

MINUTES
WOONSOCKET SCHOOL COMMITTEE
WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 9, 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:

Denise Auclair, PAC Co-Chair: She reported that the next PAC Meeting is Wednesday, September 16, from 7 p.m. to 9 p.m. at the WACTC. She announced that there will also be a "Meet the Candidates" night and some other upcoming events.

Lorraine Corey, Huntington Avenue: She asked, "How did it happen that I get to sue myself? You're all taxpayers. I am paying for two lawyers to sue me and two more lawyers to defend me through my taxes? I don't understand, but it seems to me that the only ones making out here are the lawyers! No offense to Mr. Ackerman." Mr. Dubois asked what suit she was referring to. Corey said it was the Caruolo suit for last year's deficit. "That's coming out of my taxes. It makes no sense to me because I cannot take myself to court. My hope is that both sides resolve something because I can't afford lawsuits!"

Donna Houle, 130 Ward Street, School Success Coalition: Announced an upcoming meeting on September 31st at Family Resources from 4:30 to 6:00 p.m. Child care and a light dinner will be provided. They will be reviewing their goals for the upcoming year.

RECOGNITIONS & ANNOUNCEMENTS: Dr. Robert Gerardi

Dr. Gerardi thanked all of the Principals, Teachers, Staff, Parents, and Students who attended all of the open houses, saying it was great to start the year with that kind of collaboration. He thanked and recognized Linda Filomeno for her work organizing and running the professional development day and the additional Dana Center professional development at the Northern Rhode Island Collaborative.

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

APPROVAL OF MINUTES: August 26, 2009 OPEN/CLOSED

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

CONSENT AGENDA:

Motion to approve Consent Agenda along with the Personnel Addendum: M. Dubois
2nd: A. Forcier (Unanimously Approved)

CONSENT AGENDA:

1. Personnel Actions

Certified Appointments/Non-Certified Appointments & Personnel Addendum

2. Purchases/Transfers Over \$2,000

Apple Computer/Computers/Technology/E2T2 & School Improvement Grants
GreenPages, Inc./Whiteboards/Professional Development/Technology/School Improvement Grant
New England Educational Consultants/Grant Evaluation 2009-2010/Grants&Curriculum/Title III
RIEAP/Substance Abuse Counseling/WHS/Local
Robinson & Clapham/Legal Fees/Business Office/Local

3. Home Schooling Requests

END OF CONSENT AGENDA

COMMUNICATIONS and/or COMMITTEE REPORTS: None

UNFINISHED BUSINESS:

2. Discussion/Approval Written Response to Commissioner Gist Letter – Dr. Gerardi (Taken Out of Order)

Dr. Gerardi reported that he and his staff have been working closely with Commissioner Gist to resolve the problem that resulted from his communication in regard to filling the six mandated positions during a budget deficit. He believes they have developed a plan that will provide the required services without increasing our deficit. He provided the school committee with a draft letter to Commissioner Gist outlining the WED's proposal to use funds through consolidation of classrooms, consolidation of administrative positions, and a one-time settlement payment from the Northern Rhode Island Collaborative to fund four of the six positions that were identified as mandates. Those four positions include the two reading specialist positions at the high school, the Library clerk at the middle school, and the ELL tester/parent liaison. He changed two of our waiver requests into Variance requests for the positions of the LEP Administrator and the high school library clerk and believes we can continue to provide the required services with the staff and programs already in place. Dr. Gerardi said that it's much easier to ask for a variance and get it approved than a waiver. RIDE was comfortable that their preliminary discussions would be approved upon receiving the written report he was proposing for approval tonight. The Commissioner's final request was that we write our intention to comply with state and federal laws and regulations. This draft correspondence states that the WED has every intention of complying with all state and federal laws and regulations. The WED administration did identify its concern that it believes that there are still Rhode Island laws that are irreconcilable, causing both of us to be out of compliance and including some examples. Dr. Gerardi also appreciated the Commissioner's suggestion to investigate RIGL 16-7-24 and RIGL 16-7-25 which identify the Commissioner's authority in a "maintenance of effort" determination. He noted that we will seriously consider maintenance of effort as we move forward with our projected deficit. Gerardi reported that the Commissioner has voluntarily scheduled a meeting with the school committee liaisons and himself on Thursday, September 17, 2009.

Motion to approve the draft letter to the Commissioner: A. Forcier
2nd: M. Williams

Roll Call Vote: 4 yes APPROVED.

1. Discussion/Approval Update of Caruolo Action- Dr. Gerardi

Dr. Gerardi reported that at the August 26, 2009, school committee meeting, the full school committee voted for him to write a letter to City Council President Fontaine. At that time, the School Committee requested that the City Council delay the action on an ordinance which would authorize a special tax levy in the amount of \$6,107,874.00 to fund the Woonsocket Education Department projected deficit (as of August 13, 2009) for FY10. At the August 26, 2009, school committee meeting, further reductions were found resulting in a projected deficit of \$5,559,966.00. The rationale to delay was that the school committee was hopeful that there were still major deficit reduction initiatives planned that could further reduce the budget and the school committee did not want to ask the taxpayers for a supplemental tax for more money than the school department actually needs. The school department and Mayor's attorneys are meeting tomorrow with GHGRI to discuss a withdrawal from their management that could produce a potential savings of \$1,300,000. Also, at the school committee's request, Gerardi wrote a letter to the WTG asking that they consider concessions or possible negotiations. He received a letter yesterday from Richard DiPardo, the Woonsocket Teachers Guild President, stating that they are willing to explore the possibilities of a contract extension. Therefore, we still find ourselves in the predicament of not knowing what our final FY10 budget will be. The City Council and Mayor's staff are now urging the school committee to request the supplemental tax and file for a Caruolo action. Gerardi noted that the law is clear that the school committee may--not "shall"--request that the City fund the appropriation necessary within Ten (10) days after the Commissioner's response. Therefore, until the Commissioner responds to our variances, the WSC does not have to act. Gerardi asked for the WSC's decision to request the current \$5,500,000 or to wait until we receive a response to our variances from the Commissioner.

