

**MINUTES  
WOONSOCKET SCHOOL COMMITTEE  
SPECIAL MEETING  
WEDNESDAY, JUNE 22, 2005  
7:00 P.M. OPEN SESSION  
WOONSOCKET HIGH SCHOOL AUDITORIUM  
777 CASS AVENUE  
WOONSOCKET, RI 02895**

**Meeting was called to order at: 7:05 P.M.**

**Roll Call:**

Marc Dubois, Chairman	Present
Michael Bileau, Vice-Chairman	Present
Allen Auclair	Present
John Ward	Present
Michelle Williams	Present

**WMS SALT REPORT (SEE ATTACHMENT #1)**

Dr. D'Acchioli stated that he was not thrilled with the language in the recent SALT report for the Middle School but has seen this language in other SALT reports for other Districts with the same scenarios and settings used to label the Middle School and they can turn it around like others have. It does take a village. He presented a short video for the audience.

Mrs. Donna Valentine, principal of the WMS along with Mrs. Sandra Gasbarro, Chairwoman of the SIT Team, reviewed the state of the school before the SALT visit and findings and recommendations made by the SALT team, along with the action plans which will be placed on the website.  
**(SEE ATTACHMENT #2)**

The audience members were then given an opportunity to address the Committee, Dr. D'Acchioli, Dr. Macera and Mrs. Valentine. These were the comments and suggestions made: learning won't improve with the way discipline is being handled; one of the biggest problems is the lack of respect for all adults including janitors, guidance counselors, etc.; there needs to be a resource officer in place now; cameras are needed now in the hallways and blind staircases; SIT needs to get more involvement of parents in the school; need to improve the communication between teachers and Administration - perhaps a mediator is needed; perhaps there is a power play among the administrators of the Middle School; Middle School has suffered crippling blows before Mrs. Valentine arrived when team-leader positions were taken away and the loss of Principal McGee; filled the position of Principal too fast; no one knows what the vision is at the school; inconsistent discipline; problems in the Lunch Room; students walk away from faculty and make obscene gestures towards them; many of these students are moving on to High School with this lack of respect for their teachers; there was a vote of no-confidence for the Principal on Monday where 80% of the staff voted via secret ballot after school; must have change in leadership at the school for change to proceed; the loss at the school is the children's education; they need to focus on problems rather than assessing blame; not enough communication to the parents and staff; a student's behavior and or income level should not cause a teacher not to challenge the student...perhaps the student is bored and that's why they are acting out; there is a lot of administration and teacher bashing; a lot of changes has taken place due to NCLB and change is slow and difficult; institute a faculty/administration meeting two times a month; visit other Districts that have high achievement to see what they are doing; need a new middle-school building; students are picking up on negative attitude in the building; haven't seen assertive discipline and continuity covered in their Professional Development; discipline problems don't just start at the Middle School and must look at the elementary levels and get parents more involved then; need parent accountability and consequences; if a teacher has too many discipline referrals, talk to that teacher in private and not in front of a student in the hallways; all the management is on the top and none in the

middle since the lost of Team Leaders; all four new administrators have no prior middle-school experience and never reached out to the teachers who have been at that school for over twenty years for advice and input which is a huge resource in the building such as helping a younger teacher; feeling of undermining their effort to build a community when talk-show hosts are brought into the building and he speaks badly about the teachers; the teachers want to help the students and each other; all plans and reports won't work if all don't work together and move forward; regarding reading teachers at the elementary level, ratio is one teacher to 60-70 students, at the Middle School, its one teacher to 800 students, these teachers are teaching students who are three or more years behind in reading and not able to help those who may be one or two years behind and could probably help; programs don't take the place of staff; to have a community, trust is needed and so are changes; report stated home-room activity is where no learning is going on, not true. This offers students a chance to do homework, get work missed if absent and band/chorus practice and more; teachers learn from other teachers; the physical building is not the problem, older schools like Harvard are still successful - its not the building but the people in the building; sincerity is an issue; teachers support the administrators but faculty meetings are a one-way show and they are not listening; would like to have parents come into the school to see their child's behavior.

