

MINUTES
WOONSOCKET SCHOOL COMMITTEE
WEDNESDAY, MARCH 11, 2009
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	Absent
	Anita McGuire-Forcier	Present
	Eleanor Nadeau	Present

PUBLIC GOOD & WELFARE:

Nicole Denton, WMS Band Director: Announced the Guitar Hero Tournament that will be taking place at the WMS on March 21st to raise funds for the music program. She said it has become a statewide phenomenon and spoke about the money raised by a student with proposal he had.

Tracy Belliveau, 243 Carrington Avenue: Spoke about the workshop that was held with the City Council on Monday night, saying that "it was interesting". She was glad to see our state legislators there. Belliveau stated that she feels that the state should be bearing the responsibility of paying for out-of-district placement of students. She also said that the music program supporters refuse to allow the WSC to remove band and chorus from the WMS curriculum. Her daughter told her that her music teacher got a layoff slip and the students were talking about holding their own fundraiser. "The community doesn't want band and chorus to be removed from the WMS. They have been telling the WSC for months how important these things are and submitted a petition with hundreds of names on it." Belliveau read excerpts from the WED's music education curriculum to help prove her point.

Donna Houle, 130 Ward Street, Change Leader for RIPIN: Announced an upcoming School Success Coalition meeting and noted that Brandeis is going to be at the April 8th WSC meeting to make a presentation. She also announced that Rivers Edge is having a parent meeting on Monday night and that a Math Night is being held at the WMS tonight. Houle reported on a number of activities that the schools are conducting to get the parents and community involved in the curriculum.

Kevin Plouffe, WHS Band Director: Announced that the Jazz Band students received an A- rating at the Band Festival in Newport. They also performed at the Stadium Theatre and other performances they took part in. Plouffe announced events held by the Music Boosters to raise funds. He stressed that the cuts that are on the table for next year will dismantle this successful music program and spoke about the layoff of one of the music teachers at the WMS. "This will leave only one music teacher for the two new middle schools." Plouffe reviewed the list of impending cuts that will be made if the money isn't found. He is hoping that their bus money will stay intact so they can attend their festivals next year. Plouffe spoke about educating the whole child and how the cuts won't solve the deficit. "They don't make sense." He cited a few studies that support the benefits of music education for students and thanked the WSC for their time and attention.

RECOGNITIONS & ANNOUNCEMENTS: Dr. Robert Gerardi

Dr. Gerardi congratulated the Boys' and Girls' Basketball Teams for winning their respective Northern Division Championships, reporting that the boys' team was defeated in the Quarterfinals of the State Championship Tournament. He noted that the girls are playing this evening in the semi-finals for a right to proceed to the URI Ryan Center this weekend to play for the State Championship. Dr. Gerardi congratulated Chris Penso and Brittney Lawson for winning individual State Championships in track and field this past season. Chris was the state high jump champion, while Brittney was the state weight throw champion. They are both participating in the Nike Track and Field National Event this weekend in Boston Massachusetts. He wished them both good luck. Gerardi also congratulated Justin Switzer for winning the State Championship in the 145lb wrestling class this past season. He congratulated all the winter student athletes and coaches on their success.

Motion to receive and place on file: M. Williams

2nd: E. Nadeau (Unanimously Approved)

APPROVAL OF MINUTES: February 25, 2009 OPEN/CLOSED

Motion to approve: A. Forcier
(Unanimously Approved As Corrected)

2nd: M. Williams

Mr. Dubois noted that Mrs. Majewski had a correction to her Good & Welfare on Page 8 of the Open Session as follows: *"She announced that the Guidance Offices at the WHS and WACTC are being opened late **Mondays through Thursdays** until April to help parents and students with their schedules,...."* Corrections are underscored.

CONSENT AGENDA:

Motion to approve Consent Agenda: A. Forcier

2nd: M. Williams (Unanimously Approved)

CONSENT AGENDA:

1. Personnel Actions
 Certified Appointments/
 Non-Certified Appointments
2. Purchases/Transfers Over \$2,000
3. Field Trip/Conference Requests
 NTSA Convention, New Orleans, LA/WMS/Armada Project
4. Home Schooling Requests

END OF CONSENT AGENDA

COMMUNICATIONS: None.

