area because more payrolls have since transpired from the last time they met. As the year progresses, they have better numbers on salaries. Because it is such a large area, they look at it constantly. Mr. Balducci indicated that he would explain it in a memo to the committee.

Mr. Lombardi referred to page 196, Administrative Transportation/Plant Doctors' Fee, in the amount of \$6,000. Mr. Balducci explained that the district sends the custodians for a physical, and the district pays for it. Mr. Votto explained that the district sends its bus drivers for drug testing, and that is contractual. The district does not send its custodians for a physical. He clarified that this budget doesn't include Unemployment Compensation, but by passing what the committee passed a couple of weeks ago which was the 6th grade move to the middle school with Scenario No. 4, that will entail layoffs that will result in people collecting. He cautioned the committee that this amount may not be as extra money budgeted at this point. Mr. Stycos commented that in this budget the change to move the 6th grade is not reflected, and Mr. Votto commented that this is correct. Mr. Stycos added that they should be looking at some kind of a net savings with paying the Unemployment Compensation. Mr. Votto explained that there are no layoffs reflected in this budget, but ultimately there will be if this goes forward. Mr. Stycos added that it would be better to reflect the net effect and not just the

Unemployment.

Mr. Archetto referred to page 194 of the budget, the energy manager's salary at \$74,450. He asked Mr. Balducci if this included the incentive, and Mr. Balducci said that it did include it. Mr. Archetto asked if there was a savings with this individual in the energy usage. Mr. Balducci commented that he refers to it as a cost avoidance; it is not cash that he received, but it is money that was not spent. Mr. Archetto requested an approximate figure for the savings.

Mr. Archetto referred to the same page 194 for energy training and materials at \$206,800. Mr. Balducci explained that the title may be misleading. The district is under a four-year contract with an outside energy company. Most of that money is assigned to their contract for their consulting fee, and there is some additional money to support their software and annual conferences that the energy manager attends. Mr. Archetto asked who has auspices over that, and Mr. Balducci said that his office oversees it. It is

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a contract, and the majority of those dollars are spent on a monthly basis as a consulting fee, and the small balance left pays for licensing, etc. Mr. Archetto asked if the \$206,000 also includes schooling for this individual. Mr. Balducci responded that this person attends either one or two conferences a year. The purpose of those

conferences is to become better educated on energy savings techniques. Mr. Archetto asked if this figure incorporates any paper work or letterhead. Mr. Balducci responded that there isn't much that this area spends because it is done on a computer for any reports generated. There is a nominal fee for office supplies. He asked if this was an expense for the energy person, and Mr. Balducci said that it was not.

Mrs. Greifer commented that the current year budget plus 5% amounts to \$132,715,773. Mr. Balducci explained that with the 5% increase, the cap only identifies the increase over the city appropriation. This budget can increase bottom line 8%, and the reason it is 8% is because State Aid goes up and revenue sources go up, but the city appropriation is the key.

Mr. Traficante asked if any members of the general public wished to speak.

Janice Ruggieri, 45 Overhill Drive – She stated that she would like to see a detailed budget with the cost stating analysis for the 6th graders moving back to elementary. The movement and all the line items that were supposed to save \$1.3 million has not been addressed at all at the last two meetings she has attended. It would also include the savings for the assistant principals that would no longer be needed which she thought was \$363,000 which is a significant amount. She requested some kind of detailed budget with

the cost savings.

Mr. Traficante responded that the administration is currently in session with the Cranston Teachers' Alliance to discuss a variety of items regarding the 6th grade move and the middle school scenario. The committee won't have that information until the last budget session.

Mrs. Ruggieri asked why this district pays for private school textbooks and why it is put ahead of public school textbooks. Mr. Scherza responded that it is a state statute; the General Assembly passed it as a law, and the district has to live with it.

Mrs. Ruggieri referred to the Feinstein School and commented that her elementary school had looked to see if they could receive some kind of funding, and it is a matter that Mr. Feinstein wants his name on the school; and there are certain other requirements that come along with that such as writing a quarterly newsletter, having the students involved in community events, and it is a wonderful way to look for budget savings. Those are the kinds of things that need to be addressed and pushed forward.

Ms. Iannazzi commented that when she attended LaSalle Academy, she received only the math and science textbooks from the city. She asked if it is still the same. Mr. Scherza said that it has been expanded considerably to other textbooks. With regard to the middle school move, Mr. Scherza said that despite the acrimony that was perceived around all of the deliberations and the hearings, the administration has been talking with the leadership of the Cranston Teachers' Alliance, and they have really rolled up their sleeves along with them and have agreed to make the best of it. They have put everything else behind them and will try to make it work the best they can. This is not something that they want to ram down anyone's throat without the educators' perspective on this.

Mr. Stycos stated that in the past there has been a budget item for students hired to help the custodians in the summer. He asked where it was located in the budget. Mr. Balducci responded that it was located on page 150 of the budget.

Mr. Stycos commented that on the district's maintenance staff there are a couple of electricians, a couple of plumbers, and carpenters. He asked if it has ever been considered about offering their services to city buildings and the city paying the school department for this rather than paying a private contractor. Mr. Traficante responded that he is a member of Project Redirect; he was assigned to the Public Works area and the Recreation area. They are meeting with Mr. Carlucci to discuss this topic to try to consolidate some of the

services together. That was mentioned about building maintenance, personnel, and snow plowing being considered. Mr. Stycos added that it has been done in Andover, Massachusetts.

IV. Future Meeting Dates

Mr. Traficante indicated that the next budget session would take place on Monday, February 11th, at Western Hills Middle School starting at 7:00 p.m. A second meeting will be held on February 25 at 7:00 p.m. at Western Hills. There is a snow date of February 27th.

Mr. Traficante indicated that the committee can make recommendations on February 11th

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V. Adjourn Work Session

Moved by Ms. Iannazzi, seconded by Mr. Lombardi 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 8:50 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Andrea M. Iannazzi

Clerk