Mrs. Linda Jellows, a teacher at the Middle School who was accused by a student earlier this year of hitting him, thanked all her co-workers and family for their help during this time and was found not guilty. She stated that when she spoke to Dr. D'Acchioli, he assured her that she would be treated as if it never happened. She doesn't want this to happen to anyone else. The child her accused her had thirty-eight prior referrals from twenty different teachers and there were no consequences to this student for this event because she was told by Mrs. Valentine that the parents threatened to sue the school and accused them of being racist and they were going to sweep this under the rug. She is not a racist and she was called white trash among other things. A student hit her and she wrote two incident reports and her attorney subpoenaed them and the reports somehow had disappeared. This is not about revenge but rather protection.

Mrs. Valentine stated that the student was brought to the office and was suspended and they met with the parents. No paperwork disappeared and all subpoenaed was produced.

Another teacher stated that other teachers have been accused of assaulting students and they have not been charged due to no basis for the allegations. However, the teachers have to obtain their own lawyers, go through the torture of being accused unjustly and the students remain in the school and even on the teachers' floor and are free to accuse others. Nothing is done with these children. The teachers want to be protected and not to be afraid to come to school where they may be accused of something.

Another teacher stated that a student threatened to hit her and stab her and later found a pair of scissors on this student. She has been sworn at and has had a gun drop out on the floor during her class.

Mrs. Valentine stated that the student is suspended and they try and place the student in another part of the building and perhaps, even alternative placement. As a Principal, she cannot have a student permanently removed from the school.

Chairman Dubois stated that none of these students were referred to the School Committee.

Ms. Linda Majewski, who is on the SIT team, stated some of their recommendations: revisit assertive discipline and institute a student board with a social worker, a guidance counselor and three teachers where they could sit with a student once a month if a student isn't doing their work; send parents certified letters; questioned reading proficiency when a student leaves the elementary school, is reading on a level of six-months behind and then goes to the Middle School and is assessed under the Read 180 Program and is found to be three and a half years behind...perhaps a problems between the Read 180 program and DRA's; have a take-a-parent to school day; have essay and poetry contests; showcase students where parents want to come the school to see their student; the Middle School used to be a place where remedial work could be done or a student could receive a full year of a subject if excelling...now just controlling traffic; need more social workers.

Dr. Macera addressed the issue of more parental involvement by explaining that the new 21<sup>st</sup> Century Grant they just received is for a parent-outreach coordinator and program. The program got a late start due to the funding and finding the right person for the position. They will offer support in non-school hours. They are, also, exploring a grant for elementary parenting skills and helping teachers to recognize and handle problems and it would partner with medical support in school.

Mrs. Valentine stated that the vision for the school was clearly stated at the end of the last school year before she even arrived. There have been no changes to that vision. They have communicated that at the faculty meetings each month. Also, there have been 8,500 disciplinary referrals in the eighth grade alone, which breaks down to one hundred a day. Regarding the lunchroom situation, there are, now, eight faculty members along with three administrators. They will be asking for volunteer teachers next year. She, also, stated that there is no intent on hurting the music/band students regarding homeroom activity. They are looking at the schedule to add more instruction time, which will soon be required. Two thirds of the staff wants block scheduling. If there is a lack of sincerity, that was not her intention. She didn't plan or invite Mr. Yorke to the school. She thought the interview went well and she introduced him to some teachers. She will continue to learn from her missteps and perhaps, she hasn't reached out for advice but will and hopes that people will come forward to the administrators, as well.

Dr. D'Acchioli stated that he has never met Mr. Yorke but he had called the principal and asked to visit the school. The Providence Journal had been at the Middle School for a whole week. The CALL is also a frequent visitor and he wasn't going to refuse others who made similar requests. The Middle School has many problems, which started last year due to the budget crunch. This year is bad and next year will be even worse regarding the tighter budget. The City allocated a half a million dollars less than requested and it was finalized last night. The Legislature is using the Governor's numbers, which is based on a 3% increase rather than the 5% increase the School Committee built into their budget. The difference in State projections is 1.2M dollars less. So, between the City and the State reductions, the schools will have a 1.7M-dollar shortfall. The Legislature is tinkering with the pension fund which cost the school department over a million dollar increase this year in costs. Even if they get a 50% reduction in the pension assessment, they will still be over a million dollars short for their budget. He wants team leaders but based on the funding, its not going to happen. He wants more reading teachers but that will also not happen. He doesn't want to put sports on the chopping block but how does one find \$1.7M dollars? And regarding student behavior, there have been a lot of changes in Federal Law. Currently there are special protections for a student with an IEP. Mr. Emerson stated that by law, those special protections now extend to all students. No student can now be suspended from school for more then ten days cumulative in a school year. Dr. D'Acchioli stated the Federal government has imposed this changes on all schools. The Middle School teachers and administrators need to protect themselves by work together and enforce the rules. This past year, referrals were far to frequent with students referred for flipping a coin or leaning on a wall. The administration does send registered letters to parents and many are returned. The administration is on the side of the teachers. Administrators should go to veteran teachers. Things have changed and he couldn't go back today and teach like he did many years ago. He pledged that the administration will work with teachers to get things on track.

