

MINUTES
WOONSOCKET SCHOOL COMMITTEE
WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 28, 2007
7:00 PM – OPEN SESSION
Woonsocket Area Career & Technical Center
Multimedia Room 303

Called to Order by Chairman Marc Dubois
Moment of Silence
Pledge of Allegiance

Roll Call:	Marc Dubois, Chairman	Present
	Allen Auclair	Present
	Michelle Williams	Present
	Eleanor Nadeau	Present
	Anita McGuire-Forcier	Present

PUBLIC GOOD & WELFARE:

- **Denise Auclair, PTO President at Harris School:** Thanked some members of the community and businesses for helping the school. Thanked the Woonsocket Fire Department Education Team for a program they conducted at the school on fire safety, fire prevention, etc. Thanked Li'l General, among others, for the help with the Read-A-Board outside the school as far as the materials, labor, etc. Thanked Alan Shawn Feinstein for \$3,000.
- **Richard DiPardo, Woonsocket Teachers' Guild President, 134 Huntington Ave.:** Spoke again regarding the policy before the WSC regarding gifts from the WTG. He thinks there are more important things facing the school department, such as the public perception of our students. Stated that while he was working out one day, there was a group of young men cussing and being very crude. After they left, an older gentleman approached him and said, "You must be used to that working at the high school." "I thought that the last time I spoke I was respectful to everyone," adding that he read an article in The Call where a school committee member said his proposal was reminiscent of Nazi Germany. He thought Mrs. Nadeau owed him an apology because he never told her she had to give up her friends.
- **Donna Houle, 130 Ward Street:** Asked if the extension of the Physics Program would be happening during the regular semester or would it be another class. Dr. Macera told her that they are separate courses and will be explained more during tonight's presentation. Houle asked if there would be an accelerated program next year. Dr. Macera told her that what's in place this year would continue next year. Houle noted that last year, 83% of the budget was spent on salaries. She is concerned about where it's going to go in the future because we will really be in a bind.
- **Denise Boulay, SELAC Co-Chair:** Next meeting will be held Thursday, March 1st, at Governor Pothier School from 6:30 pm to 8:30 pm. A workshop on techniques to use with special needs children will be conducted. She urged parents to attend.
- **Ms. Forcier, Cottage Street:** Her daughter attends Bernon Hts. Elementary and she is concerned about the recent arrest of a substitute teacher there. Asked how often background checks are done on employees. Dr. Macera said they are done upon hiring. "This person did have clearance from the Attorney General's Office," said Macera. Forcier asked if background checks could be done on a yearly basis for all teachers. Dr. Macera will discuss it with the WTG.
- **Marlene Smith, 7th Grade Social Studies Teacher, WMS:** Spoke in favor of the proposed school committee/administrator gift policy Mrs. Nadeau put forward. Smith said she was a former executive director of Common Cause and doesn't understand why there would be opposition to this policy. "As a member of the WTG, I am opposed to any kind of gift giving to any administrative person or school committee members. I'm not saying that anyone is doing anything wrong. It's just inappropriate. I don't see why it has become such an issue." She said Mr. DiPardo told her and Mr. Wrona that he has a policy of taking new principals out to dinner. She doesn't know if he uses his own money or not. "It gives the wrong impression." Regarding NCLB and state mandates, she said she's not intimidated by anyone. She is very against heterogeneous grouping. Regarding

END OF CONSENT AGENDA

EXEMPTIONS TO CONSENT AGENDA:

PURCHASES/TRANSFERS OVER \$2,000:

***Motion to approve a police detail at WHS for the Focus Program @ \$35/hr not to exceed \$20,000: A Forcier
2nd: M. Dubois (Unanimously Approved)***

Dr. Macera clarified that this is for a policeman for the after school program at the WHS.

FIELD TRIP/CONFERENCE REQUESTS:

Motion to approve the request for Karen Karten to attend the Mass. Teachers of Speakers of Other Languages Conference in Leominster, MA on March 8 & 9, 2007: M. Williams

2nd: A. Auclair (Unanimously Approved)

Mr. Auclair asked about protocol and whether or not these expenditures from Article 18 go before the SIT. Dr. Macera told him they do.

COMMUNICATIONS: None

COMMITTEE REPORTS:

A. Auclair: Reported that this past Monday the City Council approved requesting the General Assembly to put the bond referendum for the new middle schools on the ballot. He wanted to know if the WSC should start planning how it's going to promote passage of this bond referendum because they will only have eight weeks to do it. Dr. Macera said that she's already booked on several radio stations and she will be going to the high rises and campaigning. She said that the community's support is needed and anyone interested in helping out should contact her office. "The whole committee needs to support this and be out there promoting," said Dubois. He doesn't expect them to be out seven nights a week, however. Auclair asked if the Building Committee would be involved. Dr. Macera has spoken to Joel Matthews about it.

