

SPECIAL MEETING MINUTES

**WOONSOCKET SCHOOL COMMITTEE
WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 6, 2010
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
	Eleanor Nadeau, Vice Chairwoman	Present
	Linda Majewski	Present
	Anita McGuire-Forcier	Present
	Vimala Phongsavanh	Present

1. Discussion/Approval of RIDE “Race to the Top Grant- MOU” –R. Gerardi, RIDE Representative Maryann Snider

Dr. Gerardi reported that Commissioner Gist invited Superintendents from six districts, including Woonsocket, to RIDE to discuss the Race to the Top Grant and at the WED’s urging, another meeting was held with union leadership and school committee representation. Mr. Dipardo, Mrs. McGuire Forcier and Dr. Gerardi attended that meeting. It was explained that the federal government has set aside a huge amount of money in the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) to fund approximately five states who are leading the nation in educational initiatives. The commissioner stated that she expects the RI Grant application to be somewhere around \$100,000,000 to \$120,000,000. Rhode Island is actually considered a strong contender because of our New England Comprehensive Assessment Program (NECAP), which has led the way toward a national common core of standards and our new High School and Middle School Graduation Requirements which created the PBGR’s. When Dr. Gerardi met with the Massachusetts Commissioner of Education at a Harvard Superintendents Round Table, he expressed his envy for our graduation requirements and his concern that RI will be a stronger candidate for the Race to the Top Funds because of those PBGR’s. Also, Mary Ann Snider expressed to Dr. Gerardi that she and other RIDE officials were invited to Washington DC by the Aspen Institute because they believe that Rhode Island is one of the strong contenders for this grant. Dr. Gerardi is confident that this is a worthwhile venture for our district. He takes great pride in the number and quantity of grants that he has written over the years. His biggest challenge in writing grants has always been finding the grant recipients who can make the best use of the funding provided by the funder. The commissioner believes that Woonsocket is one of the six districts that can best utilize a large portion of that money. If RIDE is awarded the Race to the Top grant, one half of the \$100,000,000 will be used to benefit all schools in the state of RI. In the packets the WSC received from RIDE, they will see on Page 4 that those districts are called “Involved” districts. The other \$50,000,000 will be divided proportionately among the participating districts of which only eight districts will potentially be included. The Commissioner explained that of those eight districts, the money will be proportionally released based on Title I allocations. We are one of the four largest Title I districts in that pool of eight; and, therefore, would get the lion’s share of those funds. If less than eight of those communities chose to participate, then our share would increase proportionally. RI is a strong contender for this \$100,000,000 grant and Woonsocket is a strong contender for a good portion of \$50,000,000 of that grant.

Dr. Gerardi noted that he loves to write grants and he used to do that before he came to Woonsocket. He said that it’s good to get into the first round of funding; and also explained that with every grant award comes requirements on how the funder, in this case the US Department of Education, wants the money spent. Gerardi noted that on Page 5 of the MOU the WSC can see what all of the districts as involved districts will receive as a benefit of the first \$50,000,000. Some of the nine initiatives are new to RI, like linking certification with student achievement, and some of them are expansions of things that have already begun but have not been fully implemented like the Statewide Data Warehouse. On Pages 6-9, the MOU shows the eight initiatives that participating districts will be expected to implement. On Page 11 are optional initiatives based on the US Department of Education’s four assurances or other RI priorities. The first initiative of implementing a “Gold Standard” Performance Management System is something that Woonsocket is already ahead of many other potential participating districts because we have already begun this initiative with the AFT Grant Funds. Also, looking at Initiative 5 on Page 8, the WSC can see that we are already working on the implementation of multiple and high quality measures of assessment through our work with the Dana Center which is funded with another state grant. Dr. Gerardi believes that because we are already ahead on two of eight initiatives, we will likely be able submit our own proposals within the four assurance areas or other RI Priorities. The two which he is eager to explore are Extended Learning Opportunities and Enhancing Early Learning

Opportunities. The Commissioner is very astute in her understanding of the expectations of the US Department of Education and she has presented what she thinks the US Department of Education will want us to spend the money on. Unfortunately, the US department of Education has short-dated the application process for January 19th for the first round which has put RIDE under tight time constraints. The RIDE wanted finalized MOU's signed by the School Committee Chair, the Superintendent, and the Union President from each participating district by January 8, 2008. Unfortunately, they did not have a draft available, and they were hopeful that they could get us one by Friday and the actual grant will be ready by January 12th for focus groups to view. Everyone agreed that we should wait until we see the Memorandum of Understanding before agreeing to it; and, therefore, Dr. Gerardi recommended that the school committee vote to authorize Chairman Dubois to sign the MOU on behalf of the School Committee after RIDE provided the school committee with a special workshop meeting. Mary Ann Snider was present at the special WSC work session tonight to help answer any questions people may have. Dr. Gerardi has met with his directors and they reviewed the Memorandum of Understanding. There are a list of initiatives in which the WED could participate on Pages 5 through 8 of the MOU and indications had been made as to what initiatives Woonsocket would be interested in participating in and why. Mrs. Majewski asked Atty. Ackerman if the district would be bound to this MOU like a contract. Dr. Gerardi said there's a lot of concern across the state that we would lose some authority over our schools. He doesn't feel that this abridges our rights. It would give the Commissioner more authority over schools that are failing as it does with NCLB. Ms. Snider referred everyone to Item 10 on Page 2 of the MOU where it preserves the union bargaining rights. Atty. Ackerman asked, "What can RIDE do if we break the contract? There's a provision on Page 3 (D. State Recourse for LEA Non-Performance) that says the LEA could be put on reimbursement payment status, temporarily withholding funds, or disallowing costs." Snider said that the state is requiring that this contract be well-understood by its partners because the Government is going to closely monitor the adherence. Atty. Ackerman questioned whether the withholding of funds would only apply to the Race to the Top money—not other monies. Snider confirmed that that would be the case. "Sometimes in life you just have to take a great leap of faith. I think that in this case, it's merited," said Ackerman. Snider noted that the grant application is due in by January 19th. "Those that make the first cut will be asked to go to Washington, DC, to be interviewed. April would be when they would get the award, then the first payment would be July 1st. The grant is for 4 years. We have to demonstrate that what is planned in this grant is sustainable and for a long life in our state. The state is planning on paying for as much help as possible to help ease the burden on the business managers and curriculum directors in the participating districts. "We are a very lean district and many of our administrators wear multiple hats already. Will there be extra help for them?" asked Mrs. Majewski. "There's no doubt that it will be more work for all of us. It's part of the strategic agenda. It's part of the work that the Board of Regents wants done anyway," said Ms. Snider.