Chairman Dubois called a five-minute recess at 9:50. The meeting reconvened at 10:10 P.M.

Mr. Auclair asked what the vision was at the Middle School? He commended the SIT team for the work they have done. An item not addressed tonight was school climate. Also, students are coming in not prepared. He has always felt that all third graders should be reading at a third-grade level but they are not. Problem solving in Math has not improved in three years. Why wasn't the Middle School tested with the new test this year? This invalidates the whole year. Dr. D'Acchioli stated that the State is responsible for the type and timing of the testing program, it is not a local option. Mr. Auclair continued that they should do a self- study and review where they are at sixty and one hundred and twenty days into the year. That would help to drive success. There is a process in the business world for corrections and perhaps it could work at the Middle School. 85% of problems are process related due to unclear directions; 15% are personnel related because they don't know what to do; one must address and identify the problem; what is the root cause; initiate an action plan; assign responsibilities; assign a due date and completion date. He doesn't believe in reinventing the wheel and has look to see how others have handled a problem that is not

unique. He recently read an article in the American School-Board Journal by Kathleen Bench, a Senior Editor, about changing a school's climate. First, you must support the teachers; find out the climate of the building; empower teachers and staff; recognize and reward teachers and staff; don't ignore administrative morale...principals are people too; deal with student discipline consistently and in a fair manner; treat teachers as professionals; ask teachers what is going on; keep building tidy; develop emotional IQ (be empathetic, recognize and appreciate work and develop new strengths). Regarding the Beacon Charter School, perhaps as a community, they could establish a charter school to address discipline and behavior-problem students, as well, as gifted and talented students. There needs to be more parent/community engagement and some of the student issues need to be addressed at home but parents need direction and need to know what is expected of them. They have started with PAC and offers discipline workshops among other things. They will work over the summer to make clear directions for the parents. Regarding the SALT report, he is rejecting it and questions the validity of the data, which leaves a lot of open-ended questions. The language is inappropriate and demeaning. He appreciated everyone who came up to speak before the Committee and hope more will come to the meetings and keep the dialogue going.

Mr. Bileau thanked everyone who attended the meeting. He has taken many notes and voices were heard. Some decisions need to be made. He has a problem with the SALT report and has a major problem with the pre-disposition on what was written. The quickness in how this was done validates his thoughts.

Chairman Dubois thanked everyone for coming out and was able to hear both sides and vent and many good ideas came out. He knew there was a problem at the school but was taken back by the no-confidence vote of 112-14. He never expected the riff to be so deep. A lot of damage has been done. He fears they will lose good teachers. They do listen and has been talking with Dr. D'Acchioli for over two days regarding solutions. They sat back to let things work out between the teachers and the Principal but now that school is out, they are not going to sit back and changes will be made. He is rejecting the SALT report and questions the validity. Members on the team worked with Mrs. Valentine on another team for another school. It is a small state and these things happen and it is permissive. The school is not toxic and if you saw the students they turn out, you would know that is untrue.

