

MINUTES
WOONSOCKET SCHOOL COMMITTEE
WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 29, 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:

Amy Wilkinson, WMS Music Teacher & All-City Band Program Coordinator: Wilkinson spoke regarding the All-City Band Program and Woonsocket's need for after-school programs. At the beginning of this school year, she asked if the funding was available to run this program and she was told that it shouldn't be a problem because it was not a substantial amount of money. Registration was done and then the spending freeze went into effect. Right now, she is using volunteers until a decision is made about the funding. She urged the WSC not to cut the funding for this program.

George Nasuti, Director of Athletics, Fitness & Health: Nasuti spoke about the potential cuts because of the budget crisis, especially to middle school sports, band and chorus. He noted the devastation it would do to the high school band, chorus and athletics down the road, like the cuts back in the early 90s did. Many of our best athletes ended up going to private schools where they would have opportunities they didn't have here. "We are looking for volunteer help right now, but it's more difficult. Volunteers are not always the best out there, but they are doing it for free. In the Athletic Dept., we are working to make sure that these kids get these opportunities this year, but it may not work every year." He noted that transportation costs about \$200 per trip and at the WMS, they take about 12 trips per year. They don't allow any private transportation by parents. "We need to review where we stand on this issue. We also need to address the rumors that are spreading. We need to have a definite decision for the kids involved." Nasuti wants to be able to tell them something. He asked for another budget workshop like the one that was held recently and allow public input so that the WSC can make the decisions it needs to make. Mrs. Forcier asked if the WED is allowed to charge parents a fee in order for students to participate in after-school athletics. Mr. Nasuti believes it's against the law, but he's not 100% sure. He doesn't recommend it, however. Dr. Gerardi said he would be addressing this issue during the Correction Action Plan update later on this evening. He spoke with another superintendent whose district is in a worse situation, and he told him that the RI Interscholastic League might be offering grants. Mr. Nasuti said he would look into it. Gerardi said there are four or five communities that are in the same situation we are. Majewski asked if the \$55,000 that would be saved by cutting these programs includes transportation. Nasuti told her that it does.

Richard DiPardo, 134 Huntington Avenue, WTG President: DiPardo asked the WSC to reconsider a portion of the Staffing Policy that is on the agenda tonight. He took issue with the section on Page 2 regarding "class size" as it pertains to future contracts. He didn't like seeing that something is being put into his contract without negotiations taking place. "This is the second time this has happened. Class size is limited for two purposes: 1) It's there to protect the our WTG members; and 2) it's there to provide the best learning environment for our students." DiPardo recapped earlier negotiations where class size was discussed and it was determined that it wasn't necessary because the state determines class size. "Now, it's saying it can be whatever! I believed we bargained in good faith and now I see something like this!" Mrs. Majewski said she would respond to his comments when the policy is presented later. She said that some of the language was put in there to honor the contract. "It wasn't done to sideswipe the union," she said.

State Rep. Lisa Baldelli-Hunt, Prospect Street: She asked about the amount connected to the middle school cuts that might be considered. She was told it was \$55,000. Baldelli-Hunt also asked about the cost of transportation for high school students. She spoke about the fair funding formula and announced that a meeting is being held at Bryant University on November 18th regarding this issue. Mrs. Majewski asked if she wants the transportation costs broken out by special needs students, regular education students, etc., for the high school. Baldelli-Hunt said that would be helpful.

Donna Houle, 130 Ward Street: She was disturbed by Mr. Nasuti's statement that in the early 90s we lost many of our best athletes to private schools due to the sports program cuts. She is also concerned about what the cuts will do to our house values.

Susan Paulina, Miles Avenue: She attended the joint meeting last week between the City and the school department to discuss the budget deficit. She thinks we need to combine jobs that are being done by the City and the school department and consolidate our services. "We need to start playing ball on the same team."

