

MINUTES
WOONSOCKET SCHOOL COMMITTEE
WEDNESDAY, APRIL 28, 2010
8:00 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

By school committee consensus, Communications and New Business #3 were taken out of order.

COMMUNICATIONS: Fair Funding Report by Atty. Steve Robinson (*taken out of order*)

Atty. Robinson reported on the status of the complaint that was filed in February regarding the state's lack of a fair funding formula. He also reported that an amended complaint was filed today with additional information from Pawtucket. "We are in a 'wait and see' mode as far as seeing what the legislature does with the fair funding proposals they have before them at this time," noted Robinson, adding that some proposals do not help Woonsocket's plight. Robinson introduced Karina Wood from the RI is Ready grass roots campaign. She is spearheading support for a fair funding formula in Rhode Island that is equitable. Wood announced an upcoming RI Fair Funding Formula Advocacy Day on Tuesday, May 11th, at 2:30 p.m. at the State House, encouraging everyone to attend and also visit their Facebook page.

NEW BUSINESS:

3. Discussion of Corrective Action Plan – Dr. Gerardi (*Taken out of order.*)

Dr. Gerardi explained that he and Mrs. Busby are working on Steps 1 and 2 of our Corrective Action Plan, which are:

1. The WED Superintendent will place a spending freeze on all non-essential purchases until further notice. All purchase orders deemed essential or emergency operational spending will need to be scrutinized by the Superintendent and Finance Director to determine if there are in-district solutions to offset necessary spending; and
2. The WED Superintendent and Finance Director will work closely to determine if and where other spending cuts can be made.

Gerardi noted, however, that after notification and consultation with Mrs. Busby, he and Chairman Dubois have written an additional request of the Auditor general requesting an investigation of the financial activities of the City of Woonsocket pertaining to potential misappropriation of state and federal funds. Gerardi read the letter and asked that the full committee vote to approve the sending of this letter to the Auditor General as well as all of the people listed to be copied. After he read the letter, Mrs. Forcier said she would like the letter to include whatever evidence we have found prompting the request and that we would provide anything else that's requested. Mr. Dubois asked Dr. Gerardi to state for the public what the evidence is. Dr. Gerardi explained that evidence was uncovered as a result of an investigation surrounding the school department's cash flow issues. Stacey Busby elaborated on his explanation and referred to a document showing the City's account detail for school department funds. Specifically, she noted that the City indicated that they received \$1,245,189 in federal stimulus funds earmarked for the school department by the Government that were never transferred to us. She reviewed a letter from Deputy Commissioner of Education David Abbott regarding the use of federal stimulus funds. A copy of the minutes from a meeting of the Woonsocket Building Committee on December 15, 2009, shows that a vote was taken allowing \$606,000 in ERATE funds be retained by the school department following a proposal that was presented by Jonathan Gallishaw. A letter to Dr. Gerardi from Joel Mathews, City Planning Director, confirmed this. These funds were also not transferred to the WED. Dr. Gerardi also read the emails over the past few months between Stacey Busby and Ted Przybyla and Tom Bruce of the City regarding the cash flow to the WED from the City. Dr. Gerardi reported that GHGRI has notified us that they will terminate the WED as of June 1st due to our account being past due. He assured everyone that we won't lose our health care coverage. It will only change how that care is administrated and it will cost a little more initially. "Our payments will be claims-driven. We will be self-funded," said Gerardi. Mrs. Busby explained that now we pay a premium to GHGRI every month, which is sometimes more than the actual claims incurred and the

WED may even save money by becoming self-funded. Mrs. Busby also noted that the second half of the stimulus funds was being placed directly into a school department grant account because of the first half not being transferred to the WED by the City. "I've heard that as of today, the City says it has given us all of our money. Is that true?" asked Mrs. Forcier. "No. They still owe us \$3.7 million," said Mrs. Busby. Mrs. Nadeau believed, referring to the letter from GHGRI, that the City has caused us to fall behind in our payments as well as incur the delinquency fees by not transferring our funds to us. "I sat in on a meeting at McFee this week where all the employees were told that City Hall was taking over our finances. There are school employees who went to cash their checks on Monday and they bounced! They were told to contact the Labor Board. We want our money! People work – they need to be paid. The City just got a tax collection in and they couldn't pay us?" said Nadeau.

