

# **CRANSTON SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEETING**

**TUESDAY, JANUARY 20, 2009**

**WESTERN HILLS MIDDLE SCHOOL**

**400 PHENIX AVENUE**

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

**PUBLIC MEETING: 6:30 P.M.**

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

## **MINUTES**

The regular monthly meeting of the Cranston School Committee was held on the evening of the above date at Western Hills Middle School in the auditorium with the following members present: Mr. Traficante, Mr. Stycos, Mrs. Ruggieri, Mrs. McFarland, Mr. Lombardi, Ms. Iannazzi and Mrs. Culhane. Also present were Mr. Scherza, Mr. Nero, Mr. Votto, Mr. Balducci, Dr. Lundsten and Mrs. Coogan.

Chairman Traficante called the meeting to order at 5:40 p.m. It was moved by Mr. Lombardi, seconded by Ms. Iannazzi 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/Litigation (Caruolo Action; Negotiations' Update); PL 42-46-5(a)(4).

Chairman Traficante reconvened public session at 6:40 p.m.

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

**I. Executive Session Minutes Sealed – January 20, 2009**

**Moved by Mr. Lombardi, seconded by Ms. Iannazzi and unanimously carried that the January 20, 2009 Executive Session minutes remain confidential.**

**II. Public Acknowledgements / Communications**

**There were no public acknowledgements.**

**III. Chairperson Communications**

**Chairman Traficante had none.**

**IV. School Committee Members Communications**

**Mr. Stycos stated that he and other members have received several calls regarding cancellation of school on Thursday and Friday. He had not contacted the administration building because he was sure they were inundated with calls; however, he asked for an explanation of why there was no school on Thursday and Friday. Mr. Scherza reported that the administration actually did the cancellation in concert with other districts and also with the Emergency Management Agency. He was strongly advised by the RI Emergency Management**

**Agency to close the schools because of the expected wind chill factor and the extreme cold. This was a rarity and it has only happened one other time, two years ago. They also checked with other districts in the state and factored in the number of our students who were from lower socio-economic levels. There are some of our students who come to our schools every day who basically don't have anything warmer than a hooded sweatshirt. Our ability to get the students on buses in a timely manner is a factor and the time they spend waiting at the bus stop and they are not dropped off door to door. We were advised by the medical staff at the Emergency Management Agency, that exposure of more than 20 minutes could have serious consequences, especially on young people. On Thursday, approximately one-half the districts in the State decided to close, including all of the urban areas; the next day it was considerable less amongst the state schools, Providence, Cranston, Pawtucket, primarily the big ones. Mr. Scherza stated that he honestly wished he had the luxury of hindsight. He felt that no child would be harmed by making up the day in June; however, if we made the children go out there was the possibility that it may adversely harm a child.**

**Mrs. Culhane asked if this was a decision motivated by savings, or was it something that was brought on by discussion with the EMA.**

**Mr. Scherza stated that that is absolutely right. He wished he could say that this move saved us some money; however it did not.**

## **V. Public Hearing**

**a. Students – (Agenda / Non-Agenda Items)**

**b. Members of the Public – (Agenda Matters Only)**

**Chairman Traficante asked if there were any students who would like to address the board on an agenda/non-agenda item; seeing none, he asked if there were any members of the public who would like to address the board on any agenda matters only; there were no members of the public who wished to speak.**

**Chairman Traficante added that once we enter the budget presentation by the Superintendent, no public comment will be accepted; only questions and clarifications by the board will be accepted.**

**At this time, Chairman Traficante adjourned to Public Budget Work Session.**

**Mr. Lombardi noted that since it was not 7:00 p.m. they would have to wait until that time to start Public Budget Work Session.**

