

The meeting was called to order at 6:30 PM by the Chairman, Mr. Carpender, and the following members were present:

Mr. Richard Carpender, Chair	Mrs. Marge Levesque, Clerk	Ms. Marilyn King
Ms. Sylvia Wedge, Vice Chair	Mr. Michael Buddemeyer	Ms. Angela Volpicelli
	Mr. Jamie Heaney	

Also Present: Dr. Lusi, Asst. Supt. Jermain, Christine Tague, Patti Cofield, Don Davidson

Absent: Amy Larsen (High School Liaison)

A motion was made by Ms. Wedge and seconded by Mrs. Levesque to adjourn to Executive Session pursuant to R.I. Law 42-46-5, Exceptions (a)(1) Job Performance/Personnel Matters, and (a)(2) Collective Bargaining and/or Litigation. So voted 7-0.

Public Session recessed at 6:31 PM and resumed at 7:05 PM.

- CHAIRMAN'S REPORT:** Mr. Carpender reported that an Executive Session was held prior to this meeting regarding personnel matters/job performance, and no votes were taken. A motion was made by Ms. Wedge and seconded by Mrs. Levesque to seal the minutes. So voted. Mr. Carpender announced that he attended a RIASC meeting for School Committee chairs on Saturday, and the main topic of discussion was budget. The Governor's plan to bring the budget back up to level funding for this year and some funding for next year. There are many questions about the plan including the use of stabilization money from the stimulus as well as IDEA money. RIPEC representative, John Simmons, was there and indicated the state was using IDEA money. Ms. Tague stated that some people at the Rhode Island Department of Education said that IDEA money was being used; but there are a number of questions on where this money is coming from, and we don't know if we're supposed to be using it. We will continue to monitor the issue. Mr. Carpender also attended a meeting of the Strategic Planning Steering Committee with Dr. Lusi today. Things are progressing and moving forward. Mr. Carpender announced that Central Office Administration has informed the Committee that they will accept a salary freeze in the coming year, and we will be working with them to rework the contract language. Mr. Carpender stated that he had the opportunity to attend the musical "Camelot" at Portsmouth High School, and he was impressed at how wonderfully it was done.
- SUPERINTENDENT'S REPORT:** Dr. Lusi read a letter from Town Administrator, Robert Driscoll, which was also distributed to the Committee. The letter proposes, not precisely, that the Town makes use of our fund balance from 2008, which is not legal. The School Committee has the right to determine how it is used; however, the Town is proposing to reduce our budget for the current year by the amount of our fund balance. The rationale is

that we would need to use our fund balance this year, and the Town would make use of that money to close their budget gap. Dr. Lusi and Ms. Tague met with Mr. Driscoll and Mr. Faucher last week, and they agreed that that item would be postponed until April, when they could talk further. Dr. Lusi stated that we have been urging them to make sure that they actually need assistance from the School Committee and to potentially look at other ways of managing potential budget shortfalls. Another issue in the way this is being proposed is that it is “the gift that keeps on giving.” It would lower the local appropriation to the schools for this fiscal year, and consequently lower what the schools would be eligible to receive next year under the S3050 cap. She expressed to Mr. Driscoll that some Town Council members have attended our meetings and expressed the need for collaboration; however, it has to work both ways. Our goal this week is to be a little more collaborative in how we can work together.

Dr. Lusi congratulated Mr. Jeff Goss, head coach of Girls Basketball and Assistant Principal of Portsmouth High School, for being named the Division II Coach of the Year by the Rhode Island Girls Basketball Coaches Association. Mr. Goss received the award at the All League banquet last Wednesday night at the West Valley Inn in West Warwick. Dr. Lusi also congratulated Portsmouth High School Senior C. J. Martens, who will receive the Courageous Award from the Rhode Island Basketball Coaches Association on Wednesday, April 1<sup>st</sup>, at the West Valley Inn in West Warwick. The Courageous Award is given to a Rhode Island basketball player who has overcome adversity and/or a personal problem.