Mrs. Majewski felt that the reference to "potential misappropriation" of state and federal funds should be changed and wanted to wait to send a request to U.S. Department of Education because it might jeopardize our grant funds during an investigation. *Because of the evidence presented by Dr. Gerardi and Mrs. Busby, most of the committee did not feel that the wording should be changed in the last line of the 2nd paragraph, but agreed that the word "potential" be added before the word "allegation" in the last line. There was also a correction from "please" to "pleased" in that line.*

Motion approve sending the letter submitted by Dr. Gerardi: E. Nadeau
2nd: M. Dubois

Motion to amend the letter by removing the part about sending it to Mark Deckett of the US Dept. of Education and removing the references to "potential misappropriation" of funds: L. Majewski

2nd: A. Forcier
AMENDMENT DENIED.

Roll Call Vote: 3 no – 2 yes (LM/AF)

VOTE TO APPROVE THE LETTER AS SUBMITTED WITH THE CHANGES REGARDING THE INCLUSION OF DOCUMENTATION AND THE CORRECTIONS IN THE LAST SENTENCE: Roll Call Vote – 3 yes – 2 no (LM/AF)

Ms. Phongsavanh was in full support of the letter being sent as submitted. "We need a system of checks and balances in this City," she said. Mr. Dubois supported the letter as originally written and noted that the Mayor recently ordered an audit of the school department and all that came out of it was a report of the school department's expenditures—not the cash flow side. "That's not a full-blown audit," said Dubois. Mrs. Forcier recommended consideration of Mrs. Majewski's suggestion about not sending it to the federal government yet. She is afraid that if any wrong-doing is found, federal funding would be withdrawn and it would hurt the city even more. Mrs. Nadeau disagreed with that premise. She doesn't have enough trust in the state to do the right thing and feels that it doesn't hurt to ask.

PUBLIC GOOD & WELFARE:

Jeff Hardy, 242 Carnation Street: He disagreed with the vote and felt that voting while everyone is upset is going to come back to bite us. As far as the emails that were read between Mrs. Busby and the City's financial officers, Hardy asked where this information was couple of months ago. "We were told things were okay and now we are being told that we have a \$3.5 million deficit. I don't see with the City Councilors or the school committee members attend any of each other's meetings. The only time I see it is during the election season!"

Donna Houle, 130 Ward Street: Announced that there will be a School Success Coalition meeting tomorrow night at 245 Main Street from 4:30 p.m. to 6:00 p.m. A light meal and day care will be provided.

RECOGNITIONS & ANNOUNCEMENTS: Dr. Robert Gerardi

Dr. Gerardi recognized and thanked Janice Fedders and Barbara Brakenwagen for their outstanding service at the Quota Club Health Fair on April 17th. This annual event hosted by the Quota Club is open to all members of the community. The Quota Club recruits the school department to participate with the fair and administer hearing screenings. Over the years, many citizens have benefited from these hearing screenings by our speech-language pathologists, and the Woonsocket Education department has benefited from this volunteer effort with the receipt of new hearing screening audiometers and other auditory processing tests. Dr. Gerardi congratulated the Woonsocket Area Career and Technical Center Skills USA members for their outstanding efforts at the state competition. The Career center earned 9 Gold medals in the following categories. Anthony Caraman – Television Video Production; Arthur Dugas - Web Design Team; Jennifer Jackson –Photography; George Knipping - Web Design Team; Ericka Mack – Medical Math; Anna Panyathong – Customer Service; Michael Pimentel – Television Video Production; and

Jintana Souvannavongsa – Prepared Speech. These students will be eligible to attend the National Competition in Kansas City in June and Dr. Gerardi wished them luck. He also reported that Ms. Amy Hitzemann, WACTC Baking & Pastry Arts instructor, had her gluten-free biscotti featured on the “Rachel Ray Show” on Monday, April 26th. Chef Hitzemann and her husband own the A & J Bakery in Cranston and specialize in gluten-free and nut-free baked goods. He congratulated her and wished her much success in the future.