Allen Auclair, 24 Florida Street: He attended the workshop last week and was disappointed that the Mayor and our state legislators weren't there—most importantly, the taxpayers. He also announced the fair funding workshop being held on Nov. 18th at Bryant. For this formula to be fair, he believes it should go to the student—not to the district. The student can then choose the school that best suits their needs. "We have a very transient population. This way, the funding would follow the student." He hopes that the WSC will be looking at 1-year contracts for the unions instead of 3-year contracts. Also, instead of committees negotiating contracts, he thinks we need to have teachers in front of students. He believes an LLC to provide these services based on performance would be the best way to achieve that. "The system is dysfunctional—at best."

State Rep. Lisa Baldelli-Hunt, Prospect Street, Woonsocket: In response to Mr. Auclair's comments, Rep. Baldelli-Hunt said that the state funding formula is extremely complex. "When the dollar figures were determined for each district, they tried to break it down by three different needs—special needs population, poverty level, and minority population. Woonsocket stands to gain a great deal of money from this funding formula, but we are up against the districts that will be losing money." Mr. Strom asked if the legislators are aware that we are the only state that doesn't have a fair funding formula right now. "Yes. That's why this formula was put together. Not only will the urbans gain, but the suburbans will also gain," said Baldelli-Hunt.

RECOGNITIONS & ANNOUNCEMENTS: Dr. Robert Gerardi

Gerardi reported on the Harvest Food Drive that was hosted by Kevin Coleman and Fifth Avenue Schools in conjunction with the Harvest Hop Dance on Friday, October 24, 2008. Each student was given a free raffle ticket for every canned good/non-perishable item they brought in. They raffled off 35 prizes/gift certificates. In total, the schools collected 691 pounds of food and donated it to Connecting for Children and Families Food Pantry. He extended his appreciation for their hard work. Gerardi thanked Terri Curtin, Ken Ruscetta, George Nasuti and our high school student athletes for their part in organizing and running the CCF Safe Routes to School Program kick off last Thursday morning at Dunn Park. The event was a success, with City Councilors, the Police and Fire Chiefs, and other dignitaries walking with the students and families on safe routes to Kevin Coleman and Fifth Avenue Schools. To keep students walking, they will have walking Wednesdays in the future. Gerardi announced that Dr. Debra Steers, a 7th Grade ELA teacher at the WMS, will be presenting at the 2008 NCTE Annual Convention in San Antonio on November 21, 2008. He congratulated her on being selected as one of the guest speakers at this Convention. He announced that the Woonsocket Adult Education 45th High School Equivalency Graduation was held at Harris School on October 23, 2008, and congratulated its 2008 Graduates. He extended special congratulations to Jeannine Corio and Akeita Muchison, who received special awards for having completed the NEDP Program. He wished everyone the very best in their future endeavors. Gerardi thanked John Libucha of Conway Freight for sponsoring the first "Red Ribbon Day" at Bernon Heights School. The students pledged to stay healthy and drug free and a red ribbon was given to all students, faculty, and staff who participated in this successful event. Also, a special Drug Awareness parent workshop was presented with Officer Maureen Andreoni as guest speaker. Children and parents who attended the workshop made beaded necklaces with the words "Believe" "Achieve" "Succeed Drug Free" under the direction of Art teacher Kim Pierce. He congratulated all who attended.

Motion to receive and place on file: A. Forcier

2nd: M. Williams (Unanimously Approved)

APPROVAL OF MINUTES: 10/15/08 Open/Closed; 10/8/08 Closed

Motion to approve: A. Forcier

2nd: M. Williams (Unanimously Approved)

Mrs. Majewski had a correction on Pg. 3 of the Oct. 15th Open Session under "Committee Reports". It should read: "occupational therapist" instead of physical therapist.

