

MINUTES
WOONSOCKET SCHOOL COMMITTEE
WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 11, 2010
7:30 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

PUBLIC GOOD & WELFARE:

Richard DiPardo, 134 Huntington Avenue, WTG President: Said that the union is willing to back to the table, they have just been waiting to hear from the administration. He noted that he and the superintendent went to a conference in Troy, NY, and it was a very worthwhile experience. "It was very intense," he said.

RECOGNITIONS & ANNOUNCEMENTS: Dr. Robert Gerardi

Dr. Gerardi reported that the Woonsocket District Spelling Bee was held on Thursday, February 4th at the WMS at Hamlet. The District Winner is Infinity Barr, an 8th Grade Student at WMS. The District Runner-Up is Kylee Lafleur a 7th Grade Student at WMS. Ms. Barr will be competing in the Rhode Island Statewide Spelling Bee which will be held on March 20th at Lincoln Middle School. Gerardi wished her the best of luck in her upcoming competition and congratulated everyone who participated in the District Spelling Bee. He also thanked all of the sponsors who made this evening possible.

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

APPROVAL OF MINUTES: January 27, 2010 Open/Closed

Motion to approve: M. Dubois 2nd: E. Nadeau (Unanimously Approved)

Mrs. Majewski had a couple of minor corrections on the open and closed sessions.

CONSENT AGENDA:

Motion to approve Consent Agenda with the following exemptions: A. Forcier

**Personnel Appts. — Pgs. 1, 2 & 3 Removed by E. Nadeau*

**Purchases/Transfers Over \$2,000 –Carolina Biological removed by L. Majewski.*

2nd: M. Dubois (Unanimously Approved)

CONSENT AGENDA:

1. Personnel Actions

Certified Appointments/Non-Certified Appointments (Pgs. 1-3) – Removed by E. Nadeau

2. Purchases/Transfers Over \$2,000

Auto Zone/Ed. Supplies/WACTC/Voc. Revenue

Carolina Biological/Ed. Supplies/Dist. Elem/Title I ARRA Grant – removed by L. Majewski

Keystone Info. System/Software Update/Bus. Office/Local

Konica/Copiers/Sp. Ed., WHS/Title I ARRA Grant, Local

Learning A-Z/Ed. Supplies/Literacy & PD/Title I

LRP Publications/Software, PD/Sp. Ed/Title I ARRA Grant

Robinson & Clapham/Legal Services/Bus. Office/Local

CONSENT AGENDA: (CONTINUED)

3. Field Trip/Conference Requests

2010 National Science Teachers Association Conference, Philadelphia, PA/Mr. St. Charles/Title II Grant

4. Home Schooling Requests

END OF CONSENT AGENDA

EXEMPTIONS FROM CONSENT AGENDA:

1) Personnel Appointments (Certified & Hourly, Stipend and Extra-Curricular Positions)

Mrs. Nadeau stated that she would not be supporting the teacher leader positions at the WMS that are on for appointment tonight.

Motion to approve Teacher Leader Positions: A. Forcier
Roll Call Vote: 4 yes – 1 no (EN)

2nd: V. Phongsavanh
APPROVED

Mrs. Majewski asked about the second appointment on Page 1 for a Math teacher at the WHS, questioning the salary and step the person is being hired at. "Do we have to pay for this salary and step (Step 9 Masters +30)?" she asked. Dr. Gerardi assumes that our Human Resource Director verified that there are 9 years served in RI. "Was this the only applicant?" asked Majewski. "The interviews were done by a committee so I'm not aware of how many applicants there were," said Gerardi. Mrs. Majewski felt that, in these times, there should be a way to hire someone at a lesser step. She asked about hiring teachers during their free blocks for half the year to save money. Gerardi has been told that there aren't enough people free in order to do that.

Motion to approve: A. Forcier

2nd: M. Dubois (Unanimously Approved)

2) Purchases/Transfers Over \$2,000

- **Carolina Biological/Ed. Supplies/Dist. Elem: \$69,932.59 Title I ARRA Grant**

Mrs. Majewski asked if these kits have to be replenished every year. Mrs. Filomeno told her, "Yes. This is for additional kits. The kits that were provided were for the teachers. These kits are for grades 2 and kindergarten." "Now the entire K-5 has a kit?" asked Majewski. "Yes. We hope to have two kits per year for grades 4 and 5," explained Filomeno.