Motion to receive and place on file: A. Forcier

2nd: M. Dubois (Unanimously Approved)

APPROVAL OF MINUTES: April 14, 2010 OPEN/CLOSED; Revised Minutes March 24, 2010 p. 2 & 3

Motion to approve: L. Majewski

2nd: E. Nadeau (Unanimously Approved)

CONSENT AGENDA:

Motion to approve Consent Agenda with the following exemptions: E. Nadeau

**Personnel Appts.--removed by A. Forcier*

**Purchases/Transfers Over \$2,000: NCS Pearson & Rebecca Schmitt – removed by L. Majewski*

**Field Trip/Conf. Requests: FBLA -- removed by L. Majewski.*

2nd: M. Dubois (Unanimously Approved)

CONSENT AGENDA:

1. Personnel Actions

Certified Appointments/Non-Certified Appointments (**NONE**)

Hourly, Stipend & Extracurricular and Rescission of Termination/Non-Renewal—removed by L. Majewski

2. Purchases/Transfers Over \$2,000

Heinemann/Ed. Supplies/Grants & Curriculum/Title I ARRA Grant

NCS Pearson/ Prof. Dev. /Grants & Curriculum/Title II Grant – removed by L. Majewski

Rebecca Schmitt/Stipend/Grants & Curriculum/ELO Grant – removed by L. Majewski

Steps Prof. .Dev./Supplies & Books/Title II & Title I ARRA

3. Field Trip/Conference Requests

FBLA/WHS/Nashville, TN/Student Funding, Fundraising – removed by L. Majewski

END OF CONSENT AGENDA

EXEMPTIONS FROM CONSENT AGENDA:

1) Personnel Appointments (Hourly, Stipend & Extracurricular Positions): 2 positions

Dr. Gerardi was asked about whether or not we could approve any personnel appointments in light of the City putting a freeze on any new-hires. Gerardi reported that he had emailed Tom Bruce at City Hall regarding how to handle the positions on tonight’s agenda, while explaining the services provided by this staff and the federal mandates requiring these services. He also explained that these appointments are to replace staff that had resigned and are not new positions. Gerardi also pointed out that if these positions go unfilled, students who are suspended for more than ten days will have to be sent out-of-district resulting in higher costs. Unfortunately, based on the advice of the City Solicitor and based on RIGL, Bruce would not authorize these hirings. Gerardi also asked him about our grant funds that must be expended by a certain date and how they have been earmarked but hasn’t received an answer yet. He also told him about 27 non-renewals/terminations that are on the agenda to be rescinded tonight and that they are current employees whom we will have to pay unemployment to if they are not rehired prior to the end of the school year. The answer he got was that **all new employees** are not authorized based upon the requirements of RIGL 16-9-1. Mr. Dubois asked if the WSC could wait to approve these positions until they got a clear answer. Gerardi explained that if we have a student hearing where a student needs an alternative placement, we will have to send them out of district at a much higher cost. It was Atty. Ackerman’s opinion that the rescissions pertain to the next fiscal year and didn’t see a problem with re-hiring those people. Mrs. Carole Lerner elaborated on the need for the FOCUSS and MATS Program instructors, noting that one is for our 11th Day Program and is mandated. “Out of district placements average \$50,000 per year per

student. All the students in the FOCUSS program would not have Math and would have to be out-sourced," she said. "This is a situation where we are shooting ourselves in the foot if we don't fill the positions. If the City leaders are going to take over the school department's finances, they better darn well know what they are doing!" said Mrs. Nadeau. Mrs. Majewski asked about the elementary guidance position and said she thought we eliminated the elementary guidance counselors. Dr. Gerardi explained that it had been discussed, but it didn't end up happening. Mrs. Filomeno explained that the elementary guidance counselors have always been under Title I and we weren't sure there was going to be enough money in Title I next year for them. However, the new BEP has requirements for comprehensive guidance and there will be funds available for the 2010-2011 school year. Mrs. Majewski asked about the rehire of library media specialists and Dr. Gerardi said that they are required positions.