COMMITTEE REPORTS: Mrs. Majewski reported that the Uniform Committee met on Thursday, February 26th, at the WACTC. She thanked Dr. Gerardi for attending. The Uniform Committee has reached a consensus on recommendations for a possible school uniform. They asked if they could make a presentation to the WSC at an upcoming meeting. She announced the SELAC Meeting being held on April 2nd. The School Success Coalition will meet on March 19th. The PAC will meet on March 26th at the WACTC.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS:

1. Discussion of Corrective Action Plan - Dr. Gerardi

Dr. Gerardi reported that a very productive Joint City Council/School Committee Meeting was held on March 9th at Harris Hall. Council President Fontaine asked that we meet with Councilman Ward this morning to review the details of the WED's budget and accept recommendations from him. Councilman Beauchamp felt the meetings we have had were productive and suggested that we schedule another. Gerardi believes everyone in attendance became acutely aware of how dire our financial situation is now that we have identified the actual budget Deficit to be \$3,194,403. He believes that the majority of people in attendance understood the reality that the WED doesn't have the same financial benefits that almost every other district in the state has and that there is absolutely no more "fat" to cut in our budget. At this time, he will be recommending that the only solution is for the City to find the revenue to support the School Department. Out of respect for the Mayor, he will present her suggestion for one final possible cut. The Mayor has requested that the WED consider informing our employees hired before 1994 who currently do not contribute a co-pay for their health insurance that we will begin withhold the commensurate amount of co-pay for their bargaining unit as of the next pay period. Dr. Gerardi said he told the Mayor that he would have the school department attorney determine the legality of this action. He included memos from Attorney Ackerman and himself in the WSC members' packets regarding this issue. He also included the savings that Mr. Strom projected if every employee was raised to 25% co-pay. This projected showed that this action would only reap approximately \$300,000, which will not significantly close our 3.2 million dollar gap. Atty. Ackerman's position is that this action will definitely violate contract law and possibly create an unfair labor practice. He noted that Atty. Ackerman will expand on this topic and that the WSC can decide what course of action it would like to take on this initiative. Gerardi noted that after this discussion, he needed them to discuss and vote on the letters he wrote on the WSC's behalf to the Mayor, City Council, and Auditor General. These school committee-approved letters must go out before the March 15th deadline.

He also requested that they approve the Corrective Action Plan as written to RI Auditor General and the letters of notification to the Mayor and City Council. Mrs. Forcier asked how much it would cost in legal fees if the school department were brought to court for instituting the deduction for people hired prior to 1994 for co-pays. Atty. Ackerman responded that he is on salary, so it wouldn't cost the WED anything; however, he couldn't endorse willingly breaking a legal contract. "Under law, we cannot break contracts. The courts realize that the WSC is responsible to fund mandates and executed contracts. If the WSC changed the contract without the unions' consent, it would be a contract violation," said Ackerman. Forcier referred to the recent judgment allowing the City of Woonsocket to lay off firemen. Ackerman clarified that the firemen were working under an expired contract and that all the City was allowed to do was lay off workers—not change the contract for current employees. Forcier asked if Dr. Gerardi had presented the Mayor's suggestion to Mr. DiPardo yet. Dr. Gerardi said he hadn't had a chance to. Mrs. Forcier felt that the Mayor's letter should be given to Mr. DiPardo to bring back to his membership to see if they would be willing to help out.

Dr. Gerardi read the highlights of letters he wrote on behalf of the WSC to the Mayor, City Council and the RI Auditor General. Atty. Ackerman said he thinks what is different in Woonsocket from the other communities that have been in the news regarding their budgets is that the WED has been in constant contact with the City Council. He noted that the City and the WED agree that there's very little "fat" in the school budget. If we didn't have that situation, he believes that the administration would make the cuts necessary to bring the budget into balance. "It's just impossible. There's no dispute about the facts," Ackerman said. Dr. Gerardi agreed that it has been a very cooperative experience working the city government. Mrs. Nadeau said that all the expenses that would be incurred if the WED went Caruolo were discussed the other night. An audit costing \$150,000 would have to be done. It was noted that the letters being sent include the fact that the \$95,000 to support programs like Band, Chorus, National Honor Society, etc., was excluded from the deficit of \$3,099,403. This amount was requested separately in the letters. Mr. Dubois asked how long it would take to get the case resolved if the school department went Caruolo. Ackerman said it would probably take about 60 days, but maybe longer because the state is down a few judges right now. Mrs. Williams asked if the maintenance department has been looked at for cuts and listed the number of supervisors, carpenters, electricians, etc., that are employed. "Are these positions really necessary? If we are going to have to cut sports and Honor Society, we need to look at everything," she said. Dr. Gerardi said that this department has been looked at and noted that the WED has many buildings to service. He feels that by not filling positions vacated by retirements would be more cost-effective than paying for lay-offs; unfortunately, this would not have any effect on this year's budget. It will reduce next year's budget. Williams asked about needing security at Barry Field on the weekends. Dr. Gerardi explained that the weekend security person checks the boilers in all the buildings also and makes sure they are working to prevent pipes from freezing. He noted that a boiler had stopped working recently and was discovered by the security person, which prevented a much greater expense of the pipes freezing. Williams asked about the supervisor at the WHS and what he is responsible for. Gerardi explained that he is also in charge of Central Receiving. "We have looked at all these things, but we also don't want to incur the unemployment expense either. If some of these positions were eliminated, we would incur more purchased services expenses," said Gerardi. Atty. Ackerman didn't want to even speculate what the damages would be if the WED were to lose if the co-pay issue went to litigation. Mrs. Forcier suggested again that Mr. DiPardo be asked to present this request to his members to get their feedback. "I appreciate the concessions that the unions made when their contracts were negotiated and I don't believe that saving \$30,000 for the next three months is worth severing this relationship," said Mr. Dubois.