Dr. Lusi reported that the RIPEC study continues of the potential costs and benefits of regionalizing education on Aquidneck Island. The study was supposed to be complete in early March, but it is taking much longer. She and Assistant Superintendent Jermain attended a meeting yesterday where two members of RIPEC were present. They are working on collecting comparable data so that they are comparing apples to apples. We are scheduled to have a meeting with the Aquidneck Island Group towards the end of this month. Finally, the Strategic Planning Steering Committee had its second meeting today. They worked on drafting a mission, a vision, values, and goals. She thanked everyone who is participating on the committee.

- a) **Teaching and Learning:** Assistant Superintendent Jermain reported that Kindergarten registration is on-going and running smoothly.
- b) **Finance and Operations:** Ms. Tague gave an update as to where we stand regarding the food service contract. Last Friday, the East Bay Business Officials listened to Chartwell’s presentation, the only vendor to present. They were expecting a presentation from Aramark; however, right before they were to arrive, they sent a letter stating that they didn’t feel they had adequate information from the group to give a presentation. Ms. Tague stated that they had extended the proposal due date by two days to allow Aramark sufficient time to prepare. Because Aramark didn’t present, there is now only one vendor

to choose from. Chartwells gave a one and a half hour presentation, and they did an excellent job. We are comparing Chartwell's proposal to the statewide proposal, and Ms. Tague believes that we will be coming forward in April with a contract.

- c) **High School Liaison:** In Amy Larsen's absence, Dr. Lusi reported that Mr. Littlefield sent out an email update about recent activities at Portsmouth High School. They held their eighth annual "Pennies for Patients" campaign to raise money for the Leukemia and Lymphoma Society and raised \$2,241.77 in two weeks. This money will go directly to help fund research projects and help victims and families of leukemia, lymphoma, and other blood disorders. The students, faculty, and staff also donated 70 units of blood at their recent blood drive for the Rhode Island Blood Center. This was their fourth blood drive of the year, and they've contributed almost 250 units so far this year. Dr. Lusi congratulated them on both successes.

### 3. **APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

A motion was made by Ms. Wedge and seconded by Mrs. Levesque to approve the minutes of the meetings held February 24, 2009, and March 10, 2009. Mr. Heaney stated he would be abstaining from the vote on the February 24, 2009, minutes due to his absence from that meeting. So voted.

### 4. **CONSENT AGENDA**

- a) **Rescission of Resignation for Retirement.** The Superintendent recommends adoption of the following resolution, "that the School Committee rescinds the resignation for retirement of Rosemarie Escobar, Fine Arts Teacher at Portsmouth High School, as Ms. Escobar reserved the right to rescind her resignation given the proposed changes to the state retirement system."
- b) **Rescission of Administrator Non-Renewal.** The Superintendent recommends adoption of the following resolution, "that the School Committee rescinds the non-renewal of Administrator 1 and places Administrator 1 on displacement, effective with the last day of the 2008-09 school year."

A motion was made by Ms. Wedge and seconded by Mrs. Levesque to approve the Consent Agenda as presented. So voted 7-0. Dr. Lusi announced that Ms. Rose Escobar rescinded her letter of contemplation of retirement and wishes to remain teaching for our school department.

### 5. **BUSINESS AGENDA**

- a) **Approval of Policy #4355 – Computer Laptop & Equipment Use Agreement, 2<sup>nd</sup> Reading and Adoption.** A motion was made by Ms. Wedge and seconded by Mrs.

Levesque to approve as a second reading and adopt proposed Policy #4355, Computer Laptop and Equipment Use Agreement, as presented. So voted 7-0.