Motion to approve: A. Forcier

2nd: L. Majewski (Unanimously Approved)

END OF CONSENT AGENDA

COMMUNICATIONS: Mr. Dubois announced that this afternoon, he, Mrs. Forcier, Dr. Gerardi and Mayor Fontaine met and issued a press release that they will initiate a lawsuit against the state for unfair funding. It will be filed tomorrow. Dubois thanked everyone from the RI is Ready grass roots campaign for their help, adding that this is a civil rights issue. Mrs. Forcier announced that RI is Ready's next meeting is February 16th from 5:30 pm to 7:30 pm in Pawtucket at the International Charter School. She said that kids will be bringing home a paper for parents to sign showing their support for a fair funding formula and urged them to sign it.

COMMITTEE REPORTS: Mrs. Majewski reported that the SELAC committee met the first week in February and David Kane did a presentation. It was very well-attended she said. Mrs. Nadeau and Mrs. Majewski will be working on the uniform policy and will be drafting something with the subcommittee.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS: None

NEW BUSINESS:

1. ESGR Letter of for the Guard and Reserve – Dr. Gerardi

Dr. Gerardi explained that the Department of Defense has begun this program to increase public understanding of the role and importance of the National Guard and Reserve forces to our community and country. The Employer Support of The Guard and Reserve program helps identify the benefits of hiring members of the guard and reserve and memorializes the legal responsibilities under the Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act. Gerardi said he would be proud to sign this certificate and hang it in the McFee Administration building to demonstrate our honor and hold our National Guard and Reserve employees in high regard for their service to our community and Country. He asked that the WSC approve his signature on the document to demonstrate their support for the National Guard and Reserve.

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

2nd: L. Majewski
APPROVED

2. Discussion of Reduction of Sports and Other Programs – Dr. Gerardi

Dr. Gerardi explained that during our FY09 budget process, we were guided to look at Judge Rubine's decision regarding the BEP and as a result, we justified our community's expectations for a BEP to justify making the decisions about our sports and extra-curricular programs. Gerardi has been keeping track of the more recent Cranston Caruolo decisions and they are suggesting we act differently than we have in the past. It's his responsibility to guide the school committee through such potential litigation and he must recommend every possible reduction to the local budget that he can possibly find. In the first Cranston Caruolo action, the Cranston School Department was told by the auditors that they had to eliminate all middle school sports, which they did. In the most recent Cranston Caruolo action, they have been told to consolidate their east and west high school teams. This runs contrary to Rubine's decision because the rich community culture of having an intercity rivalry is not considered above the BEP. After Mrs. Busby and Mr. Nasuti looked at our current sports offerings, the most significant reductions they could consider were the elimination of the middle school and the Junior Varsity sports programs. This action would eliminate a total of 11 teams which would include Football, Baseball, Softball, Soccer & Cheerleading and reduce the budget by approximately \$58,000. In addition to the sports program, Mrs. Busby and Dr. Garcia reviewed all of the extra-curricular school activities. The possible cuts to WHS Co-Curricular activities are: Choral, Select Choir, Debate Team. They will keep Band, but eliminate the assistant positions including asst. choral director. They would also eliminate Sr. High Publications, Art Club, Dance Club, Ski Club, Senior Yearbook-Financial. These cuts will reduce the budget by approximately \$35,000.

Although Gerardi was asking the school committee to approve 241 non-renewals of teachers tonight, the reality is that due to contractual obligations and Board of Regents regulations requiring specific staffing, the department will not likely be able to reduce the teaching staff by more than a handful of positions. However, he could not ignore reducing staff in any area that is not contractually mandated or a federal or state law or regulation and recommended the following reductions in staffing: 1) the elimination of one high school Guidance Counselor's position and the high school Guidance Coordinator's position to be replaced by one high school Guidance Department Chair. The rationale for this cut of one position and change of another position from an administrative coordinator position to a teacher chair position is strictly for financial reasons. The current BEP requires a guidance counselor-to-student ratio at a maximum of 1 to 300. Currently we have an average ratio of 1 to 240. If we reduced by one counselor we would be over the BEP limit. However, we could switch from the coordinator position to the chair position because the coordinator cannot service students but the chair can, thus reducing the student to teacher ratio to within BEP limits. The net effect would be one less Guidance Counselor salary and fringe minus the stipend for the chair position for approximately a \$100,000 saving; 2) the elimination of all elementary guidance counselors for a savings of \$44,000 in local funds and \$280,000 from ARRA Funds (FY11 one year only solution); 3) the elimination of the Elementary Special Education Department Chair (10 month) position and the replacement of the administrative responsibilities associated with that position with an Assistant Director of Elementary Special Education (12 month). This was actually approved last year but was not acted on. This change will result in significant reduction in overtime summer pay which could save as much as \$20,000; 4) the elimination of two out of the three Social Worker/Truancy officer positions we currently employ. As identified by Judge Jeremiah Jeremiah in a letter Gerardi shared with the school committee, our current truancy officer program of having one Truancy officer for each level, elementary, middle, and high is a model for the state. We cannot afford the luxury of having model programs for the state if we are planning on going to court for a Caruolo Action. Other districts get by with only one full time truancy officer and we could save approximately \$130,000 by doing the same.