Mrs. Forcier asked if we request the money we need now and the City Council denies it and we go to Caruolo, what happens if these potential savings are found after we file. "Can the requested amount be adjusted up or down during a performance audit?" she asked. "If the Commissioner was told to give us \$3.5 million and the teachers were generous and we get more savings from switching from GHGRI, we could get to "\$.00", possibly," said Gerardi. Atty. Ackerman said that an audit could help document if there is a deficit and how much of a deficit there is. "Can we bring the amount up as well as down during an audit?" asked Forcier. Ackerman told her, "It's possible that the auditors could find that we need more money than we thought, yes. If we find out we are in violation of mandates that aren't being met." "Then why don't we just ask for the money now if it can fluctuate up and down instead of waiting for an answer from the Commissioner?" asked Forcier. Atty. Ackerman told her it wasn't really a legal question and was up to the WSC to decide. Mrs. Nadeau asked if the state pays for the performance audit if the City requests one

should we file a Caruolo action. Dr. Gerardi said that we would have to pay for it unless it's determined that it would be reimbursable. "Isn't the first step always to get your budget in line and present it to the City Council, then if they reject it we can go to Caruolo?" asked Nadeau. She asked Dr. Gerardi to explain what happened with the Caruolo Action for FY09. "Basically, the City agreed that all the bills for FY09 would be paid. The budget of \$64 million was appropriate. Our budget of \$61 million for this year is \$3 million less than what was just determined as appropriate for FY09," he explained. He added that a performance audit was never done for FY09. Mrs. Nadeau believed they had to do due diligence before taking a Caruolo action. "We should get the deficit down as low as possible," she said. Dr. Gerardi wasn't sure when it would be appropriate to ask for "maintenance of effort" because we are operating with less than was deemed appropriate for last year. "Is it something we should pursue immediately?" he asked. Atty. Ackerman told him "yes, separate from the Caruolo action". "School has only been open for one week and we have had several meetings with the City Council regarding the budget. Now people are asking us to hurry up and file a Caruolo lawsuit. I don't want to get sucked into their game. We were notified by the union yesterday that they're willing to reopen negotiations. We may see significant savings from the switch to another health care management group and are waiting for variances from the Commissioner. I'm not willing to file a Caruolo suit at this point in time," said Mr. Dubois. Mrs. Forcier asked Atty. Ackerman about the \$3.2 million for maintenance of effort and if it would be up to the Commissioner. "It's up to the Commissioner to determine what's appropriate by law and then up to the WSC to ask the City Council for that funding. The Commissioner can state what she believes is necessary to provide the education to the students. If the City says no, we could end up in court," he said.

Motion to refrain from bringing a request to the City Council until a more definite budget figure has been obtained: E. Nadeau

2nd: M. Williams

Roll Call Vote: 4 yes APPROVED

NEW BUSINESS: None
CONFERENCES: None

SUPERINTENDENT'S REPORT: Dr. Gerardi

Gerardi announced that all of the principals have reported that the opening of each school was successful with the minimum of usual adjustments necessary. He also announced that Durham did a commendable job in correcting any issues that arose in the first few days. Because of all of the variables, transportation always needs adjusting in the first two weeks. By erring on the side of caution, Durham had a positive start.

Motion to receive and place on file: M. Williams

2nd: A. Forcier (Unanimously Approved)

SCHOOL COMMITTEE GOOD & WELFARE:

A Forcier: She was glad we had a good start to the school year. Reported that she was approached by a manager of United Storage on Diamond Hill Road to say that they are willing to let any school organization run a fundraiser there. Said she decided to vote yes on not going forward with the request to the City Council because of the maintenance of effort. "If that comes about, it may eliminate the deficit." Thanked Linda Filomeno again for adding and adding and adding on more responsibilities to her already heavy workload. "She does so much for the children and their families also. I'm amazed at what she can handle."

E. Nadeau: Said that when we go into legal action, Atty. Ackerman doesn't get any more money because he is on salary. "What happened with the first Caruolo suit, the City hired a special attorney and, therefore, we felt it necessary to hire one. That was initiated by the City Council, who chose to get an outside lawyer. Thank God it was a very brief case. Just keep in mind Promac and how long that took. No one wins."

M. Williams: She was glad school opening went smoothly and asked about Durham's performance. Dr. Gerardi told her that Peter Fontaine was only here 10 minutes longer than the previous year to straighten out any messes.

M. Dubois: Pointed out that Atty. Ackerman isn't paid any more for all the extra things he does. He thanked Peter Fontaine for handling any bussing issues that came up. Dubois couldn't believe that parents called Channel 10 because the busses were 20 minutes late for the elementary students. He asked if anyone was at the meeting tonight from Durham. Dr. Gerardi said that they asked if it was okay to skip this one because they were working on routes. He told them it was okay. Mr. Dubois thanked Dr. Gerardi and Mr. Garceau for being visible at the schools during the opening day of school. He appreciates it.

Motion to adjourn at 8:00 p.m.: A. Forcier

2nd: E. Nadeau (Unanimously Approved)

Respectfully submitted,
Nancy G. Belisle, WSC Recording Secretary