

The meeting was called to order by Ms. Wedge at 7:02 PM. The following members were present:

Ms. Sylvia Wedge, Chair	Mr. Michael Buddemeyer	Mrs. Marjorie Levesque
Mr. Richard Carpender, V. Chair	Mr. Jamie Heaney	Mr. Douglas Wilkey
Mrs. Terri Cortvriend, Clerk		

Also Present: Dr. Lusi, Asst. Supt. Jermain, Patti Cofield, Marissa Mello, Dr. Olson, Dr. Martin, Mr. Amaral, Mr. Arruda

1. **CHAIRMAN'S REPORT:** Ms. Wedge welcomed everyone to the meeting and thanked the regular meeting attendees for being part of the process. She stated that the Committee and Administration have been looking at a lot of changes that could impact students, parents, teachers, administrators, and the school board; however, we are trying to make the best out of a bad budget situation, and our options are limited. The budget has now been set, and we must find a way to live within it. The results of last summer's Tent Meeting and the Caroulo trial have negatively impacted our budget, and she urged the public to ask their state representatives to come up with a fair and equitable formula for state funding.
2. **SUPERINTENDENT'S REPORT:** Dr. Lusi stated how pleased she was to see the Portsmouth Middle School girls' basketball team in the audience. She stated that we have many wonderful and successful students in Portsmouth, and one of her biggest regrets this year is that she has had less time to spend in our schools with them and with our teachers and staff. She also welcomed the parents and staff that were present at the meeting.

Dr. Lusi reported that she has served as the RISSA representative to the ad hoc group that has been developing the "Funding Our Future" proposal that was discussed in the April 10th Providence Journal article. She attended the committee meeting at which it was presented at the State House last night, and she thought it was well-received and definitely made an impression that they had such a diversity of groups represented at the table.

Dr. Lusi gave an update on the position of Director of Finance and Administration. She reported that Mr. Ralph Malafronte has completed his time with the School Department, as he has run out of days he is able to work as a retiree. She extended her profound thanks to Mr. Malafronte, whose work saw us through the Caroulo action and almost through the delivery of our budget to the Town. She announced that Mr. John Souza, who has been serving as Interim Facilities Director, has agreed to step in and fill the vacant Director of Finance position. Mr. Souza is actually a retired Finance Director from Massachusetts.

Dr. Lusi stated that she will bring forward a report on Medicaid and other revenues at the next School Committee meeting.

Dr. Lusi announced that we have submitted the School Department's budget to the Town Council. In addition to what has been submitted (a transmittal letter, budget summary page, all funds summary, and the operational budget), we will be submitting an Executive Summary and some In\$ite charts within the next few days. She reported that we will no longer be producing budget books of hundreds of pages. She read a portion of the transmittal letter and stated that the budget submitted does include cuts to the magnitude of cuts being addressed at this meeting, and we will be obligated to find other cuts should these not be approved. She stated that revenues are still shaky.

- a) **Teaching and Learning:** Asst. Supt. Jermain stated that the Gates McGinite tests in reading comprehension and vocabulary were recently administered at Portsmouth Middle School. It is the post test to the pre-test they took in the fall. She is currently working on the professional development schedule for next year in writing, reading, and math. She will be working with Denise Dvorak, our literacy coordinator, during April break to finalize the draft literacy PD schedule in order to share it with the staff. She stated that she sent a reminder to the School Improvement Teams that the State report updates are due by May 1st. She reported that changing the sequencing of science courses at the high school has proven to be very beneficial and will better prepare students going forward to meet industry changes in math and science. Our school has been approached to be one of six national teams for a special project called SAMs (Science of Atoms and Molecules). Under the direction of Department Chair, Jeff Schoonover the PHS science department is doing an amazing job and may soon be receiving national recognition for their work in this program as well as their work in the Physics First project in RI. Asst. Superintendent made the committee aware that the Department of Education is joining a multi-state partnership in developing a new Algebra II test. It is a joint partnership with nine other states across the country and is aligned with the new high school regulations and grade span expectations. This project was announced in Washington this morning and comes out of work that Rhode Island has been doing with the national Achieve network. This end of course exam will cover a full range of algebraic topics that will be administered over a two day period. It is hoped the seniors will be able to test pilot the draft next fall. Asst. Supt. Jermain announced that she is postponing the NECAP presentation because of tonight's agenda items. To keep the committee informed on how she uses the NECAP data and other data to create the professional development and future teacher training plans, she will email the committee in the next few weeks with the data and the action steps that will take place because of the data.
- b) **Finance and Operations:** See above.
- c) **High School Liaison, Marissa Mello:** Miss Mello reported that the fourth quarter has started, and the students are getting ready for their proms and graduation.

