

MINUTES  
WOONSOCKET SCHOOL COMMITTEE  
WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 23, 2009  
7:30 PM – OPEN SESSION  
Woonsocket Area Career & Technical Center  
Multimedia Room 303

**Call to Order / Moment of Silence / Pledge of Allegiance**

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

Chairman Dubois reported on the unanimous vote taken during Closed Session to approve the letter drafted by Dr. Gerardi to Mayor Menard in response to her letter to him on Monday, September 21, 2009, and authorizing Dr. Gerardi and Chairman Dubois to sign it on behalf of the School Committee.

**Recognitions and Announcements were taken out of order by unanimous consent of the WSC.**

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**RECOGNITIONS & ANNOUNCEMENTS: Dr. Robert Gerardi**

Dr. Gerardi expressed his sincere sympathy to the family of Mary Keegan, adding what a special person she was and noting the many hours she spent on the Building Committee advocating for the new Middle Schools. He added that she also attended the School Committee meetings and supported many initiatives for students. Gerardi acknowledged that Mary was also known as the 6<sup>th</sup> school committee member because she attended so many meetings. In memory of Mary, Chairman Dubois had asked that a black cloth be draped over a chair with a rose on it, which he pointed out in the audience. He then held a special moment of silence in honor of Mary. He reported that many members of the school committee and the Building Committee have suggested that a room in one of the new Middle Schools be named in honor of Mary's dedication to the WED and the new middle schools. Gerardi said he will gladly consult with the Building Committee and put this on the next appropriate school committee agenda. Gerardi recognized the building level administrators for their hard work in enforcing the dress codes. Many of the School Committee members' implored them to strictly enforce the dress code rules when they approved the student handbooks and he is pleased to have read evidence of that. The article in the Valley Breeze by Kristen Russo titled, "Most Students at WHS Prefer Stricter Dress Code Rules", was a wonderful public recognition of the results of the administrators' efforts. Gerardi also recognized Mike Ferry and the entire administrative staff at WACTC and the HS for the implementation of electronic attendance. They have increased classroom attendance and decreased inefficiency and paper expenses associated with the previous attendance referral process.

**"TEACHER OF THE YEAR 2009"**: Gerardi extended his congratulations to this year's "TEACHER OF THE YEAR", Ms. Sandra Gasparro, Woonsocket Middle School Teacher. He described her as a consummate professional, adding that as a house leader, she excels at her job. He reported that she often goes beyond the parameters of her job description and serves as a confidante, surrogate mother, disciplinarian, and a source of inspiration as situations arise. Gerardi announced her other accomplishments and awarded her with a certificate and displayed the plaque of Teachers of the Year to which her name will be added.

Motion to receive and place on file: M. Williams

2<sup>nd</sup>: A. Forcier (Unanimously Approved)

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**PUBLIC GOOD & WELFARE:**

**Tracy Belliveau, Carrington Avenue, Woonsocket Music Booster:** She reported the results of the elimination of band and chorus from the curriculum at the WMS. The number of students participating is very low and she is worried about the high school music department's future if something isn't done.

**John Ward, 166 Getchell Avenue, Woonsocket City Councilman:** Thanked the WSC for recognizing Mary Keegan and remembered her being at many of the school committee meetings when he served on the WSC. "She will be sorely missed." He said he appreciated the letter that the WSC voted to send to the Mayor, but he hopes they will reconsider their decision. Ward spoke about the letter that Dr. Gerardi drafted and was approved in closed session earlier in the evening and the WSC's decision to delay sending the letter to the City Council requesting more funds to cover the school department's deficit. "There is a process that needs to be followed." He noted that he had been through this process with Atty. Robinson when he worked for the Johnston School District. "It doesn't have to be a definite amount because that amount will keep changing until a final tally is made." He noted that until a motion is filed in court, the Mayor isn't required to do a performance audit and that motion hasn't happened yet. "A simple sentence; such as, 'Our estimated deficit is \_\_\_\_\_ and we need to request more money,' is all that's necessary."

Ward asked that the WSC reconsider revising the letter to include a request for funds to cover the deficit to bring before the City Council. "I don't want to make the lawyers rich and delay the process, wasting more tax dollars."

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**APPROVAL OF MINUTES: September 9, 2009 OPEN/CLOSED**

Motion to approve: M. Dubois

2<sup>nd</sup>: M. Williams (Unanimously Approved)

**CONSENT AGENDA:**

**Motion to approve Consent Agenda: A. Forcier**

**2<sup>nd</sup>: M. Williams (Unanimously Approved)**

**CONSENT AGENDA:**

**1. Personnel Actions**

Certified Appointments/Non-Certified Appointments

**2. Purchases/Transfers Over \$2,000**

Apple Computers/Computers/WACTC/Perkins

B&H Photo/Camera Equip/WACTC/Perkins

Century Consultants/Software Upgrade/Technology/Local

Dell Computers/Computer Equip./Technology/E2T2

Epson America, Inc./Projectors/WMS/Technology/E2T2

Monsignor Gadoury Catholic Schools/Prof. Development/Grants & Curriculum/Title II Grant

**3. Field Trip/Conference Requests**

**4. Home Schooling Requests**

**END OF CONSENT AGENDA**

**COMMUNICATIONS: None**

**COMMITTEE REPORTS:** Mrs. Majewski reported that SELAC will meet on October 1<sup>st</sup> at 6:30 p.m. at Pothier Elementary School. The School Success Coalition met on September 17<sup>th</sup> at Family Resources Community Action.

