

MINUTES
WOONSOCKET SCHOOL COMMITTEE
WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 15, 2008
7:00 PM – OPEN SESSION
Woonsocket Area Career & Technical Center
Multimedia Room 303

Call to Order / Moment of Silence / Pledge of Allegiance

Roll Call:	Marc Dubois, Chairman	Present
	Michelle Williams, Vice Chairwoman	Present
	Linda Majewski	Present
	Anita McGuire-Forcier	Present
	Eleanor Nadeau	Present

PUBLIC GOOD & WELFARE:

Bill Legare, Valley Transportation: Legare announced that next week is School Bus Safety Week and urged everyone to keep their eye on the buses. The police are aware of this safety week and he wanted to make sure the public pays attention. Mrs. Majewski asked if all the buses say that they must stop at all railroad crossings on the back of them. Mr. Legare told her that they do and it's a state mandate.

RECOGNITIONS & ANNOUNCEMENTS: Dr. Robert Gerardi

He reported that on Thursday, October 9th, Governor Carcieri and the state department had the kickoff for their "Way To Go" website. Also, two middle school teachers made a professional development presentation to their colleagues after they attended a RIDE-sponsored conference on co-teaching.

Motion to receive and place on file: A. Forcier 2nd: M. Williams (Unanimously Approved)

APPROVAL OF MINUTES: 9/10/08 Open/Closed; 9/17/08 Budget Meeting Open; 9/24/08 Open/Closed

Motion to approve: A. Forcier 2nd: M. Williams (Unanimously Approved)

Mrs. Nadeau asked Dr. Gerardi about the school-based coordinators information. Mrs. Majewski asked about Jane Cotnoir, saying she heard people say that she was working at the WMS. The WSC did not approve her appointment at the last meeting. Dr. Gerardi told her that she is not working. She was acting as a substitute in that position, but as soon as he knew that they didn't want to approve it, she was told to stop working. Mr. Dubois asked about the entire budget work session being posted in the newspaper and whether Dr. Gerardi knew anything about it. Dr. Gerardi said that he asked his secretary and she said she didn't post it. Mr. Dubois wondered why the minutes were posted and who paid for it, because it must have cost a good amount of money. "They were public, but we don't know how they got them," said Dubois. He asked Dr. Gerardi to look into it. Bill Legare had the paper it was in and gave it to Dr. Gerardi.

CONSENT AGENDA:

Motion to approve Consent Agenda with the following exceptions: M. Williams

- *Personnel Appointments: Removed by L. Majewski*
- *Purchases/Transfers Over \$2,000: Aurora Electric, Carolina Biological Supply, City of Woonsocket, Keystone Info. System, Nettie Alexander – Removed by L. Majewski; Beacon Charter School – Removed by E. Nadeau*

2nd: M. Dubois (Unanimously Approved)

CONSENT AGENDA:

1. Personnel Actions: Removed by L. Majewski

Certified Appointments
Non-Certified Appointments

2. Purchases/Transfers Over \$2,000

Apple Education/Computer Equip/WACTC/Perkins Grant
Aurora Electric/Fire Alarm Upgrades/WACTC/Local - Removed
B&H Photo/Camera Equip/WACTC/Perkins Grant
Beacon Charter School/Tuitions '09/District/Local - Removed
Carolina Biological Supply/Ed. Supplies/WMS/Local - Removed

CONSENT AGENDA: (continued)

City of Woonsocket/Police Detail/WHS/Local - Removed

CCF/Contract 09/Grants & Curriculum/21st Century Grant

EBS Healthcare/Speech Therapy/Sp. Ed/Local

Keystone Info. System/Software Licenses/Bus. Office/Local - Removed

Mentor, Inc/Adult Ed/Even Start/Even Start Grant

Nettie Alexander/Consultant/Grants & Curriculum/PRIMES Grant - Removed

Norton & Associates/Speech & COTA Services/Sp. Ed/Local

Sciacca & Piccirilli/Prof. Service/Sp. Ed/Local

Snap-on- Industrial/Ed. Supplies/WACTC/Perkins Grant

3. Home Schooling Requests

4. Disposal of Obsolete Equipment

END OF CONSENT AGENDA

EXEMPTIONS FROM CONSENT AGENDA:

1. PERSONNEL APPOINTMENTS (Certified & Non-Certified)

Mrs. Majewski had questions about the FACTS/FOCUS Program. She noticed that this program was paid for out of local funds, while most of our other after-school programs are covered by grants. Carole Lerner explained that this is the WED's alternative high school program. Some of it is covered by IDEA and some is covered locally.