Motion to authorize Dr. Gerardi to submit the letters to the Mayor, City Council and the RI Auditor General on behalf of the WSC: M. Williams.	
2nd: A. Forcier	Roll Call Vote: 4 yes. APPROVED

Motion to approve authorizing a co-pay for health insurance from employees who currently don't have a co-pay: M. Dubois	
2nd: E. Nadeau	
MOTION TO TABLE: A. Forcier	2nd: E. Nadeau
Roll Call Vote: 4 yes.	TABLED

2. **Discussion of Naming of New Middle Schools – Dr. Gerardi** *(Taken out of Order- Placed under New Business in error)*

Dr. Gerardi read his memo to the WSC explaining that the school committee has already exercised the right to name schools in the past and that a school naming policy is not needed to do so based on this past practice. He noted that if the WSC chooses to create a policy, it could be as simple as citing Rhode Island General Law. Under Title 45 Towns and Cities Chapter 45-2, General Powers Section 45-2-16, it states the legal rights within the city for naming buildings. He also included for them the Bristol/Warren Regional School District naming of School District Facilities Policy as another model. That policy includes the RIGL 45-2-16 language but adds a second paragraph describing the inclusion of the Town Council in the process. In the absence of a policy, the school committee could vote tonight on names for the new middle schools. He reviewed discussions that have

taken place at past WSC meetings regarding the naming of schools and ideas that had been submitted for the names of the two new middle schools. "Many people have expressed their opinion on the naming of the two new middle schools; but most importantly, the construction company is waiting for the names to order the signs for the buildings. The Building Committee has suggested identifying the schools as Woonsocket Middle School North and Woonsocket Middle School South or Woonsocket Middle School Villanova Street and Woonsocket Middle School Hamlet Avenue," said Gerardi. Mr. Dubois didn't feel that the WED needed first passage of a school naming policy because the WSC has always had the right as past practice. Mrs. Nadeau suggested naming the buildings "Woonsocket Middle School North" and "Woonsocket Middle School South". "If the names were changed in the future, new signs could be made if the money is there. The construction company needs to know in order to have the signs made. Many cities have schools that are designated North, East, South or West. We need to decide in order to move things along," she said. Mr. Dubois said another suggestion was naming them "The Hamlet Building" and "The Villa Nova Building" based on the streets that they're on and thought it would be a little more personal. Mrs. Forcier agreed with him because she thought it would be an easier reference for parents and maybe help prevent a rivalry between the North building and the South building. Mrs. Nadeau thought that if people can't read the signs North and South on the buildings, they might need other programs before they go to the middle schools. "If you can't read—you can't read," she said. Forcier stressed that she didn't mean to infer that in any way. She just thinks it would be easier if people weren't right there at the location.

Motion to name the two new middle schools the "Woonsocket Middle School – Hamlet Building" and "Woonsocket Middle School – Villa Nova Building": M. Dubois

2nd: M. Williams

Roll Call Vote: 4 yes. APPROVED

NEW BUSINESS:

1. Discussion/ Approval of School Naming Policy – Dr. Gerardi (*Taken out of Order – Placed under Unfinished Business in error*)

Motion to Table: M. Dubois
Roll Call Vote: 4 yes

2nd: M. Williams
TABLED.

2. Approval of Braver Audit Report for Fiscal Year June 30, 2008 – Dina Dutremble

Mrs. Dutremble reviewed the report, noting that there is a question about what was the actual approved budget for last year because three budgets had been presented. The minutes of the WSC meetings are going to be reviewed to see if it can be determined. She said that it seems that step of reconciling the budget was missed because of the turnover in superintendent and the business manager last summer. Mrs. Nadeau recalled that three budgets were presented because the union contracts were up for renewal and had not been settled yet. Dr. Gerardi read a memo that Dr. Macera had written stating that one of the budgets was developed based on what the WED would get from the state.