CONSENT AGENDA:

Motion to approve Consent Agenda with the following exceptions: E. Nadeau

- *Purchases/Transfers Over \$2,000: Connecting for Children & Families– Removed by A. Forcier; Leslie Univ. Reading Recovery – Removed by L. Majewski*
- *Home Schooling Requests: Removed by L. Majewski*

2nd: M. Williams (Unanimously Approved)

CONSENT AGENDA:

1. Personnel Actions:

Certified Appointments
Non-Certified Appointments

2. Purchases/Transfers Over \$2,000

Connecting for Children & Families/Contract 09'/Grants & Curriculum/Local/Article 18 – Removed by A. Forcier

EBS Healthcare/Speech Therapy Services/Sp. Ed./Local
Lesley University/ Reading Recovery/Prof. Development/Local – Removed by L. Majewski

3. Field Trip/Conference Requests

Literacy for All Conference, Providence, RI/District/Reading Recovery Grant
National Staff Development Council Conference, Washington, D.C/McFee/Title I Grant
National Science Teacher's Association Conference, Charlotte, NC/Mt. St. Charles/Title II

4. Home Schooling Requests: Removed by L. Majewski

END OF CONSENT AGENDA

EXEMPTIONS FROM CONSENT AGENDA:

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

- ***Connecting for Children & Families/Contract 09'/Grants & Curriculum/Local/Article 18***
Mrs. Forcier recused herself from the vote on this item.

Motion to approve: M. Williams

2nd: L. Majewski (4 yes – 1 abstain)

- ***Lesley University/ Reading Recovery/Prof. Development: \$6,245.00 Local***

Mrs. Majewski asked if this was just for teacher training or if it also includes program materials. Linda Filomeno told her that this amount will be reimbursed to the local budget. The costs are for the fees to Lesley Univ. and the funds to send teachers to the conferences.

- 2. HOME SCHOOLING:** Mrs. Majewski asked if there is a deadline for people to submit requests for home schooling by. Dr. Gerardi told her "no". "It can be done on a semester or quarterly basis," he added.

Motion to approve exemptions from the consent agenda: A. Forcier
2nd: E. Nadeau (Unanimously Approved)

ADDITIONAL PURCHASE/TRANSFER OVER \$2,000:

- ***NCS Pearson/NovaNet/Feinstein E-Learning Academy: \$4,300.00 E-Learning Revenue***

Mr. Gerardi said that this item was not advertised. The E-Learning Academy receives funds from other communities to participate in this program. A copy of \$5,000 check that was received from the Town of Coventry was provided to the WSC members that more than covers this purchase.

Motion to approve: L. Majewski

2nd: M. Williams (Unanimously Approved)

COMMUNICATIONS: None

COMMITTEE REPORTS: Mrs. Majewski announced that the Uniform Subcommittee will be meeting on Nov. 5th at 7 p.m. at the WACTC. The Parents Advisory Council will be meeting on November 12th. The SELAC Committee meets in December. The School Success Coalition met on October 20th.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS:**1. Corrective Action Plan Update – Dr. Gerardi**

Dr. Gerardi reported that he and Mr. Strom met with Ernest Almonte, the RI Auditor General, last week to update him on the steps being taken to correct the deficit. Almonte made some recommendations. He felt that the reductions we have made to date would enable us to write a separate corrective action plan to address the 2008 deficit and the 2009 deficit individually. Gerardi asked, if this plan is approved and the 30-day extension, for Mr. Nasuti to please be patient. Gerardi recommended that the WSC approve these two plans. Mrs. Majewski asked if the middle school teacher in charge of the All-City Band and Chorus can get volunteers for another month until they have a decision about the Band and Chorus. She told Majewski, "yes". Gerardi also said that he had spoken to the Superintendent of West Warwick, which is in a worse situation than we are. They are considering a class action suit for a fair funding formula and Dr. Gerardi suggested that they contact us and other communities in a similar situation because we may be interested in joining them.

Motion to approve: A. Forcier
Roll Call Vote: 5 yes. Motion approved.