CONFERENCES:

1) PAC Presentation – Cindy MacNeil, PAC Co-Chair

Cindy MacNeil introduced Carmen Boucher, who made a PowerPoint presentation on the history of the Parents Advisory Council, its mission, bylaws and officers. She outlined the PAC Representation and listed the many accomplishments of the PAC starting in April 2005. She also outlined future projects and encouraged participation by parents and school administration to keep the PAC alive.

Motion to receive and place on file: M. Williams

2nd: E. Nadeau (Unanimously Approved)

2) Approval & Presentation of Youth Risk Behavior Study – Donald Perry, Dept. of Health

Mr. Perry was seeking authorization to contact the WMS and the WHS to solicit their participation in the Youth Risk Behavior Survey. It needs to be done by mid- to late-May and is anonymous and voluntary. The survey consists of questions regarding weight and physical activity, nutrition, alcohol and other drug use, injuries, tobacco use, and, for high school students, sexual behaviors. It is conducted in 6 to 8 randomly selected classrooms. Data will only be reported for the state as a whole and will not be reported by district or school. Ms. Williams asked why students are asked what their race is and why they are asked separately if they are Hispanic or Latino. Mr. Perry explained that it's a very standard practice because being Hispanic is not a race--it's an ethnicity. The way the programs are designed, it's very important. Williams has heard teachers say that the kids don't fill out the surveys properly; such as, they may be male and put they are female. She wondered how accurate the results are in that case. Mr. Perry said that studies have shown that there is a high percentage of reliability with the survey results because they are

anonymous. Auclair asked what the ultimate use of the data collected was. Perry stated that many programs at the state and local level are targeted towards risk behaviors of youth. They are also used for program evaluation.

Motion to approve: M. Williams

2nd: M. Dubois (Unanimously Approved)

3) NECAP Test Results – Pat Dubois

Dubois outlined the results by school in charts that were included in the WSC's packet. Last year's scores were compared to this year's scores with a column showing the percent of increase over the previous year for each grade. Mr. Auclair asked about the differences in proficiency rates for males versus females. He noticed a difference in Grades 5, 6 and 7. Linda Filomeno said they would have to look into research that is out there. Dr. Macera explained that the developmental pathways in boys and girls are very different. "The girls start developing two years before the boys; and once they reach 16, the boys surpass the girls. Auclair asked to be involved somehow in the effort to increase NECAP scores. Williams pointed out that if we are supposed to be at 100% proficiency by 2019, the middle school Grade 7 will only be at 40% in reading by then. Mrs. Dubois told her that action plans are being developed to address this issue at the WMS.

Motion to receive and place on file: A. Forcier

2nd: A. Auclair (Unanimously Approved)

4) Special Education Restructuring at WMS: Special Education Director, Carole Lerner

Lerner presented the findings of the consultants that were hired. There are 450 students at the WMS with IEPs. She presented the recommendations of the consultants for restructuring and the reasons for it. Mrs. Forcier noticed that the staff said that the high turnover in principals affected the test scores. "If we don't pay them what they are worth, they are going to leave," she said. "One thing brought up at the joint meeting with the City Council on Monday was the 45 additional mandates by the state of RI. It increases our costs. The guidelines in RI far exceed the federal guidelines. In my opinion, the more mandates they throw in there, the more money it will cost and the state doesn't give us enough money to fund them," said Williams. Nadeau asked how the restructuring affects the staff at the WMS. Mrs. Lerner doesn't believe it will affect the teaching staff much. "It remains to be seen how it will affect the teacher assistants. Support for these students will still need to be provided," said Lerner. Nadeau wanted to know why she read about it in *The Call* before the WSC had gotten the information. Dr. Macera explained that if the paper calls prior to a meeting for information, she will give it to them if possible, but she didn't think it would appear the next day. Lerner got the results at a meeting on Monday, which the WSC members were invited to. None of the WSC members got that invitation. Auclair asked if SELAC could be provided with two copies of the consultants' report. Dr. Macera will oblige. Donna Houle stated that the integrated classrooms at Globe Park were done away with last year because the state didn't recognize them. "Now they want to integrate classrooms at the WMS. I would like to see integrated classrooms come back to Globe Park," said Houle. Linda Majewski asked for a copy of the report for the PAC.