## **TABLED RESOLUTIONS**

**Chairman Traficante asked if there is a motion to remove the three Resolutions from the table for discussion.**

**Mrs. McFarland made a motion to remove this Resolution from the table.**

**There being no second, the motion dies and remains on the table until the January 28, 2009 meeting.**

**NO. 09-1-2 – RESOLVED, that effective February 1, 2009, the Cranston Public Schools will charge non-free or reduced eligible students \$1.00 per meal for breakfast in all non-Title 1 schools. The school administration will also work to have school affiliated organizations, such as PTO's and extracurricular activity groups, operate school breakfast programs in schools with low participation. Such organizations will work with the school food service director to comply with all government laws and regulations and shall receive any income from the breakfast sales in that school, after the school food service program has been reimbursed for its costs. If a school affiliated organization is chosen to operate a school breakfast program, the School Committee will be notified.**

**Moved by Mr. Lombardi, seconded by Mr. Stycos to remove from the table.**

**NO. 09-1-3 – RESOLVED, that at the recommendation of the Superintendent, the Working Agreement between the Cranston School Committee and Local RI-153 of National Association of Government Employees (NAGE) be approved.**

**Discussion: Mr. Stycos would like to urge people to vote for this contract; he thinks it is a good compromise. Basically the custodians go to a 10% cost sharing on their health insurance, immediately, from the present of 3%. They also agreed to give up the health insurance by-back provision which we've been trying to get rid of for years. In exchange they get a 3% raise and a commitment to recall people that were laid off. He feels it's important that the previous committee laid it out that if the custodians came forward and the other unions came forward with cost savings that we would eliminate the lay-offs and they did that. He feels that the committee has an obligation on this one to vote for it and he feels that it is a good deal for us financially and the last point to our favor is that the cost sharing for new employees goes to 12% in the third year of the contract. Getting the cost sharing gradually up and enough staff to keep our buildings clean, and we are eliminating the buy-back in exchange for a 3% raise in the third year.**

**Mr. Lombardi also noted that he urges his colleagues to support this and in adding to what Mr. Stycos said, we're now getting the language in that sunsets all of the provisions within that contract**

such that during the termination date or the expiration date of the contract there's no provisions that would call for this to be a rolling contract into the new year. So it allows us better flexibility in terms of our

negotiations subsequent to July 1, 2011. Congratulations to our negotiation team and to the custodians for coming to the table and putting together an agreement that realizes the current realities of life.

Ms. Iannazzi noted what is important about this no-layoff provision as well is that it applies to existing employees only. If employees were to retire, it would be up to the School Committee whether or not those positions should be re-filled and if they are re-filled we would still have the right to terminate those employees as long as they were hired after January 1st. She also wanted to make a general disclaimer that although she will be supporting this contract, because of the amount of money the average custodian makes is rather small (\$30,000), does not mean that she will support a 3% raise in other contracts. She thinks that there is a big difference between a 3% raise in this contract and a 3% raise in a larger bargaining unit which would amount to substantially more money. She will be in support of this contract, but can't say that she is supportive of the 3% raise in the 3rd year.

Mrs. McFarland stated, as a new member of the committee and having the opportunity to only briefly go over this 3-year contract over the

last two meetings that she attended, she's had an opportunity to see the parity of the custodian's union coming forward and given a contract with health care and based upon the salary they currently make at this point. This is a tremendous opportunity to see how collectively the custodians worked with the School Committee members that negotiated this and collectively for the entire City, how they've done a much better job in negotiating this contract that I've seen on the City side and the savings that they've given to both the taxpayers of the City as well as the school department, I just want to say "thank you".

Chairperson Traficante noted that he also wants to say "thank you" to Mr. Carbone, president of the bargaining unit and to the executive board. "We appreciate your cooperation and made note that the custodial bargaining unit set a tone and a direction for other unions to look at and hopefully follow."

At this time, Mr. Carbone thanked the School Committee for their cooperation.

Moved by Mrs. Culhane, seconded by Mr. Lombardi and unanimously carried that this Resolution be adopted.