3. **STUDENT SPOTLIGHT**

- a) **PMS Girls' Basketball Team.** A motion was made by Mr. Carpender and seconded by Mr. Heaney to commend the PMS Girls' Basketball Team for winning the Second Season Tournament held in North Cumberland in February. So voted 7-0. The following students received certificates from the School Committee and Administration:

Kelly Beck

Chandler Borrosh

Jordan Borrosh

Hadley Colman

Alison French

Lindsey Haslam

Tamoyha Henderson

Hannah Larkin

Laurel McIntosh

Rebecca McVicker

Sydney Menning

Erin Ryan

Megan Sewall

4. **APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

A motion was made by Mr. Carpender and seconded by Mr. Heaney to approve the minutes of the meeting held March 27, 2007. So voted 7-0.

5. **CONSENT AGENDA**

- a) **Request for Unpaid Leaves of Absence.** A motion was made by Mr. Carpender and seconded by Mr. Heaney to approve the requests for Family and Medical Leave in accordance with the backup information. So voted 7-0.

6. **BUSINESS AGENDA**

- a) **Discussion/Action – Closing Prudence Island School.** A motion was made by Mrs. Levesque and seconded by Mr. Heaney to close Prudence Island School effective at the end of the 2006-07 fiscal year. Dr. Lusi gave a Powerpoint presentation on the projected cost savings from closing Prudence Island School. She stated that the enrollment for next year is projected to be two students, and a third student who is currently attending Melville School. We are proposing to close the school and have the students attend Melville School. The start time would be moved up to that of Portsmouth Middle School, and transportation from the ferry would be with the students on our current bus. Mr. Wilkey said in the past, it was brought up that the school be temporarily closed and not terminated as a school building so that it could be reopened if more students move to Prudence Island. He asked about hiring a monitor for the bus when the older students are not on there. Dr. Lusi said if a monitor were to be hired, there would still be a substantial savings.

Prudence Island residents (Pat Rossi, Grace McIntee, Kate Hibbard, Elizabeth Porter, Allan Bearse, Eliza Volkman, Andrew Maillart, and Cheryl Janese) voiced their concerns about closing the school.

Grace McIntee and Kate Hibbard described the work the Prudence Island School Working Committee had done in terms of exploring alternatives so that the school wasn't a burden on the town. They requested an extension of time for the Committee to do its job of finding an alternative. Elizabeth Porter said she went through this same issue twenty years ago when her children were elementary age. A tutor was ultimately hired so that her children could stay on the island.

Eliza Volkman and Allan Bearse spoke on behalf of their elementary aged son. They have every confidence that Dr. Lusi and the Committee will pull this budget together, and they think it can be done without closing the school. If the school does close, they said they won't be sending her across the bay to be separated from them for 10 hours a day.

Andrew Maillart spoke on behalf of his elementary aged daughter. He has some serious issues with her riding the ferry and spending 10 hours separated from her parents.

Mr. Heaney stated that he understands where the citizens are coming from, and he would like to do everything possible so that the two kids don't have to come across on the ferry. However, he said the bottom line is that we need to find ways to save money in the budget.

Mrs. Cortvriend asked Dr. Lusi to address the option of temporarily closing the school. Dr. Lusi stated that she doesn't know what our rights are regarding reopening the school and that there is some confusion as to whether the school building would revert back to the Town or transfer to the Audubon Society.

Mrs. Levesque stated that the issue of closing Prudence Island School has been coming up every year, and she struggles with it every time. However, we are in such bad fiscal shape, and we have to look at the whole school system.

Mr. Carpenter said this has weighed heavily on his mind for the past few weeks. He has worked hard with the Prudence Island School Working Committee, and he has gotten to know the residents. He said this is the most difficult decision he has ever had to make. He feels that if the Tent Meeting had not taken place or had not been successful, there would be another \$300,000 in this budget, and we wouldn't be sitting her. He hopes when it's all said and done, we can still be friends. He thinks closing the school is the right thing to do based on the financial situation of the entire community. He hopes the Prudence Island School Working Committee can still present their findings to the School Committee at a future meeting. The motion passed 6-1. Mr. Wilkey was opposed.

- b) **Discussion/Action – Moving Grade 5 to Elementary Schools.** A motion was made by Mr. Carpenter and seconded by Mrs. Levesque to approve moving Grade 5 to the Elementary Schools commencing with the 2007-08 school year. Dr. Lusi gave a

Powerpoint presentation on the cost savings of moving Grade 5 to the elementary schools, which is approximately \$74,693. She reviewed classroom needs for FY'08, elementary school occupancy rates, and the projected K-4 enrollment in subsequent years. Her personal opinion is that moving Grade 5 students to the elementary level will not harm our students academically, and for some, it may be socially beneficial by providing another year in an elementary environment. We have to look at both student needs and cost effectiveness. Mr. Buddemeyer stated his own experience moving from 4th grade to 5th grade in Portsmouth, and he advocates not moving them. He agrees that it won't harm the students, but he feels it will hold them back a little. Mrs. Levesque asked about lunch arrangements at the elementary schools. Dr. Olson stated that Melville could maintain with two lunch periods, as their 3rd and 4th grade lunch is not full. Dr. Martin said elementary schools have large cafeteriums, and Hathaway may need to move towards three lunches. Dr. Olson added that as we move towards lengthening the school day, we will be moving towards shortening the lunch periods, which will open up more time in the cafeteria. A parent asked about having band at the elementary school level. Dr. Martin said they are committed to make sure that the 5th graders would have something special, and that it wouldn't be just an extension of 4th grade. Mrs. Cortvriend asked about library books for the 5th graders. Dr. Lusi stated that they would have to look at the Middle School library books and send some of them to the elementary schools to enhance their libraries.