Motion to receive and place on file: M. Williams

2nd: A. Forcier (Unanimously Approved)

UNFINISHED BUSINESS:

1) Final Approval of FY08 School District Budget – 2nd Passage: Miriam Goodman

Mr. Auclair asked if there was a plan in place in case we don't get the 5.25% increase from the city and from the state that we are requesting. Dr. Macera said there is. "We won't get 5.25% from the city so we need to adjust our budget more accordingly now instead of after the fact," said Nadeau. "Last year we proposed 4.1% from the city and more from the state and were criticized for not requesting enough. The 68 layoff notices are for the worst-case scenario. If we don't ask, we don't get. We will be lobbying and won't leave any stone unturned. I am not going to lowball the budget because I will always ask for what I feel is fair," said Macera. Nadeau had a problem with the non-union wage proposal. She thinks the three assistant principals at the WMS should all work 10 months. Dr. Macera disagreed. "To run some of the programs that need to be run in the summer, I will have to call back an assistant principal at per diem rate, which is more than a 12-month principal rate. At the WMS there is summer school and the RAMP-UP program. These programs can't be run with people on vacation. It will be very difficult to get principals if their per diem rate is lower than the teachers," explained Macera. Nadeau said she would not support second passage of the budget.

In regards to legal fees, Ms. Williams pointed out that we are the only district in the state that has our lawyer on the payroll. "Nothing against Mr. Ackerman—he has done a great job. We are the second to highest district in the state in legal fees for 2004-2005, according to the InSite Report," said Williams. Dr. Macera noted that the legal fees for

Promac are over \$1.4 million alone. Williams mentioned that after ten years, Mr. Ackerman will be eligible to receive a pension and she has a problem with that. "He will get a pension on \$83,500 a year," said Williams. She would like to see what other districts are paying in attorney fees. Dr. Macera said it is ultimately up to the WSC and that the hiring of the attorneys for the Promac case was done before she was superintendent. "I have 39 years in the system and have always paid into it. There are people in the pension system that have never paid into it. There was money borrowed from the pension system during the banking crisis that has not been paid back. There needs to be equity in the system and monies put back with interest that were borrowed," said Macera. Williams noted that having our attorney on the payroll is a very unusual circumstance. When asked how long he's been on the payroll, Ackerman told Nadeau it's been four or five years. "How did it come about?" she asked. "I have been representing the WED since 1971 and billed on an hourly basis. Some years it amounted to \$100,000 or \$150,000. Having worked for 35 years for one client, I have gained a great deal of insight about the department. After working all these years for this one client, I requested being put on the payroll so that the department would not be hesitant to call if they had a problem due to the cost and so that I could contribute to the pension system. There's no conflict of interest. It wasn't a special arrangement and wasn't because of the former superintendent. I have probably saved this department hundreds of thousands of dollars over the past few years. It's up to the WSC if they want to change the arrangement," said Ackerman. Mrs. Nadeau didn't have a problem with the salary—it's the pension. "It's not your performance," she added. "It seems to me that the school department makes out better this way," said Ackerman. "From being a legal secretary, I know how lawyers bill. It's not cheap. If the City Council and Mayor has to approve the WSC raises, how come it's coming out of our budget?" asked Forcier. Atty. Ackerman was pretty sure it's a law. "The WSC can't do it for themselves," he said. "I think it's a big savings having Atty. Ackerman in a salaried position. If you look at the Promac fees, if these lawyers were on salary, we would be saving a lot of money on this litigation," said Dubois.

Motion to approve: A. Auclair
Roll Call Vote: (MD, AF, AA – Yes) (EN, MW – No)

2nd: A. Forcier
Motion passes by a 3 to 2 vote.

Motion to take New Business #2 out of order: M. Dubois

Passed by unanimous consent.

NEW BUSINESS: (taken out of order)

2) Extension of Physics First Grant to Include a Chemistry & Biology Initiative (State Sponsored / Grant Funded) – Ronald DeFronzo, East Bay Educational Collaborative

Mr. DeFronzo presented a PowerPoint presentation on Physics First, which represents a change in the sequence of courses in the Science program. Currently, the sequence is Biology, Chemistry, and then Physics. This program offers Physics in 9th grade, then chemistry and then biology. He gave the history of the Science program and presented statistics showing the success of the Physics First program. He provided a simulated exercise for the audience and covered the free equipment that will be going to all schools. Williams asked if the state is only paying for the first year. DeFronzo told her the government has money in the budget for professional development. "We have the money for this year and we are working on the money for next year," he said. Donna Houle asked if the money includes textbooks. "When the new book is printed, every child will get a book," said DeFronzo.

THE REMAINING AGENDA ITEMS WERE NOT HEARD DUE TO WSC POLICY TO NOT START ANY NEW BUSINESS AFTER 10:30 P.M.

Mr. Dubois asked that no more than two conferences be placed on the agenda in the future.

Motion to adjourn at 10:50 p.m.: A. Forcier
Motion Withdrawn: M. Williams

2nd: A. Auclair
2nd: E. Nadeau (Unanimously Approved)

Respectfully submitted,

Nancy G. Belisle
WSC Recording Secretary

Revised 3-28-07 WSC RECESSED TO THE NEXT MEETING.