Motion to approve the audit report: A. Forcier

2nd: E. Nadeau (Unanimously Approved)

3. Discussion of Mayor's Proposal of 5% Reduction of School Committee Salary – Eleanor Nadeau

Mrs. Nadeau asked how this 5% reduction would be done (i.e. whether it would be a deduction or could they give back 5% of \$8,000 and have it placed in a fund for special programs). Mrs. Dutremble believed that this would be a legal issue and deferred to Atty. Ackerman. Ackerman believed two factors were involved—one being an individual's voluntary decision and the other being a decision by the body. The salary of school committee members in Woonsocket is based on state law and city council resolution. It seemed to him that the WSC members wouldn't be able to change their salary even if it would be to reduce it. "I don't think the WSC as a body could vote to change their salary; however, I think anyone could voluntarily decide to give up that sum of money. Whether or not you can devote that money to a special program, I don't think that can be done. You could also only reduce your own salary while you're in office," he said. Mr. Dubois said it came to his attention that one WSC member went to the Payroll Clerk about a salary reduction. He didn't think anyone could do that without first discussing it with the rest of the WSC members. He spoke to every committee member and everyone is in favor of taking a 5% reduction in their salary. He was under the impression that he could pay \$100 every three months to make up the difference. That's why he asked Dina, Atty. Ackerman, and Dr. Gerardi about the WSC members being able to adjust their salary while they were in office. He found out it could only be done by the City Council. Dubois was glad that this item was put on the agenda tonight for discussion, adding that he has no problem with reducing his pay by 5%. He didn't like one WSC member going on their own and submitting a letter about a pay reduction without discussing it with the Chair or Vice Chair because then everyone, according to "talk radio" and gossip, was saying that only one member was taking credit for voluntarily taking a pay cut. "That is not the case," he emphasized. Ms. Williams wanted to know how to go about taking the 5% reduction also and she contacted Dottie. Williams said she emailed Darin and asked him to take

5% out of her pay because he needed it in writing. "No one informed us about how to go about doing it," she said. She really didn't think that any member was in the mindset about not giving up the 5%. "Just because someone jumped on the bandwagon and went on the radio and grandstanded about giving up 5% doesn't mean that any one of us wasn't willing to do it. We all agreed to do it, but were never advised on how to go about it. I don't know when it actually began, but I'll be happy to pay whatever I owe," Williams added. Mrs. Forcier said that after their meeting with the Mayor and the City Council where this was discussed, she looked into it. She called Dottie and was told to contact Darin and put it in writing. "I didn't know it was my responsibility to lead this action. I was only taking care of myself. I didn't know who did or didn't do it, nor did I care. The City Council brought the issue up on the radio and the only reason I called in was because another school committee member called and said the only reason I did it was because I was going to run for City Council. That's not true. I did nothing wrong. I did it because it's what we said we were going to do. I didn't wait for other people to do it. If you don't want to do it, no one can force you. I said I was going to do it and I did it," she said. She checked state law and the City Charter first. "It hit the radio Thursday morning and at that time, I was the only one doing it. By Thursday afternoon, two other members called and looked into it. It wasn't scheduled to be on the agenda. It only got put on the agenda on Friday. It was never indicated that we would discuss at a meeting and it has been weeks. The Mayor did it. The City Council did it. I will not apologize for doing the right thing. If it took me to do it for others to do it, then good for me!" said Forcier. "If you were so concerned about being a member of the school committee, you would have put it on the agenda so it would be all out in the open. We're elected officials. We work for the people in this City and should act like adults," said Mrs. Nadeau. At this point, Mrs. Forcier objected to what Mrs. Nadeau was saying and the Chair called a recess.

The chair declared a 5-minute recess. The meeting was called back in session at 9:00 p.m.

Mrs. Nadeau said she just wanted to know the process of giving their 5% and put the issue to rest. Mr. Dubois wished it could have been discussed as a team and is glad they got a ruling by Atty. Ackerman. He wished that if someone did that on their own, they would have at least let the chair of the WSC know about it. Dubois asked Dina to let them know the week that the first pay was adjusted so they could all put in letter for their deduction and be equal. He read a statement from Mrs. Majewski indicating her willingness to take the 5% reduction. Mrs. Forcier insisted that she didn't do anything wrong and doesn't see why it's being made into a big issue. She just had her 5% taken out and the next thing she knew she was the "bad guy". Mr. Dubois stressed that all the members wanted to do it, but just wanted to do it the right way. Forcier asked what would have been the right way. "The right way would have been to contact our attorney to ask if you could do it. No one is making you out to be the bad guy. I know you can't control what is said on a talk show, but when you call the show yourself, it's a different thing," said Dubois. Mrs. Forcier explained that she had to because another school committee member called in and said Forcier was going to run for City Council and she wanted to correct that. Mrs. Nadeau stated that she called the John Dionne Show because he was encouraging her to run for City Council. She called to say she that if she chose to run again, it would be for school committee--unlike maybe other people on the School Committee who wanted to bail and run for City Council. She wasn't one of them. Mrs. Nadeau stated that she never said a name. "If the shoe fits, you put in the rest of it! Go and listen to the tape!" she said. Mr. Dubois asked Atty. Ackerman if a vote needed to be taken. He told them no, that since everyone is in favor of it, they can notify McFee in a letter if they want a payroll deduction or write a check. "It's up to them how they want to do it," said Dubois.