- b) **Approval of Policy #3269 – Acceptance of Donated Items, 2<sup>nd</sup> Reading and Adoption.** A motion was made by Ms. Wedge and seconded by Mrs. Levesque to approve as a second reading and adopt Policy #3269, Acceptance of Donated Items, as presented. So voted 7-0.
- c) **Approval of Policy #6111 – School Calendar, 2<sup>nd</sup> Reading and Adoption.** A motion was made by Ms. Wedge and seconded by Mrs. Levesque to approve as a second reading and adopt Policy #6111, School Calendar, as presented. So voted 7-0.
- d) **Approval of Policy #5117 – Student Assignments to Elementary Schools, 2<sup>nd</sup> Reading and Adoption.** A motion was made by Ms. Wedge and seconded by Mrs. Levesque to approve as a second reading and adopt Policy #5117, Student Assignments to Elementary Schools, as presented. So voted 7-0.
- e) **Acceptance of 2008-09 Audit and Management Letter.** A motion was made by Mrs. Wedge and seconded by Mrs. Levesque to accept the 2008-09 Audit and Management Letter. Ms. Tague explained that as part of the annual audit, each year the audit firm provides management with a list of findings that they observed during the audit process. These findings pertain to deficiencies identified and brought to our attention. In general, the management letter is a tool to assist internal management in effecting changes to ensure financial integrity in the statements provided on an annual basis to the community. As a result of previous issues identified with financial statements in private sector industry, the standards by which we are evaluated and reviewed have been elevated to ensure fiscal integrity of financial reporting. Historically, financial statements of the School Department were recorded on a cash basis and were only presented on a full accrual basis for purposes of the financial statement presentation on June 30<sup>th</sup>. Under this approach, the audit firm itself made the conversion from the cash to accrual presentation. However, since the new standards have been imposed, the financials must now be provided on a full accrual basis prior to the audit engagement. In effect, these standards do not allow audit firms to assist in the development of the financials, but merely to audit the financials.

Most of the findings noted in the Statement of Auditing standards (SAS) as noted in #112 and #114 relate to the timely recording and reconciliation of accounts of activity. As she indicated in her management response, several of these issues were attributable to the financial systems conversion as well as the new standards. Several of these deficiencies have been or are in the process of correction. In her experience with four major financial system conversions, it generally takes approximately twenty months before the system is running effectively and processes and procedures are updated to allow for efficient and

effective internal controls. She stated objectively that we are striving to achieve this outcome as quickly as possible and have made substantial progress. This process is no different from the new standards we must now meet to improve test scores. We are in the process of adapting to the new standards so that we may attain the proficiency of a highly performing district in the financial category. We have taken actions that will help us address these new standards on an ongoing basis as well as assist us in meeting the timetable of the July 1, 2009, implementation of the State's Uniform Chart of Accounts (COA). She contracted the services of Thomas W. Vignali, CPA, in an amount not-to-exceed \$5,000. Mr. Vignali has been assisting the Middletown School Department and many others that are short staffed with compliance with these new standards and with the State COA. She believes this proactive action will ready us for the FY'09 year-end audit and requirements for the new COA. Concerning the Single Audit Act, which involves the restricted funds (OMB A-133) findings, she pointed out to the committee that out of the five previous findings identified in the FY'07 report, only one remains that was not addressed to compliance. This finding concerns a report due to the state on December 31, 2008. That report was filed on February 14, 2009. The motion was approved 7-0.