2. PURCHASES/TRANSFERS OVER \$2,000:

• **Aurora Electric - Fire Alarm Upgrades at WACTC: \$3,632 Local**

Majewski asked if this was part of the agreement to be reimbursed by the state. Mr. Strom told her it has been approved by Joe DaSilva to be reimbursed.

• **Carolina Biological Supply – WMS Educational Supplies: \$8,685.93 Local**

Majewski thought these kits and supplies were covered by the PRIMES Grant and asked why they are coming out of the local budget. Mr. Strom explained that the kits were paid by PRIMES last year, but they need to be replaced on a regular basis because it's required by NECAP. Majewski noted that the PRIMES Grant is a 3-year grant, so she asked him to check on it. Mrs. Filomeno explained that the PRIMES Grant only covers professional development. "The first time we used the kits, it was considered professional development. Now, the teachers know how to use them. We will need to replenish them every year. The replenishing cost isn't nearly as much as the initial cost of the kits," said Filomeno.

• **City of Woonsocket – FOCUS Program Police Detail at the WHS for Sept. 08: \$2,888 Local**

Mrs. Majewski asked if the City is covering any of this cost and whether it is different than the Resource Officer at the WHS. Strom explained that it isn't the Resource Officer. It's for the alternative program and he believes that a good portion of this cost will be reimbursed through the District Negotiated Agreement.

• **Keystone Information Systems, Inc. – Financial Software Licenses for Business Office: \$9,700 Local**

Majewski noted that we had just purchased license agreements a couple of months ago and asked why they are seeing this purchase again. Strom explained that these upgrades were needed in order for Human Resources and Payroll to use it. Majewski said she would like to see what the total cost is of purchases when only a portion is being paid at a time. "It would be nice to see the whole picture," she said.

• **Nettie Alexander – Consulting Services (10/08-6/09): \$12,300 PRIMES**

Majewski asked if this is for a new program because it had come before the WSC previously. "Is it for the whole district? Just the high school?" she asked. Linda Filomeno explained that she works for the district K-8. Strom told her that the first time she saw it was for the summer payment. Filomeno said the first payment was probably made in September.

EXEMPTIONS FROM CONSENT AGENDA: Purchases/Transfers Over \$2,000 (continued)

- **Beacon Charter High School – Tuition for 08/09 School Year (estimated): \$155,000 Local**

Mrs. Nadeau noted that we had an expense for them in August and asked if this was tuition for our students who attend Beacon. Strom explained that it is and this is an estimate for FY09. "It has been going up every year," said Strom. When asked if it's a one lump fee, Strom said that it's paid quarterly. He doesn't know the number of students from Woonsocket that go to Beacon, but he can check on it. Carol Lerner added that "for students who go to Beacon, we pay our regular per pupil cost. Last year, they sent us a bill for \$189,000 for additional costs for students with IEPs. It's sitting with RIDE at this time, because we challenged it. I believe it is still in appeal." Atty. Ackerman reported on a bill that was passed two years ago, which all 11 districts have challenged.

**Motion to approve exemptions from the consent agenda, including Personnel Appointments: L. Majewski
2nd: M. Dubois (Unanimously Approved)**

COMMUNICATIONS: Bus Appeal was settled and was removed from the agenda. No other communications were reported.

COMMITTEE REPORTS: Ms. Majewski reported that a SELAC Meeting was held and a presentation was made by a speech/language pathologist and a physical therapist. "It was very well attended," reported Majewski. She announced that the PAC will be meeting on November 12th.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS: None

NEW BUSINESS:

1. Approval of Job Descriptions for Grant Bookkeeper/Budget Specialist/Benefits Specialist – Dr. Gerardi

Dr. Gerardi recommended approval of these two positions and said he sent a memo to the WSC.