NO. 09-1-9 – RESOLVED, that at the recommendation of the Superintendent, said non-certified personnel be recalled from layoff, and

**Be it further RESOLVED that the Superintendent notify those individuals of the committee's actions.**

**Motion was made by Ms. Iannazzi to remove from the table, seconded by Mr. Lombardi and unanimously carried that this Resolution be removed from the table.**

**Moved by Ms. Iannazzi, seconded by Mr. Lombardi and unanimously carried that this Resolution be adopted.**

**Chairperson Traficante reported that this completes the Resolutions on the docket.**

**Since we had approximately ten minutes prior to the Public Budget Presentation, Chairperson Traficante stated that they take a ten minute recess.**

**Motion was made by Mr. Lombardi to adjourn the Public Meeting, seconded by Ms. Iannazzi and unanimously carried that they adjourn for ten minutes.**

## **VI. Public Budget Work Session**

**Chairman Traficante called the Public Budget Work Session to order.**

**Mr. Traficante stated the superintendent will be presenting his**

**proposed budget to the School Committee this evening. This will be the first time for five of the seven members of this committee to be presented with this budget by the superintendent. There will be no public comment this evening on the budget presentation. He asked that the public please save their comments until the next meeting, which is on January 28, 2009, here at Western Hills Middle School.**

**At this time, Chairman Traficante called on Mr. Scherza, Superintendent of Schools, to present the 2009-2010 School Budget. Please see the attached Power Point Budget Presentation.**

**Mr. Scherza noted that copies of the budget and/or power point were available on the stage for anyone who would like to have one.**

**Mr. Scherza made the following statement before presenting the budget:**

**“This administration, I believe, put together a budget request that is painfully inadequate and one which addresses the bare minimum of both existing and emerging State and Federal Requirements. We have attempted to make some very heavy cuts at the Central Office level in an attempt to spare the School Committee from having to move forward alone. Tonight we put before you an honest representation of the needs of Cranston students. There’s no plus, no fat, etc. There are no raises built in other than the requisite step increases mandated by law. This budget eliminates or reduces many**

**programs and services that we hold dear but which are not mandated.**

**It is based on level funding of our current model, based on information we know at this time. Personnel, supplies, class sizes all will be negatively impacted. I'm sorry if this sounds harsh, it's not intended to; however, it is what it is. The School Department is fully committed to the children of our community, but our ability to meet even minimum requirements as well as the goals that we feel are appropriately professional, are waning. We are at the point with the ambitions of political entities at the State and local levels and have finally outdistanced their levels of support. I believe that the teachers, administrators and support staff have responded well in so much as our students have performed at generally high levels. However, I fear that as a**

**district, we're beginning to slip backwards again. We need to stop the momentum and get back on track. Our consistently high levels of achievement have been chronicled by the RI Department of Education and the RI Public Expenditure Council. In short, the Cranston Schools have proven that the tax payers have been paying high dividends even though it is a fact that we have one of the lower per pupil expenditures in the entire state. I know that I am preaching to the proverbial choir, but I ask this committee to join this administration in fulfilling their obligations outlined in RI General Laws 16-2-9 and 16-2-10 and to make the hard decisions that will best serve the interests of the children of Cranston and reverse the trends that have resulted in the large part from recent strain of budget inadequacies. Whatever our funding level they ultimately settle at, I**

**can assure you that the faculty and staff at the Cranston Public Schools will do their very best that can be done with the resources that are available to us. Thank you.”**

**At this time, Mr. Scherza went through the Budget Presentation. Mr. Balducci explained the number part and what our assumptions are. Mr. Scherza finished up by telling the committee what some of the things are that are not contained in this budget that had to be cut or reduced to get down to the cap size that is imposed on us by law.**

**Attached is the Power Point Budget Presentation.**

**Upon conclusion of the Budget Presentation, Chairman Traficante asked the committee if there were any questions or clarifications for the superintendent or Mr. Balducci.**

**Mr. Lombardi asked Mr. Balducci about 3 basic premises needed. One being that we need \$4.1 million dollars from the City and a reduction of 3% from the State and the School Committee needs to cut all of these programs. Then and only then, will we be at that \$1.9 million dollars. Mr. Traficante noted to Mr. Lombardi that the committee can assume that \$1.92 is not going to hold up. It is going to be far greater than that.**

**Mrs. Ruggieri asked if there are actual figures available that they can see that shows the actual savings on fuel surcharges and those kinds**

of things. Having the State taking it over vs. what we are currently doing. Mr. Scherza stated that right now those are all estimates from the state because we don't have actual data from this year; we're still in the midst of this year. The projections are that it would be between \$500,000 and \$700,000 dollars so we just took the mid-raise of \$600,000 dollars. But there is not a report that gives us actual numbers.