- f) **Discussion/Approval – 2009-10 Budget Request.** A motion was made by Mr. Buddemeyer to approve the 2009-10 budget request in the amount of \$35,746,286. Seconded by Mr. Heaney. Mr. Larry Fitzmorris asked if this budget is balanced, and Mr. Buddemeyer stated that it is balanced within contingency of some cuts or changes that may need to be identified later. Mr. Fitzmorris stated that in the past, the School Committee has not voted on the restricted budget; however, he suggested that it is the appropriate thing to do. He respectfully asked the Committee to include it. He congratulated the School Committee for what he thinks is a significant achievement in the area of salaries. He thinks it is the first time the salaries did not increase more than the total budget. Mr. Fitzmorris asked Ms. Tague what actions have been taken in this budget preparation to cut benefit costs, and Ms. Tague replied that most of our benefit costs are contractual, and they are being addressed as we go through the negotiation process. Retirement costs are contractual, as well. Ms. Tague pointed out that the non-certified staff contribution as a percent of payroll is actually much higher than the teachers. The Town retirement system is 19 Percent. Dr. Lusi stated that every July, we receive a letter from the Retirement Board telling us what the rate will be for the coming fiscal year. The letter shows a reduction of just over \$24,000 in certified retirement. She stated that it seems somewhat unlikely to her because of what she is hearing at the state level. Mr. Fitzmorris asked if the School Committee made any efforts to open contracts to renegotiate, and Mr. Carpender replied that they are currently in negotiations. Pat Rossi of Prudence Island asked the Committee to reject the proposed budget because the operational costs of Prudence Island School are not included. She stated that what is included are the transportation costs for these students to attend school in Bristol. She stated that if the Prudence Island parents wanted their children educated in Bristol, then they would live in Bristol. She was concerned with the start and finish times of Bristol's

Colt Elementary School, fearing that the students would be late for school in the morning and miss the ferry back to the island in the afternoon. Dr. Lusi stated that she and Ms. Tague met with the Bristol/Warren Superintendent and Director of Finance, last Friday, and they discussed the ferry times and school times. They are looking into the situation and will get back to us. They do have a bus that their School Department owns that they may be able to dedicate to transporting the students. Dr. Lusi stated that once she has the details, she will get back to the parents. She stated that the per pupil tuition cost to send the Prudence Island students to Colt Elementary School is approximately \$12,000. Mrs. Rossi stated that she thought the plan for the Prudence Island elementary students needed to be submitted to the Rhode Island Department of Education for approval, but Dr. Lusi explained that our School Department attorney advised us that we did not have to submit the plan back to RIDE. She feared that the tuition costs would exceed the cost to keep the Prudence Island School open, should other families with children move to the island. She stated that the Prudence Island residents will continue the volunteer program to do the best for the kids, and she will continue to do the coordination for co-curriculars, etc. for the students, which provides a large savings for the School Department. Grace McIntee, a resident of Prudence Island for the past 29 years, voiced her concerns about closing the Prudence Island School, especially the fact that if the school closes, it cannot be reopened. She stated that in the long run, given the history and volatile nature of our school system, it is foolhardy to close the Prudence Island School. Jen Young and her family live on Prudence Island because her husband took a job that requires residency on the island. She stated that she will never put her child on a ferry for that amount of time. She does not agree with closing the school. Denise Allard has a child at Prudence Island School, and she stated that she feels the same way as Mrs. Young. Her daughter has been attending Prudence Island School for the past three years. The ferry is a huge concern for her because of the timing, the weather, and the heat. She is concerned for her daughter's safety. Marilyn King stated that she is concerned about the ferry not running in the afternoon during inclement weather, and Dr. Lusi explained that the families would have to have a buddy family in Bristol, like we do now in Portsmouth. Ms. Volpicelli and Mrs. King stated that they have a hard time with that. Dr. Lusi stated that she respects everyone present at the meeting and their concerns; however, she feels like she has addressed those concerns on numerous occasions, although not to their satisfaction. She grew up in a rural area. She knows when you care for your children that you develop networks so that if your child can't get home, you have an alternate plan that is safe and secure. Ms. Tague stated that the per pupil cost includes transportation. She added that we are also looking at closing additional schools. Mr. Carpender stated that he appreciates everyone for coming to this meeting. He stated that he has been on the School Committee since 1992, and the issue of closing Prudence Island School has been an ongoing struggle. This is the most difficult decision he has had to make in all those years. While he appreciates all the comments from the Prudence Island residents, and the fact that we save \$44,000 is one side of the equation, keeping the school open costs more than \$44,000. In such difficult economic times, he doesn't know of any other decision he

could make. He stated that he is going to vote in favor of the budget as presented, and he is sorry.