Motion to approve: A. Forcier

2nd: M. Dubois

Mrs. Forcier said that we already have two people working 40 hours a week in these two positions. Dr. Gerardi explained the circumstances. "By reorganizing these positions, we are actually saving money," he said. "What happens if the person that is in the position doesn't want to bid?" asked Forcier. "Something opens up somewhere else and she would have to bid on it because she would be displaced," answered Gerardi. Mr. Strom reported that we would be saving \$6,000. "Last week, because we don't have a person handling benefits, we found a \$12,000 error that was corrected. To avoid this from happening again, this job will pay for itself," he said. Mrs. Nadeau asked if there would be two positions and whether one is open due to a retirement. Mr. Strom answered "yes" to both questions. "Why is the grant bookkeeper requiring a B.A. and the Benefits position only a high school diploma?" asked Nadeau. Strom explained that the grants bookkeeper position is more of an accounting position and requires more expertise. He said that the Benefits Specialist is more of a procedural position. "Will the grants person make more money?" asked Nadeau. "No. They are both specialist positions. The person doing the benefits in addition to the secretarial position pay will be taking a cut in pay initially. She is getting a sizeable stipend to do the benefits right now," said Strom. "Why would she take a pay cut?" asked Nadeau. Strom explained that with the step system, she would eventually go up in pay. Mrs. Majewski and Mrs. Nadeau both would like to see the salaries of these positions and the top pay categories. Majewski wants to re-look at the benefits position and hold off approving it until after we finish all our budget hearings and possibly make it a half-time position. Forcier asked Dr. Gerardi if it can be done as a half-time position. "It's becoming increasingly difficult and mistakes like we just found will cost us money. I don't want anything to fall through the cracks, especially in the finance department. Too many of these positions have been consolidated," said Gerardi. "In my opinion, I feel very strongly that it's a full-time position. We have a number of people who are doing pieces of it. Not only does this person need to know the different plans that we have, they can answer questions that people have. Right now, people don't know who to ask these questions. It wouldn't be just medical benefits. It would be all benefits. We really didn't have a person doing benefits full-time. They were a budget/benefits person, which I don't feel was adequate," said Strom. Mr. Dubois said he supports both positions. "These are not jobs we are creating for people. I feel we need stability in these two positions. We will vote on both positions separately," he said.

Motion to approve the position of Grants Bookkeeper/Budget Specialist: A. Forcier

2nd: M. Williams

Roll Call Vote: 5 yes. APPROVED.

NEW BUSINESS #1) continued:

Motion to approve the position of Benefits Specialist: M. Williams

2nd: A. Forcier

Roll Call Vote: 4 yes – 1 no (LM)

APPROVED

2. Discussion of Transfer of WACTC to City- Dr. Gerardi

Dr. Gerardi reported on his meeting with RIDE regarding the transfer of the Woonsocket Area Career & Technical Center to the City. He was concerned that it would be a big increase in costs to the district, but it actually would not be since we already pay the heat and electricity for the building. "It would be a \$44 million dollar asset, which would increase the City's bond rating. We would have more control over the building. I feel that the assets would outweigh the negatives," said Gerardi. Ms. Williams doesn't think the state has any money to refurbish the building first. Dr. Gerardi told her that they have a limited amount of money because they have already done it in a couple of other districts. "Is this school's size adequate for our students?" asked Williams. Gerardi explained that we serve students from other communities also and get tuition from them. "If we own the building, we would have more control. Currently, there are over 500 students attending the WACTC," he said. Strom reported that on Oct. 23rd, RIDE is going before the legislature for their capital plan. "Part of this plan is for funds to get these facilities up to snuff. Any capital improvements that we may have to do later on may be reimbursable through our housing aid," he said. Mrs. Forcier doesn't think we can take over another building. "We only have \$500,000 in our capital improvement fund. Mrs. Majewski doesn't think there is any harm in discussing it. She would like something showing what the capital improvements to the building may be. "Is there a deadline for when this decision has to be made? We need a full analysis of the building before we can make this decision," she said. Dr. Gerardi told her there isn't a deadline. Strom added that the state is very anxious to get it done, however. They want to have Peter Fontaine review all of this. They have only gotten one quote for a new roof. "If it's going to cost \$3 million to upgrade it, I don't think the state will even consider it," he said. Mrs. Nadeau asked if we know what the agreements with Providence and Coventry looked like. Dr. Gerardi thinks the upgrade costs were \$1.2 and \$1.6 million based on the building needs.

Motion to approve to further this discussion with the City Council and the Mayor: M. Williams

2nd: M. Dubois/E. Nadeau

Roll Call Vote: 5 yes. APPROVED

3. Review of RIDE Statewide Student Transportation System – Dr. Gerardi

Dr. Gerardi and Mr. Strom attended a meeting regarding this plan for a Statewide Student Transportation System, which would begin with special needs students and students at non-public schools. It is expected that this plan will be mandated during the January 2009 General Assembly session. This mandate would be followed by the award of the busing bid and beginning of outreach to the school districts. The management contract would be awarded separately in February of 2009, followed by the implementation of the new program for Group 1, which is made up of six districts in Northern Rhode Island. Woonsocket is one of them. "We are the smallest region as grouped by the Department of Education and have been chosen to be a pilot for this initiative. If it's mandated, we have to do it. If it saves us money, we appreciate it. The state believes that consolidation of services will be more cost-effective," said Gerardi. He added that Valley Transportation can bid on this process if they want to. Mrs. Nadeau felt that the Roll-Out didn't make sense. Gerardi believes that it was compiled depending on when each district's contract runs out. "Is this for one company doing the whole state?" asked Nadeau. Gerardi said that it doesn't prevent companies from getting together to bid, but there are some big companies out there. "If we can't afford to pay for our public students' bussing, why do we have to pay for private school bussing?" asked Nadeau. Dr. Gerardi explained that it's a long-standing state requirement. "According to RI state law, we can't deny non-public school bussing. They want to do two RFPs—one for someone to provide the busses and one for someone to manage the routes," he said. Concerns arose about the length of time students would be on the busses, etc. "Isn't there a law for elementary school children that they can't be on a bus for more than a certain length of time?" asked Williams. Mrs. Lerner said that the requirement is only within the district. Mrs. Forcier supports giving this a shot and hopes it works out. "It's mandated. We have no choice," said Strom. Dr. Gerardi added, "They claim they can save us \$300,000."