CONFERENCES: None

SUPERINTENDENT'S REPORT: Dr. Robert Gerardi

Gerardi spoke about these being "extraordinary times that require extraordinary leadership". He knows it's unpopular to suggest that raising revenue is the only solution to the City and school departments' financial crisis. He said he's proud to be working with a school committee that has acknowledged that sometimes you just cannot cut any more than the minimum and you must provide society the services it demands. He hopes that city officials can convince the community that they have done their best to hold the line for many years, but that in order to preserve a vibrant town with outstanding services, the time has come to increase revenue.

Motion to receive and place on file: E. Nadeau

2nd: M. Williams (Unanimously Approved)

SCHOOL COMMITTEE GOOD & WELFARE:

M. Williams: She attended the Bernon PTO meeting on Monday, saying that as far as she is concerned, she is not in favor of disrupting the Nature Trail for a skating rink. As far as the budget cuts, she said, "We certainly don't want to cut National Honor Society, the prom, and other rights of passage at the WHS and put the WHS' accreditation at risk. However, the state is in such a fiscal disaster that we are not going to find \$3.2 million. We don't want to make these cuts. We are an urban district and we have a lot of kids with troubles. Usually we have hearings before the meeting and have to send these kids out of district, which costs us thousands of dollars." She wondered what

Barrington's out-of-district placements are in comparison to Woonsocket's. Dina said she will try to get that information for her. "This all goes back to fair funding. Dr. Gerardi was asked to consolidate on-line services that we don't even have. We need to contact our legislators about a fair funding formula."

M. Dubois: Said that if you look at the InSite reports for the suburban communities, their numbers are a lot lower. "A lot of it is swept under the rug. The police aren't called. They don't want to believe they have the same problems as we do." Dubois had some parents call him because they thought he was supporting Mt. St. Charles and their desire to building a skating rink because he called the meeting the other night. "I just wanted what was best for the Woonsocket school students—whether it be by modifying the Nature Trail and sharing an athletic facility with Mount or not."

A. Forcier: Announced the upcoming fashion show being sponsored by the WACTC Hospitality Program at the WHS on March 18th at 6:30 p.m. at the WHS. It will benefit SkillsUSA. She reminded parents that there are parent/teacher conferences at the WHS tomorrow night and at the WMS next Wednesday night. Forcier spoke about her support of the Nature Trail and how more development would be pushing wildlife out of their habitat. She asked about the number of state mandates and how much it costs to fund them. Dr. Gerard told her that studies have been attempted on this issue, but it's a very cumbersome process because of all the state and federal regulations. "It has never really been done. Communities have done parts of it for the mandates that cost them the most," he said. Forcier asked if the WSC could have a community member who is well versed in finance sit in on the Finance Subcommittee. This idea was brought up to her. She asked about the stimulus funds and how much flexibility we would have with them. Gerardi explained that it's difficult to tell because everyone's interpretation of the Bill is different. Forcier spoke about another fair funding formula she heard about that we wouldn't benefit from.

E. Nadeau: She spoke about the discussion that took place at the joint meeting the other night about our legislators pursuing the issue with us paying for out-of-district placements for students. She doesn't think we should be handling it and would be glad to present them with the information. Nadeau stated that she and Mr. Dubois sit on the Finance Subcommittee of the school committee. "We just sit in on the budget process. I don't see how an outside person who sits on a subcommittee can do any more than what our people do who work with it every day." She reported that they would be interviewing for a business manager next week and if anyone wants to sit in on the interviews, they should contact Dotty. "Any one of the WSC members can sit and observe. I have heard criticisms about it, and all I have to say is sit and learn."

Motion to adjourn at 9:30 p.m.: M. Dubois

2nd: M. Williams (Unanimously Approved)

Respectfully submitted,

Nancy G. Belisle, WSC Recording Secretary