Mr. Wilkey read a list of his opinions and concerns about moving Grade 5 to the elementary schools, and he stated that he would vote to reject the movement. Dr. Lusi clarified several of the points Mr. Wilkey made. She stated that although she doesn't like to move, moving Central Administration to the Middle School was an additional way to save the community money. She stated that if there is an increase in enrollment in a few years, moving Central Administration is much less difficult than closing and reopening a school. She added that the first thing she did when the idea of moving the 5th grade back to the elementary schools came about was ask the Principals if they had room, and they said yes. She took strong exception to Mr. Wilkey's statements about her former proposal of the 4-day school week because she thinks he is aware of the kind of straights the School Department has been under financially and why those types of ideas have come forward. She stated that moving Central Administration to the Middle School would be for a minimum of 4 years, if not more. She added that even if Central Administration stayed at its current location, there would be a \$75,000 cost savings from moving the 5th grade back to the elementary schools.

Mr. Heaney said at the last meeting, he asked Dr. Lusi to come up figures for closing a school, and she did that. He said if eliminating an elementary school can't be done, the most logical choice would be to move the 5th grade. Given the numbers Dr. Lusi provided, he supports the move.

Mr. Carpender stated that Mr. Wilkey was gracious enough to give the Committee his remarks prior to tonight's meeting, and he absolutely supports Mr. Wilkey's right to make these comments; however, he found a number of issues he thought were incorrect. Mr. Carpender stated that moving the Central Office was never part of the original savings proposal. He added that it is the norm in Rhode Island for middle schools to be comprised of Grades 6-8. He took strong exception to the insinuation that the Superintendent makes decisions without doing any homework and without evaluating what might happen. He hopes that Dr. Lusi will continue to think outside the box. He asked to hear public comment before making his final decision.

Several citizens, parents, and teachers voiced their opinions both for and against moving 5th grade back to the Middle School (Mrs. Melvin, Matt Daly, Chris Kracik, Jay Handfield, Alan McMillan, Marianne Raymo, Jodi Augustine, Valerie Bissell, Karen McVicker, Jamie Caromile, Nicole Oliveira, Nancy Zitka, Barbara Martin, Karen McDade, Matt Viana, Dr. Martin, Dr. Olson, and Mr. Amaral). Dr. Lusi read a letter she received from Chris Carceller supporting the move.

Dr. Lusi thanked everyone who came and participated in the meeting, stating that it was a very constructive discussion on both issues.

Mr. Heaney stated that the Portsmouth community is at a crossroads, and we need people to come up with ideas like this. It's not a bad idea to move the 5th grade, but it's also not a great idea. He feels there are probably some areas we can squeeze from the budget, but there needs to be a dialogue for that to happen.

Mrs. Levesque stated that they have looked very hard at this budget, and they have very painstakingly gone through everything. She personally resents the insinuation from a parent in the audience that not everything had been looked at.

Mr. Carpender stated that the budget we have in place includes things that are legally required, and we're not legally required to have the 5th grade at the middle school. It is finances, and it will be for the next three years. He said he would support the motion.

The motion passed 4-3. Mr. Buddemeyer, Mr. Heaney, and Mr. Wilkey were opposed.

- c) **Approval – 2007-08 School Calendar.** A motion was made by Mr. Carpender and seconded by Mr. Heaney to approve the proposed calendar for the 2007-08 school year, as presented. So voted 7-0.
- d) **Discussion/Approval – February Financials.** A motion was made by Mr. Carpender and seconded by Mr. Heaney to approve the February financials as presented. So voted 7-0.

7. **SUBCOMMITTEE AGENDA**

- a) **Finance:** Mr. Carpenter stated that this is a housekeeping adjustment on the budget bottom line. There was a \$2 difference because of rounding. A motion was made by Mr. Carpenter and seconded by Mr. Heaney to approve the 2007-08 School Department budget of \$33,451,958. So voted 7-0.
- b) **Policy:** Mrs. Levesque would like to present the proposed technology policy as a first reading on the next School Committee agenda.
- c) **Gymnasium Construction Oversight Committee (GCOC):** No report.
- d) **Fundraising:** No report.
- e) **Prudence Island School Working Committee:** No report.

Mr. Heaney made a motion to adjourn. Seconded by Mrs. Cortvriend. So voted 7-0. The meeting adjourned at 10:14 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Patti Cofield
Recording Secretary for

Terri Cortvriend, Clerk