Mr. Ward thanked everyone for coming and stated he listened to all the suggestions and appreciated them. He hasn't said much about the issue and he feels similar to the way he felt about the report a couple of years ago for Citizens. There is clearly a problem at the Middle School and it is a self-inflicted wound in an attempt to change things due to budgetary restraints. He doesn't like the report using insulting language and doubts things as severe as described. One person on the team is Pawtucket School Department's Standards Coach and is a Regents SALT Fellow and is on every team. All the rest were different members. He chaired both this report and a report done in the Oliver Hazard Perry School in Providence and the Providence Journal did a three-part series on that, as well. Statements were made of a 'toxic climate', adversarial relationship between teachers and administration, public perceives the school to be dirty, dark, dangerous and deserted, more suspensions this year with 80% of the students well-behaved, 15% occasional a problem and 5% called the frequent fliers and are kicked out on a regular basis. Very similar comments as those made about WMS. So, he read about some of the things Oliver Perry School has done such as established a student planning center where it allows teachers to send students to leave just that class until they settle down and then they go back to the classroom and don't lose the whole day. You can read more about this on the Providence Journal website, Metro Section, three-part series. They started after-school activities, which Woonsocket has done for years. They make the after-school activities things the kids want to participate and tie it into academic requirements so the activities are not necessarily academic but used as inducement to do well in school. Simply a style concept. Another thing they do is a credit recovery where they structure the week so students can make up classes so when they enter a classroom they are not behind and become disruptive. Perhaps, that is something they should consider. So, based on what he read about the Oliver Perry School, he knows what they will be saying about the WMS in a couple of years by simply changing the name in the recent report about that school... 'WMS is making strides and continued efforts to improve the school's climate and academic achievements. The school is wonderfully diverse and their students want to and can learn. There is academic vigor across all classes in all content areas. They strike a balance between their focus on discipline and academics. Continue to implement recommendations to improve the school. Efforts made by teachers and administrators to reach there shared vision by innovative and culturally appropriate ways to build partnerships with the parents, one of their

valuable resources. They are making progress. Strive to excel by making WMS an even better place to learn.’ Next, he explained that a judge wrote an opinion describing what School Committees of. Article 12 of the R.I. Constitution states that the State is required to provide all students a public education and that responsibility is delegated by the State to School Committees, section 16.2-9. School Committees are agents of the State and not the municipality to impact education and make decisions with limitations placed on them by budgetary restraints. 83% of their funds come from the State and Federal government and a smaller amount from Woonsocket. They used to receive 29% from Woonsocket and now it is 17%. Then they had level funding for the last few years. That’s why the cuts made last year was the wound that they inflicted upon themselves. Since Henry Hatcher left and before Donna Valentine arrived, it was decided to eliminate team leaders and combine classes where possible, etc. and that results in more disciplinary referrals. It’s a self-inflicted wound that they need to revisit. Also, the opinion stated that the Committees distribute the 6M in Federal funds and per Article 12; they are the ones responsible for personnel, administration, negotiations and allocation of funds. He has been involved in ten budgets and not once have they been asked to participate in the allocation of Federal funds. There is always restrictions; such as, when he asked at the last meeting if some funds from the Drug-Free School money could be used for team leaders for a safer school environment and discipline. The answer is no. They receive feedback about concerns, issues and priorities and not to undermine the process, perhaps members of the Finance Sub-Committee could sit with administration and review the budget and the urgent needs of the Middle School and reassess priorities. Middle schools model the emotional development of kids. Hormones. He has advocated that the sixth grade be treated as a transitional grade and separate them to one side of the school, its own school. Also, there should be intramural sports where all students participate and they can create comrodery. They have lost some teachers’ aides and that has caused some problems. They need support from social workers and professional development. He wants the State to play a more significant role. The vision of the school needs to be communicated by the entire school administration and support staff. He expects they will do this. He has a lot more ideas on the subject and is willing to talk with anyone. He asked that all get involved; help, listen and they would succeed.

Ms. Williams thanked everyone for coming to the meeting. She is not accepting the SALT report and the language is demeaning. There are excellent teachers at the Middle School and solutions will be found. The SIT team had some great ideas. She hasn’t heard the vision of the school. She is concerned on how effective they can be when there is a lack of trust, respect and communication. She thinks people have to definitely listen and that is not happening. The problem, in her opinion, is inexperienced personnel. It was a difficult situation to be put in. She doesn’t blame Mrs. Valentine. She blames McFee administration. You have someone with no experience and the school is not performing well. Something has to happen regarding communication and address the needs of the students. A recommendation on the report was to support the teachers and hopefully, over the summer, they will do what they need to do to get where they want to be.

**Motion to accept the WMS SALT report**  
Roll Call Vote (All No)

**MD Second: AA**

**Motion to adjourn at 11:00 P.M.**  
Unanimously approved

**MD Second: MW**

Respectfully submitted,

Denise St Germain  
WSD Recording Secretary