2nd: M. Williams

NEW BUSINESS:**1. Special Education Staffing Policy –1st Passage - L. Majewski, C. Lerner**

Mrs. Majewski made a presentation with Carole Lerner regarding the Special Education Staff Policy. Majewski told the public that they can comment on it tonight during the public hearing portion. Majewski explained that the WSC was asked to attend a meeting in preparation for this. IDEA was re-authorized by Congress in 2004. New policies needed to be adopted according to a timetable. A draft policy was presented last fall and public hearings were held. This regulation was passed by the Board of Regents and is law. The school districts were asked to produce a policy for their district on how they were going to support this regulation. Majewski and Lerner were given a template policy from RIDE and worked with it to come to what is being presented now. They changed very, very little. There will be more public hearings in the next 90 days. Mrs. Majewski read the staffing policy. On Page 2, where class size is discussed, Majewski stated that they will honor the current contract that is in place until June 30, 2009; but after that, the WSC/WED must follow the state regulations. Majewski asked if anyone had questions. Mrs. Lerner added that, according to the Civil Rights Office and RIDE's legal department, we cannot bargain around IDEA and the 504 Act. She said that concerns were raised about defining the severity of disability. Lerner was told that we could not change that definition when it has been defined already by the federal government. Mrs. Forcier was concerned that if class size amounts cannot be used, then the size would be abused. Lerner believes there are safeguards in order to prevent that from happening. Waivers must be requested from RIDE for increases. RIDE will be policing this. Majewski added that the state cautioned everyone that they better not try to balance their budget by overloading classrooms. She asked the WSC to review the staffing portion of the Consolidated Resource Plan. Mrs. Nadeau was concerned that RIDE is now taking away the district's ability to negotiate these things. Mrs. Lerner believes they are only looking at the IDEA and 504 programs. Nadeau asked about the Corrective Action Plan in light of the split in the middle school next year. Dr. Gerardi said they will be considered two separate schools and it will affect the District Negotiated Agreement.

PUBLIC HEARING:

Richard DiPardo, 134 Huntington Avenue, WTG President: He clarified his statement earlier this evening about the staffing policy. "The WTG stands for the lowest possible class size to increase individualization for the children. We had RIDE's protection previously saying that you can't go higher--now we don't. Lower teacher to child ratio definitely benefits the student. Under our contract, if you go over the number listed, it's going to cost you. It wasn't just to benefit our own people. It's a temporary solution. It wasn't designed to overload classes or for teachers to make extra money. We stand for the protection of the student and the teacher. We have to also stand for the sanctity of the process of collective bargaining." He said he understands the policy.

Lynn Kapiskas, 163 Prospect St., SELAC Chair: Announced that she is the parent of a handicapped child. Her concern is the staffing requirements and class limits. She referred to the term "appropriate personnel" in the policy, which can be taken many ways. She asked about the statement under the first bullet where it says, "All of our students can learn; they will demonstrate academic and functional performance which will be evidenced by meeting standards of adequate yearly progress." "What students will be used?" she asked. Dr. Gerardi told her that they will adhere either to the NECAP standards or the alternative assessment GLEs. Kapiskas asked about the issue of meeting the graduation requirements for special needs students. Dr. Gerardi explained that the Commissioner of Education noted that the NECAP scores will count as 33%, but other measures can be used as another option to the NECAP test. Lerner added that there will not be a double diploma system. "There will just be one diploma. There will be common tasks or other activities that kids will demonstrate in order to graduate, but there's some flexibility,"

she said. "As far as parent involvement goes, I want to make the WSC aware that parents can attend the IEP meeting but are no longer required to sign the IEP. Once the parents give consent, the IEP can be implemented. I understand that RIDE is looking at all this stuff in preparation of the AVA," said Kapiskas. She told the WSC that the parents are more aware these days of what their rights are. Lerner added that all of this information is on the website. There are due process procedures that are in place for parents who feel that their child's rights are being violated. Mrs. Majewski asked about movement on the GAP testing in RI. Lerner told her that there's a lot of talk about it, but not a lot of movement.