**UNFINISHED BUSINESS: NONE**

**NEW BUSINESS:**

**1. Discussion/Approval of Maintenance of Efforts – Dr. Gerardi**

Dr. Gerardi reported that in the letter the school committee received from the Rhode Island Commissioner of Education dated August 27, 2009, she recommended as one of the legal remedies to our projected deficit was to request a Maintenance of Effort Determination. At the meeting that Commissioner Gist and Deputy Commissioner Abbott held last week that City Council School Committee Liaison Ward, Ms. Forcier, Ms Nadeau and Gerardi attended, the Woonsocket Education Department was again encouraged by the Commissioner and the Deputy Commissioner to file a Maintenance of Effort Determination. Gerardi noted that Attorney Ackerman has been working closely with Attorney Robinson and he has prepared a draft of what the petition would look like. This petition was explained by Atty. Stephen Robinson to the public. He also responded to Councilman Ward's comments, saying that the performance audit is a result of last year's Caruolo litigation and as far as he is concerned, the WED is not in violation. Atty. Robinson recommended going forward with the Maintenance of Effort Petition, adding that it is a long-standing statute and has been on the books for many years. "It's a very simple, straight-forward process," he said. Mrs. Forcier said she wouldn't have a problem putting in the letter to the Mayor something that says, "At this time our deficit is \_\_\_\_\_", because right now the letter doesn't state that we are in a deficit. Dr. Gerardi explained that it makes more sense for us to get a Maintenance of Effort Determination first to help our chances if we file a Caruolo Action. Forcier just doesn't want to waste taxpayer dollars going through a long legal process. She said she welcomes an independent audit, hopefully before the election. "If I'm not re-elected, my life will go on. I have been honest and sincere and welcome an audit. I want to prove to the community that we haven't been wasting the taxpayers' money," she said. Forcier also discussed the lack of a fair funding formula. Mrs. Nadeau said she doesn't think there's any member of the WSC that doesn't desire a performance audit. "We want the City to pay for it because we are already in a deficit. The Mayor shouldn't be threatening to withhold paychecks from our employees. We are doing what we feel is best for the children in this city," she said. Mr. Dubois also fully supports going ahead

with the Maintenance of Effort Petition. "As far as attorney's fees, a lot of it will be handled by Richard Ackerman who is on salary. It will not cost us more. This is a matter that isn't going to go away," he said. Mrs. Majewski echoed the previous comments of the WSC members. "We have made every effort to reduce our costs and run efficiently and I support going ahead with the petition," she said.

Motion to approve beginning the process of a Maintenance of Effort Petition: M. Dubois  
2<sup>nd</sup>: E. Nadeau/M. Williams

Roll Call Vote: 5 yes. APPROVED

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## 2. Discussion/Approval WACTC Back Pay –(Litigation) – Dr. Gerardi/M. Dubois

Gerardi reported that at the meeting with Commissioner Gist and Deputy Commissioner Abbott, they discussed the issue of the current petition before them from the Cranston and Chariho School Districts requesting back pay of the costs associated with the administration and guidance of their vocational schools. He said that Cranston believes they are owed approximately \$7.5 million and Chariho believes they are owed approximately \$4.5 million. Since Woonsocket is smaller than Cranston and larger than Chariho, we could be entitled to somewhere between those two amounts. In his conversations with Attorney Andrew Henious from the law offices of Brennon and Recuprio, it wouldn't cost the WED any additional money to join in this petition since our attorney would separately file our own briefs in regard to this matter. He asked for WSC approval for our attorney, Richard Ackerman, to contact Andrew Henious and begin the process of filing this petition to determine in regard to WACTC back pay from the state. Mrs. Majewski asked Atty. Robinson to explain what a petition is for the public. He said that a petition has the same force of law as if you were in a courtroom, but doesn't necessarily take place in a courtroom. The Commissioner of Education has the power to grant a petition in regards to education.

Motion to approve: E. Nadeau  
Roll Call Vote: 5 yes APPROVED

2<sup>nd</sup>: A. Forcier

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## 3. Discussion of Student Parking Stickers at WHS/WACTC- Dr. Garcia/L. Bedard