"How quickly do we need to implement the plans once the money is approved?" asked Mrs. Nadeau. Snider said we would have about 6 months to implement it. We are in Group 1. Nadeau asked, "If we clear Phase 1 and the funds are allocated, how does it affect the local budget?" "It doesn't. It's meant to supplement—not supplant the local money," explained Snider. "So if the City tries to say that we got this money and tries to give us less, it won't work?" asked Nadeau. "That is where this will help, because if they try to give you less, this grant money can be taken away," answered Snider. **Dr. Gerardi and Ms. Snider reviewed the initiatives that we would like to participate in. There was a consensus with the WSC that Item D (2) (i) thru (iv) should be changed from "NO" to "YES".** Mrs. Nadeau asked if participating in this program will mean additional staffing is needed. "It may mean additional staffing for the life of the grant," said Snider. Dr. Gerardi indicated that there may be some ongoing costs for maintenance of new computer programs, but that is what is happening now. "If a district pulls out, it could jeopardize the entire state's grant. The US Department of Education is evaluating it very carefully and Rhode Island is in a very good position to get this grant," said Snider. Dr. Gerardi asked that the WSC sign off on the MOU at tonight's meeting because it needs to be submitted by January 8th. "There's time to withdraw after we see the grant on January 12th. The 13th is the last day to opt-out. After that date, if districts decide to opt-out, it jeopardizes the grant for the entire state," said Dr. Gerardi explained. "At the end of the 4 years, if we had to create any new positions, we would not have to fund these positions in the future?" asked Mr. Dubois. "The program is meant to develop systems that everyone in the state is going to have to develop anyway," said Snider. "These systems mirror what the Board of Regents and the Governor are going to ask us to have anyway. There are some systems that we will need to put in that we will need to maintain. The goal is to become more effective and more efficient," explained Gerardi.

Mrs. Forcier said she has read the MOU and has attended the meetings and feels that if we don't choose to go after this money, we will be forced to implement these new initiatives without the money. She's concerned that the state is going to use this money as a reason to not adopt a fair funding formula and she doesn't want to be part of a charade. "What is the federal government looking for as a percentage of participating districts in the state?" asked Mrs. Majewski. Snider said that they don't have a target percent. "Is there any in-kind fiscal responsibility that we have to match?" asked Majewski. "No. We have to demonstrate how this money will be used and it will be very closely monitored," said Snider. "Is this going to put additional demands on teachers for professional development?" asked Majewski. Snider said that they are going to determine if we are successful by student improvement. "That's the bottom line," she said. Dr. Gerardi noted that there would be money to pay for substitutes for professional development and stipends will be built into the grant. Majewski asked if they are open to redefining how we measure

success if a student takes one year longer to graduate, because the way it is now, that student would be considered a drop out. Snider explained that it's the federal government that put on those restrictions, not the state. Snider said they have heard that this grant is going to be the testing ground for the reauthorization of NCLB. Mrs. Nadeau told Snider that the WSC sees the underbelly of the education system in the student hearings that come before them. "Just like policemen, we see the underbelly of society. We only have these kids six hours a day. They live in that environment. We are seeing more and more of that and it's part of our NECAP scores. I hope all of these things are looked at. It has nothing to do with teaching. The people in government should come and sit in on what we do. They need to see that," said Nadeau. Majewski asked if there is going to be a capacity analysis as far as the scope of work because of the amount of work involved. "It's part of the 90-day work plan development. It looks insurmountable, but spread out over the four years, I think it will be manageable," said Snider. Majewski reported that our district didn't have the systems to begin with that other districts were asked to cut because of the financial crisis. "Will we have some extra help with getting those off the ground?" noted Majewski. Snider said that RIDE is looking into that. Mrs. Forcier asked about Item B (3) on Page 6 which indicated a "NO" for participation. "You don't feel we need to participate because we have already participated in the first round?" she asked. Dr. Gerardi doesn't see it as a large learning opportunity for our teachers because they already know how to teach to the standards. "If they aren't going to learn from it, I would rather see our resources going elsewhere," said Gerardi. Carmen Boucher, parent, said she felt that our teachers should have this opportunity. Mrs. Majewski asked about Item C3 (i) on Page 6 in reference to costs for new computer programs and whether these costs would be in addition to our budget. Dr. Gerardi explained that Jonathan Gallishaw told him that we would need additional funding for the initial set-up, training and ongoing costs for these programs after the grant is over.

Motion to authorize Dr. Gerardi and Marc Dubois to sign the MOU and also allow the WSC the option to withdraw from the Race to the Top Grant Application: A. Forcier

2nd: V. Phongsavanh

Roll Call Vote: 5 yes. APPROVED

Motion to adjourn at 8:35 p.m.: A. Forcier

2nd: E. Nadeau (Unanimously Approved)

Respectfully submitted,

Nancy G. Belisle, WSC Recording Secretary