The total of the cuts Gerardi recommended so far is approximately \$387,000 in local funds and \$280,000 in ARRA Funds). While he's not happy about making these cuts, he believes they are imperative for our success if we must file a Caruolo action. Gerardi asked the school committee to approve these cuts to the budget they would be approving tonight.

He also noted that they must reconsider the elimination of All Day Kindergarten. At a bare minimum, if we keep all day Kindergarten we will be increasing the local budget by at least \$600,000. By doing so, we will never be able to use Title I funds for the second half of All day Kindergarten because it becomes a local responsibility. These are several of the reasons that we may have to do this.

1. The first reason is that we have identified that All Day Kindergarten is not a state mandate and therefore elimination should be considered if we will need to go to court for a Caruolo Action because we will lose and the Auditors will say that we did not eliminate all non mandated positions.
2. Second, if Citizens Memorial Elementary School does not make AYP this year, and the initial analysis of the raw NECAP scores suggest it may not, then we may be forced by the NCLB law to shift \$600,000 from the elementary Title I program to supplemental services. This will result in the use of local funds to support All Day Kindergarten.
3. The third and final reason is that if we cut 10.5 All Day Kindergarten and the 10.5 classroom aids in All Day Kindergarten, we would free up Title I funds and RIDALPA Funds to pay for the eliminated elementary guidance counselors that will be required when comprehensive guidance becomes mandated, as he predicts it will, as well as shifting some of the literacy coach positions to Title I funding so that it will free up the Title II money that will be needed for the upcoming mandated new evaluation system which is already memorialized in the new BEP. The extra federal funds may also be able to reduce our cost for other positions which could result in reductions of staffing cost this year or next year.

To address the concerns of some members of the school committee, other communities have changed the half day every day model of half day kindergarten to a split week model of half day kindergarten in which some students would attend Kindergarten on Mon. Tues. and half of Wed. while the other students would attend the other half of Wed. and Thurs. and Fri. This would address the limitations of the short half day and would also help parents in identifying all day daycare on the other days. Upon further brainstorming, they have also thought that maybe the school department could use the extra empty classrooms to offer parents high quality affordable daycare in the school during the times that their children wouldn't be in Kindergarten. If a daycare program is created, we may see reasonable revenues and could actually provide parents with less expensive before- and after-school alternatives. Gerardi also recommended that the school committee separately approve the elimination of All Day Kindergarten as another elimination of non-mandated positions which will likely result in shifting some other costs that cannot be calculated at this time away from the local budget.

Mrs. Nadeau asked what all these cuts would save. Dr. Gerardi told her he was able to get a copy of Cranston's Performance Audit and was able to see what areas they needed to cut. He can't give her an exact amount of savings at this time. Mr. Dubois feels that cutting direct education to students (i.e. all-day kindergarten) is only going to cost us more later on. Dr. Gerardi did a study two years ago and found that the majority of the communities don't have all-day kindergarten. "These communities probably don't have the problems that we have here in Woonsocket either," said Dubois. Mrs. Majewski noted that pre-school and kindergarten are different age groups. "Preschool is 4 years old and Kindergarten is 5 years old." She also noted that July 1st the new BEDP takes over and how can we predict what will be required under the new BEP? Dr. Gerardi said that the old BEP is very specific. "It told you staffing levels needed, for example. The new BEP is more performance-based. I'm afraid it will end up costing us more," he said. Mrs. Majewski didn't feel comfortable making the all-day kindergarten cut tonight because she still has many unanswered questions. She suggested eliminating one house leader at the WMS and supports reopening negotiations with the union about the health care copays. As far as cutting sports, she feels we will be jeopardizing students' chances of getting full scholarships to college if we cut them at the middle school level to save \$58,000. "The BEP. That's where it starts. It's expected to be fair for each community, but each community is not equal. It's standardized and it shouldn't be," said Nadeau. She recommended that we add a resource office to our budget and hope that the city will fund it. "It's a safety issue—not a budget issue," she said.