4. Discussion of Corrective Action Plan- Dr. Gerardi

Dr. Gerardi recapped the budget work session that was held last week and updated the WSC and the community on what has been done so far to address the deficit. A spending freeze has been instituted on non-essential purchases. They have identified some cuts that can be made in the administrative budget. They have communicated with the union leadership about possible concessions. Waivers have been requested and discussions about consolidating services with the City will take place. "However, the cuts we are looking at may not solve this problem. We may have to cut student programs like winter activities and sports, band and music, art, etc. It's not going to be easy. A joint budget work session has been scheduled with the City Council on October 22nd," said Gerardi. "I wouldn't want to jeopardize our NEASC accreditation, which is the highest we

every received, by cutting extracurricular activities," said Majewski. "We have a legal mandate to only provide a Basic Educational Program (BEP). We are legally responsible not to be over budget. If it goes before a judge, that's what they will look at. We don't want to do it, but it's a possibility. There's a \$2.5 million gap over two years. It's almost like we are being penalized for being a responsible district with our funds," said Gerardi. Atty. Ackerman provided some information on the Cranston case that went to court and explained how the process works. Majewski asked him if cutting positions to meet the BEP conflicts with the contractual obligations and what happens if it does. "We can't violate our contractual commitments," said Ackerman. Dr. Gerardi explained how they are intertwined. "Extracurricular and after school programs are not covered by the BEP," he said.

CONFERENCES: None

SUPERINTENDENT'S REPORT: Dr. Robert Gerardi

Gerardi thanked the Mayor, the City Council, the WSC, the Negotiating Committee, the WTG and the central office clerks for working with him to overcome these financial difficulties.

Motion to receive and place on file: E. Nadeau

2nd: M. Williams (Unanimously Approved)

SCHOOL COMMITTEE GOOD & WELFARE:

E. Nadeau: "It has not been a good week," she said, adding that she has been thinking about the middle schools and the people who have been working on that Building Committee for three years. "We want to have these new middle schools in order to provide our kids with athletic fields and gym and music departments and art—and to think that they won't be utilized for our students makes me very sad. We have to put aside politics in this community. Taking away from students is not a WSC problem. It's a community problem. It's going to come down to what we think they should have. I would hate to see a system where we just provide the core subjects. It doesn't create a well-rounded student. It's always the kids that lose out."

M. Williams: She thinks that one of the things that contributed to the problem is the 30/50 bill that went through. "It pitted the urban districts against the suburban districts." She participated in sports in high school and loved it. She hopes there's a way we can save them. She also announced the upcoming Shelter Walk.

M. Dubois: Echoed Ms. Williams' and Mrs. Nadeau's sentiments. "It fathoms me that the state spent \$100 million for renovations to the Dunkin' Donuts Center, but couldn't properly fund our schools. It shows where their priorities are." He reported that the new chairs the WSC members have were donated by the CVS Corporate Offices and thanked them.

L. Majewski: Reported that the Draft District-wide Policy for Special Education would be looked at for the next meeting. Asked Mr. Strom to check on the status of contracts with Konica. She wants to know the status of the middle school with the contract. Thanked Dr. Gerardi for getting the flow charts from the schools in the district. Commended the Negotiating Subcommittee of Mr. Dubois, Mrs. Nadeau and Dr. Gerardi for working with the unions and hopefully working something out. She is deeply distressed to have to even think about putting our NEASC accreditation at risk.

A. Forcier: Thanked Atty. Ackerman for his insight into the process. Thanked the City Council for putting in a resolution last year for the fair funding formula. "We will need to do it again for this year. We need to get fair funding for our children. Next Thursday and Friday she will be at CCRI for the Third Eye Project. She will be here next week to attend an Advisory Meeting for the Automotive Technology Program here at the WACTC.

Motion to adjourn at 9:30 p.m.: L. Majewski

2nd: M. Williams (Unanimously Approved)

Respectfully submitted,

Nancy G. Belisle, WSC Recording Secretary