CONFERENCES: None

SUPERINTENDENT'S REPORT: Dr. Robert Gerardi

Dr. Gerardi had the pleasure of handing out the diplomas at the Woonsocket Adult Education High School Equivalency Graduation. He was proud that one of his former students from another community was a graduate that night. Gerardi is looking forward to the Beam Signing tomorrow at the new Middle Schools. He reminded the School Committee members and Building Committee members to meet at 1:30 p.m. at the Villa Novan Street entrance. His classroom visits have slowed significantly since the current financial crisis. However, he has visited the teachers and students at Globe Park School and continues to be impressed with our students, staff and administration. He is thankful that all divisions of the Woonsocket City Government have been supportive during the development of the Corrective Action Plan. A first step has been taken tonight toward resolving our financial problems with the approval of the FY2008 Corrective action plan; and he's optimistic that we will get through this crisis within the next month with the development of a FY 2009 Corrective action plan.

Motion to receive and place on file: M. Williams

2nd: M. Dubois (Unanimously Approved)

SCHOOL COMMITTEE GOOD & WELFARE:

M. Williams: As far as the graduation requirements, Williams asked what happens if a student moves in from a state that doesn't have a portfolio system. Dr. Gerardi explained that exceptions had to be written into our graduation plan for children that move in. Williams spoke about mentioning to the City Council how we have so many mandates from the state above and beyond what the government requires. Dr. Gerardi said that the state has addressed this. Williams thanked the administration for working very hard on the budget.

M. Dubois: Thanked Dr. Gerardi, Mr. Strom and Atty. Ackerman for their hard work on the budget—especially with Dr. Gerardi and Robert Strom being new to the district. He appreciates their hard work, as well as that of his fellow WSC members. "Ms. Nadeau has four things on her plate for tomorrow." He received something from the RIASC regarding a seminar they are hosting next month for \$125 per person. He urged everyone to get out and vote.

L. Majewski: Thanked Carole Lerner for presenting with her and working on that staffing policy project. She asked about the flow charts and if they are still coming in. Dr. Gerardi said there's one more that he needs to get. Majewski got a notice from the Youth At Risk Coalition about an activity being held at the Parent Support Network in Johnston. Congratulated the Girls' Soccer Team that made it to the playoffs and wished them luck. Thanked everyone for putting in all the extra time to address this deficit. She was glad to hear Mr. DiPardo say that "children first" is what drives the Teachers' Guild.

A. Forcier: Asked how much we spend on substitutes yearly in the WHS and WMS. Strom told her it's about \$547,000. She said that Cumberland is using no more short-term substitutes. They are getting one substitute and opening up a study hall. "If Cumberland can do it, it must be allowed. That would save our sports and music programs." Dr. Gerardi said that it's an interesting concept and something to look into. Forcier said she has the article. She attended the Safe Routes to School activity and had a great time. It was very well attended. She said that they did this fair funding workshop at Bryant University before and it went nowhere. "If we keep waiting and waiting, it won't go anywhere." She believes we should be leading the effort to get fair funding by filing a lawsuit—not take a back seat. Forcier asked that it be put on the next agenda for discussion. She thinks Mr. Auclair's idea about the funding following the student is a good idea (voucher program). She wished everyone a happy and safe Halloween.

E. Nadeau: Stated that when they met with the City Council, it was a workshop and the public cannot participate in a workshop. She thinks that when we have a plan, we need to have a public forum so that everyone knows what's going on. As far as the fair funding formula, Nadeau said that the three steps that Rep. Baldelli-Hunt listed would be in contradiction to a voucher system and she explained why.

Motion to adjourn at 9:10 p.m.: M. Williams

2nd: M. Dubois (Unanimously Approved)

Respectfully submitted,
Nancy G. Belisle, WSC Recording Secretary