3. Discussion of Impact of Governor's Proposal of FY10 & FY11 – S. Busby

Mrs. Busby reiterated what was discussed with the City Council and the concerns that she has regarding the budget especially a decrease in revenue. Mrs. Majewski asked her to explain the cap. Dr. Gerardi also expanded on her explanation by saying that every community can increase their taxes up to 4.5%. He explained that because some communities cost less to run, they can afford to give the school department more.

4. Approval of FY11 Budget -1st Passage –Dr. Gerardi/S. Busby

Dr. Gerardi recommended the approval of the FY11 budget as submitted with reductions as approved tonight and any reductions approved before the final adoption of this budget.

Motion to approve the FY11 Budget with the reductions recommended by Dr. Gerardi under New Business #2; namely, 1) the elimination of one high school Guidance Counselor's position and the high school Guidance Coordinator's position to be replaced by one high school Guidance Department Chair. 2) the elimination of all elementary guidance counselors for a savings of \$44,000 in local funds and \$280,000 from ARRA Funds (FY11 one year only solution); 3) the elimination of the Elementary Special Education Department Chair (10 month) position and the replacement of the administrative responsibilities associated with that position with an Assistant Director of Elementary Special Education (12 month); and 4) the elimination of two out of the three Social Worker/Truancy officer positions we currently employ: A. Forcier

2nd: M. Dubois

Roll Call Vote: 5 yes. APPROVED

Mrs. Majewski asked that the busing costs for half-day kindergarten be added to the budget. She wants to formally request to open negotiations with the union. Majewski was concerned about the Backpack Program and who would take that over. Dr. Gerardi said it probably would shift to the building social worker. Mrs. Forcier asked about outsourcing the social worker positions. Dr. Gerardi said that it usually ends up costing us much, much more, using occupational and physical therapists as examples. "The agency we hire them from needs to make a profit," he explained. Mrs. Majewski asked how we will save \$20,000 for the change in the special education director position and Gerardi explained.

CONFERENCES: None

SUPERINTENDENT'S REPORT: Dr. Gerardi

Dr. Gerardi noted that difficult decisions will need to be made in the coming months with conflicting legal mandates making the task of balancing a budget extremely difficult. He was pleased to see that in the last week the Mayor and School Committee each took two separate legal actions against the state in an effort to improve Woonsocket's financial concerns. He's looking forward to working with the Mayor, City Council, and School Committee to legally resolve our problems in a collaborative and collegial way. While the Woonsocket Education Departments will work collaboratively with all constituents, Gerardi reminded everyone that he and the school committee were notified by RIDE that we must legally represent the interest of the State in providing an education to the children of Woonsocket.

Motion to receive and place on file: A. Forcier

2nd: L. Majewski/ E. Nadeau
(Unanimously Approved)

SCHOOL COMMITTEE GOOD & WELFARE:

E. Nadeau: Expressed her condolences to the Janik and Baldelli families for their tragic losses. "Our prayers are with you in the difficult days ahead."

V. Phongsavanh: Said that it's her first budget process and it's obviously very tough. She wanted everyone to know that the committee is doing everything they can.

M. Dubois: He was asked to be a guest judge for the Spelling Bee and said there were a lot of surprises because of the younger students who went much farther than they did before. He thanked Kathy Lombardo and Donna Blais for organizing it. He wants to send a letter to the unions regarding negotiations and requested it be placed on the next agenda. Dubois thanked the City Council members who came tonight for listening to the WED's concerns. He would like to see the amount of stipends looked at under negotiations also. "There are many volunteers out there that we might be able to get and not have to pay stipends."

L. Majewski: Thanked the City Council for coming. Thanked the union for being willing to come back to the table. Asked Dr. Gerardi about the ARRA funds for next year also. Mrs. Filomeno said that they were issued for one period of time. There are still some funds left. Majewski thanked Dr. Gerardi and Stacy for their hard work on the budget and thanked everyone for coming.

Forcier: Thanked the City Counselors that came. "We are going to be facing some difficult times and one thing people can do is fill out their census. We lose a lot of money because they aren't filled out. Tell everyone you know. Show up on February 16 at the International Charter School. Be Counted! Call you state rep! Two of them every year have voted to level fund education."

Motion to adjourn at 9:35 p.m.: L. Majewski

2nd: A. Forcier (Unanimously Approved)

Respectfully submitted,

Nancy G. Belisle, WSC Recording Secretary