Mr. Carpenter stated that he attended a meeting on Saturday at RIASC, where they talked about the stimulus package and IDEA money. As this money comes in, we need to be cautious as to where it is budgeted because it will be one-time money over a period of 2 years. At the end of the 2-years, the money will go away. We need to be cautious of that and look at being prudent, we need to look at an exit strategy for 2-years out. There are areas that are not year-to-year monies. These monies need to be used for things such as infrastructure, technology, supplies. We need to be careful what we do with it. The proposed budget was approved 5-2. Mrs. King and Ms. Volpicelli were opposed.

A motion was made by Mr. Buddemeyer that the School Committee approves the inclusion of the Technology Warrant in the amount of \$350,000; and the Building Warrant in the amount of \$350,000, along with the School Department's Budget Request to the Town Council. Seconded by Mr. Heaney. So voted 7-0.

- g) **Ratification of Contract Award for Electricity.** A motion was made by Ms. Wedge and seconded by Mrs. Levesque to ratify the contract award for electricity to Constellation Energy, as presented. So voted 7-0.
- h) **Bid Award – PHS Windows.** A motion was made by Ms. Wedge and seconded by Mrs. Levesque to award the contract for window replacement at Portsmouth High School to Martone Surface Company in the amount of \$225,000, as presented. Mr. Davidson said we are \$72,000 short to finish the courtyard. We are only asking for the base amount because we are in negotiations to finish the courtyard. Mr. Larry Fitzmorris asked if there were any other bids on this contract. Mr. Davidson stated that there were four bids: Martone Service Company at \$225,000; Tremont Caulking and Coating at \$8,172; The Damon Company at \$244,180; and Clear Choice Glass and Window Company at \$68,000. Dr. Lusi stated that some of the bidders were not responsive. So voted 7-0.
- i) **Approval – 2009-10 School Calendar.** Ms. Wedge made a motion to approve the proposed calendar for the 2009-10 school year, contingent upon mutual agreement with NEA Portsmouth regarding the scheduling of Professional Development days. Seconded by Mrs. Levesque. Mr. Carpenter inquired about the full 2-week vacation in December, explaining that he received comments last year from parents who had babysitting issues because of the length of the vacation. He stated that in years past, school ended a day and a half before Christmas. Dr. Lusi stated that the last time we ended school that close to Christmas was in the 2005-06 school year. So voted 7-0.

j) **Report on February Financials.** Ms. Tague stated that due to the priority nature of preparing the budget for the Town Council, she would give a detailed analysis of the February financials at the April meeting.

k) **Agenda Item Request – Member Resignation from School Committee.** Mr. Heaney read the following statement into the record: *It is with a deep and heavy heart that I announce my resignation from the Portsmouth School Committee, effective April 1, 2009. I now join a distinguished list of Republicans that have not been able to complete their terms: Duncan Ingraham, Terry Cavanagh, Dr. Roy Twaddle, and the late Honorable Doug Wilkey. The pressure is now on you, Mr. Buddemeyer, to hang on for another year and a half to break the streak!*

*As many of you know, I am marrying a wonderful and beautiful woman this year. Despite her many glowing qualities, she is not from around these parts. When it was time to decide where she would take the bar, we decided it would be in our best interests for her to take two - in the faraway lands of New Jersey and New York. Lands of opportunity. And not only would they be new to me, they continue to be new for everyone else.*

*It has been a long road to get here today. It has been nearly 28 years since I was brought home from Newport Hospital to our converted summer house in Island Park. It has been nearly ten years since I stood at JFK stadium and gave my first out of school speech and lead the crowd of hundreds in the Pledge of Allegiance when I graduated from PHS. It has been nearly nine years since I first ran for a seat on the Town Council - seven and a half since I was first elected. And nearly two and a half years since getting elected to this current position.*