Mr. Lombardi asked if it is of Mr. Scherza's position that all of these programs that he is closing are not required by Law/Regulation or Contract. Mr. Scherza answered that it is his belief that they are not, other than the ones we have reduced to minimum levels and still stayed in compliance. Some of them he knows people are going to care about a lot in this town and the committee will receive a lot of calls, e-mails, testimony, etc. at meetings about things that we all agree that we would love to have here that are worthwhile programs but are not required by law, regulation or contracts.

Mrs. Ruggieri asked about the EPIC and if figures have ever been done to see what it costs as far as students who are entitled which would fall under law for an IEP under the EPIC plan vs. cutting the entire program or even keeping the program at an elementary level. Mr. Scherza noted that gifted and talented in its entirety is not required by law or regulation. As far as required by IEP, asking Mrs. Coogan to correct him if he is wrong, he does not know of one single student who qualifies for EPIC on the basis of an IEP. At this point in

time, he doesn't think it is a requirement.

Mrs. Coogan reported that qualifications for the EPIC program are based on test scores, teacher recommendations, etc. Qualifications for an IEP are based on an evaluation that determines that a handicap condition exists. Giftedness is not a handicapping condition so you don't necessarily qualify for an IEP if you're a student who is also gifted and talented. Are there students that are very cognitively bright and intelligent who may have a learning disability or may have attention deficit or something else with it? Yes. Specifically off the top of her head, Mrs. Coogan could not think of any students who have an IEP because of a disability but are also in the EPIC Program. However the possibility is there but it's not a given that you get an IEP if you are in the gifted and talented range.

Mrs. Ruggieri stated that it is her understanding that any student who tests either two grade levels below or two grade levels above their actual grade level that there is something involved with that. Mrs. Coogan stated that, no, that is not true.

Mr. Scherza noted that the two grade levels below would trigger some kind of interventions by the district, but the two grade levels above would not.

Mrs. Culhane asked about the transportation issue, is that on the assumption that the governor's plan for busing is going to go

through? Mr. Scherza reported that the busing is an initiative of the General Assembly that has been in the works for two years. That is not the governor's plan although he did pick up on it. It was actually initiated by the General Assembly and actually cost out by RIDE for the General Assembly members. Mrs. Culhane asked that if that doesn't actually happen, is that money that we're going to have to add to the budget. Mr. Scherza replied that it would have to be added back into the budget; however a contract has already been awarded and the RI Department of Education assures us that they're moving forward and would be up and running for the beginning of school next year.

Chairman Traficante asked if we had taken into consideration the arbitration case regarding area supervisors in this proposed budget. Mr. Balducci answered, "no we did not."

Mr. Scherza noted that in response to Mrs. Culhane, there is another piece that Mr. Nero reminded him of that they heard last week. He noted that if we do not opt into the state busing, which has been identified as a savings area, the statement was made by a member of the General Assembly that they would cut our aid by that amount. In essence, saying that "we've identified the savings and you chose not to take advantage of it." If we don't take that, it will hurt us in another way.

## **VII. Announcement of Future Meetings**

**The next Budget Hearing will be on January 28, 2009 at Western Hills Middle School at 7:00 p.m. At that time comments may be made on the proposed superintendent's budget.**

**Chairman Traficante stated that before we adjourn, he wants to recognize and thank Councilman Lupino, who is present this evening and also former School Committee person, Deborah Greifer, who is also present tonight.**

## **VIII. Adjournment**

**Moved by Mr. Lombardi, seconded by Mrs. McFarland and unanimously carried that the meeting be adjourned.**

**There being no further business to come before the meeting, it was adjourned at 8:03 p.m.**

**Respectfully submitted,**

**Andrea M. Iannazzi**

**Clerk**