Dr. Garcia explained that this initiative was undertaken by Susan Votto, Assistant Principal at the WACTC, because of vandalism, cars being parked without permission, and kids coming into the parking lot from out of state to cause trouble. "The resource officer is all over the place at different schools now. This initiative will help provide a safer environment for our students," said Garcia, thanking Mrs. Votto for her efforts. Dr. Bedard added that 92 students have signed up for stickers and also thanked Mrs. Votto for her hard work on this. Bedard spoke about the difficulty in having someone out in the parking lot every minute to supervise. "Changing the time of advisory to the first block has helped tremendously. Before, the students would leave the building and be hanging out in the parking lot or go for coffee. Having the stickers also makes the students feel that driving to school is more of a privilege," said Bedard. Mr. Dubois asked about the security cameras and if they are working. Dr. Bedard told him that often they aren't working. She explained that, during the summer, a couple of light poles with cameras were knocked down by a student driver so there are even less right now. "How many parking spaces are there?" asked Mrs. Nadeau. Bedard said there are 170 student parking spaces in the lot. Nadeau asked if students are carpooling. Bedard said she has noticed that many students are now carpooling because of the gas prices. Ms. Williams asked if someone would be there in the morning to check stickers to see who is coming into the lot. Bedard explained that this will be done after the students arrive because there isn't staff available to do it when they are coming in. She noted that Officer Raymond will assist also when possible. Mrs. Majewski thought it was a good idea and asked about #3 in the policy about students not being able to leave the lot during the day. She was concerned about students who may need to go to a job, for example. Dr. Bedard said that those students would have a business card size pass to indicate why they would be in the parking lot. Majewski asked about a system for a temporary parking sticker for students that may have to use another vehicle one day so they don't get towed. "Maybe something they could hang up from the rear-view mirror would be good," she suggested. Mr. Dubois asked if they considered assigning a parking space along with the sticker. "It's something to consider," said Bedard. Dubois suggested it for Student of the Month so they could park in the front row.

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

2<sup>nd</sup>: L. Majewski  
APPROVE

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## CONFERENCES: None

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## SUPERINTENDENT'S REPORT: Dr. Gerardi

Gerardi announced that the WACTC is having a "Cruisin' for Careers" Car Show fundraiser on Saturday, September 26<sup>th</sup> from noon to 5:00pm and the public is invited. He announced that the Woonsocket High School Football team will play their first home game on Saturday, Oct. 3<sup>rd</sup>, at Barry Field at 1:30 p.m. He is still hopeful that the Mayor, City Council, School Committee, and he can be reasonable and cooperative in the resolution of our fiscal concerns.

Motion to receive and place on file: M. Williams

2<sup>nd</sup>: E. Nadeau (Unanimously Approved)

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**SCHOOL COMMITTEE GOOD & WELFARE:**

**L. Majewski:** Announced that the PAC met on September 17<sup>th</sup> and they are working on an opening ceremony for the new middle schools. She extended her condolences to Mary Keegan's family and listed all the committees that Mary served on. Congratulated Sandra Gasparro.

**E. Nadeau:** Said that she had a strange feeling this afternoon before the meeting, because Mary Keegan would always call her with questions about the agenda. "I will continue to have my talks with her. She was a very good friend." Nadeau said she was offended by the Mayor's threat to withhold the school department funding, especially the paychecks. "Many of these people live week-to-week. You should never threaten a person's paycheck! It's immoral! I am pretty tired of being threatened and having people in the school department being threatened—whether it be by the Commissioner, Mayor, or whoever! We are trying our best and I am proud of this committee."

**M. Williams:** Extended her sympathies to Mary Keegan's family. "She was a very special friend. It was a gift to me to know Mary." Congratulated Sandra Gasparro. "As far as the teachers not getting paid on Friday, I find it hard to believe that will happen. It would cost the City a lot of money in legal fees. We have labor laws in the state of RI. If you work, you must get paid."

**M. Dubois:** Extended his sympathies to Mary Keegan's family. "It's not the same looking out and not seeing her in the audience. I was lucky enough that she liked me. She was always there with her candor and her advice." Said he got a call from the Providence Journal about the NECAP scores being released today. He heard that the Governor singled us out for improving significantly. Congratulated Sandra Gasparro. Dubois also said he plans on attending the Commissioner's meeting with the PAC on September 30<sup>th</sup> at the WACTC. He urged anyone with a question for her to get in touch with him. He thanked Bill Legare for providing a bus for free for a recent fundraiser at the Par-X Club. He's glad that the WSC took a unified stand in going forward with the Maintenance of Effort Petition. "I don't believe the funds will be withheld by the Mayor. We are being bullied."

**A Forcier:** Extended her deepest sympathies to Mary Keegan's family. "Mary lived a very good life and touched a lot of people." Congratulated Sandra Gasparro. Forcier said she received some phone calls because no one was recognized from the other categories (clerks, custodians, paraprofessionals) due to funding. She felt that next year they should be recognized with a certificate or something for the hard work they do. She spoke about the WMS 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> Grade Chorus and Band programs having very low numbers and her concerns. Forcier asked the PAC, if they get a fair funding formula that the WSC supports, if they could share it with the Commissioner when she meets with them on Sept. 30<sup>th</sup>. She noted that there are two or three versions floating around. Denise Auclair, PAC Co-Chair, told Forcier she was invited to attend the meeting herself. All the WSC members were invited. Forcier didn't recall getting that invitation.

Motion to adjourn at 8:50 p.m.: A. Forcier

2<sup>nd</sup>: M. Dubois (Unanimously Approved)

Respectfully submitted,

Nancy G. Belisle, WSC Recording Secretary