*There have been many ups and downs over the four plus years serving the people of Portsmouth. However, I have always strived to do my best for you and represent you in a proud and respectful manner. I hope I have not let you down. It has been my privilege and honor to serve you.*

*I would like to briefly thank some of the people that have helped me through the years. Courtney Dowd, The honorable Peter McIntyre, Honorable Hubert "Huck" Little, Honorable John Loughlin, His Excellency Donald Carcieri, Robert Driscoll, Dave Faucher, and everyone else on the town side while I sat on the Council. Dr. Lusi, Colleen Jermain, Chris Tague, Patti Cofield, and of course the Honorable Mike Buddemeyer, and the other honorable members of the School Committee. The Portsmouth Republican Town Committee, with their help, allowed me to win two elections. The Portsmouth Concerned Citizens and our unofficial town blogger - John McDaid. My family and friends, the Magee family. And of course, everyone in town that has ever voted for me. Thank you.*

Mr. Carpender thanked Mr. Heaney for his services and wished him well in his future endeavors. Members of the School Committee and Administration also thanked him for doing a great job.

6. **SUBCOMMITTEE AGENDA**

- a) **Finance.** Nothing further to report.
- b) **Policy.** Nothing further to report.
- c) **Facilities.** Mr. Buddemeyer announced that the next meeting will be held on April 1 at 5:30 PM at the PHS Library.
  - 1) A motion was made by Mr. Buddemeyer and seconded by Mr. Heaney to approve the Facilities Subcommittee Charter and membership. So voted 7-0.
- d) **Health and Wellness.** Mr. Carpender announced that he appointed Ms. Volpicelli to the Health and Wellness Subcommittee as the School Committee representative. Ms. Volpicelli reported that the Health and Wellness Subcommittee met on Monday, March 16<sup>th</sup>, at the Administration Building. The school updates were reported. Two of the elementary schools, the middle school, and the high school are involved with Health and Wellness activities with their students. The middle school reported that the teachers are participating in the Biggest Loser competition. The PMS School Nurse teacher, Mrs. Nancy Souza, reported that she and others coordinated a Wellness Day for the staff. There was a blood drive, Muni-Blue gave a presentation, and Mrs. Souza gave the entire staff the opportunity to learn more about their body fat index. She and Mrs. Kathy Arent (the PMS Food and Nutrition Teacher) stressed the focus of healthy lifestyles and balance. Mrs. Arent shared the success of the morning fitness program with the PMS students that she and Mrs. Leslie Choinski (PMS PE teacher) conduct at 6:30 AM on Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday mornings. There are 78 students who participate, and one of the rules of the program is that the students have breakfast together before school. Hathaway and Elmhurst are doing the monthly Health and Wellness calendar. This is where the students document their activities and healthy choices each day on their calendars. This has been a year-long project. Hathaway was the pilot school for this activity, and Elmhurst School has taken this plan and customized it to their building. Subtle changes are being observed in one year. For example, fruits and vegetables are being served at celebrations instead of cookies and cupcakes; and students are drinking more sugar-free drinks such as water. The elementary schools are also offering cooking enrichment programs. At the high school, the school nurse and dietician have been working with the student advisory group on offering different types of healthy side dishes and salads. They reported that the high school and middle school students may not be aware of what healthy choices and combinations of foods are available to them. Based on this observation, it was decided that possibly student groups could work on creating

visuals, and the advisory group felt that this could be a goal next year. This group also wondered if advisories could be used to help facilitate discussions on health and wellness topics. All levels are reaching their year-end goals. The Parent Teacher Organizations are looking for more healthy choices to raise funds. Ideas for future work include utilizing advisories more to educate staff and students on healthy alternatives and proper nutrition. The next report will be in May.

A motion was made by Mr. Heaney seconded by Mrs. King to adjourn the meeting. So voted. The Public Session adjourned at 8:30 PM.

Respectfully submitted:

Patti Cofield  
Recording Secretary for:

Marge Levesque, Clerk