**Motion to approve all personnel appointments on tonight's agenda: L. Majewski
2nd: E. Nadeau (Unanimously Approved)**

2) Purchases/Transfers Over \$2,000:

- **NCS Pearson for professional development out of Title II Grant: \$2,600**

Mrs. Majewski asked what site it is for and what type of professional development it is. Siobhan Ryan explained that the monies would be used to train people on the assessment program that Mike Ferry has at the WACTC.

- **Rebecca Schmitt – ELO Grant Stipend: \$3,000 ELO Grant**

Mrs. Majewski questioned what this was for. Mrs. Ryan explained that Mrs. Schmitt is a Science teacher at the WHS who started working with a particular student, involving him in art at RiverzEdge. She developed a year-long model program for Extended Learning Opportunities that will be part of the ELO Grant which will enable students to earn credits for activities they participate in outside of school.

3) Field Trip/Conference Requests: FBLA Trip to Nashville, TN from the WHS

Mrs. Majewski asked about the number of chaperones and whether or not they are 12-month employees. "Are they being paid to chaperone this trip?" she asked. Mr. Garceau understood that the chaperones are school-year staff and will not be paid.

**Motion to approve exempted purchases and field trip request: L. Majewski
2nd: E. Nadeau (Unanimously Approved)**

END OF CONSENT AGENDA

COMMITTEE REPORTS: Mrs. Forcier announced the upcoming RI Fair Funding Formula Advocacy Day on May 11th at the State House and urged everyone to show their support. Mrs. Majewski announced that the Curriculum Committee will be meeting next Tuesday.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS:

1. Approval of ELO Policy P3-3.6 – 2nd Passage – V. Phongsavanh, R. Gerardi

Ms. Phongsavanh noted revisions that were made since 1st Passage of the ELO Policy. Others that she noted at the meeting were: 1) instead of Carnegie Units, the policy will read Carnegie "**credits**"; 2) instead of Extended Learning Opportunities, it will read "**Expanded**" Learning Opportunities; and 3) on Page 2, under the regulations and procedures for implementation, the bullet for "**Reasonable limits on the number of approved extended learning opportunities that can be administered each school year – school-wide and per student**" has been removed. Mrs. Linda Filomeno explained how the ELO Grant would pay for stipends that might be needed for teachers. She explained that this is a collaborative program between the teachers, RI Dept. of Education, the community, and students.

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

2nd: E. Nadeau
APPROVED.

CONFERENCES: *(By unanimous consent, this item was taken out of order.)*

NECAP Presentation: Postponed to May 12th, per Dr. Gerardi.

Woonsocket Prevention Coalition Proposal for Post Prom Graduation Party- C. Frisk

Mr. Victor Ramos, Asst. Executive Director of the Woonsocket Prevention Coalition, asked for permission to hold a post-graduation party in the WHS gymnasium again this year. Ramos explained the purpose of the event and provided the details. He noted that it has been very successful in the past.

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

2nd: E. Nadeau
APPROVED

NEW BUSINESS:

1. Discussion of After School Child Care Program and Fees – R. Gerardi

Dr. Gerardi received a letter from the RI Commissioner of Education regarding before- and after-school child care programs. The letter identifies that RIDE interprets the law as approving the LEA as having the right to run such programs. The Commissioner noted that any state requirements regarding such programs must be followed. However, Dr. Gerardi noted that at this time and with our financial considerations, he's not confident that we will be able to hire the staff needed for the program even though it would likely generate revenue. He would like to continue investigating this program and report back at a future meeting if he determines that we would be able to implement it.

2. Update of FY10 Budget Audit Report – R. Gerardi/S. Busby

Dr. Gerardi reported that he and Mrs. Busby have not yet signed the engagement representation letter because as he stated at the City Council meeting, we do not agree with all of the findings and do not feel that enough adjustments have been made from the April 20th draft to the April 26th draft. He and Mrs. Busby disagree with the audit report's conclusion that we will end the year with a \$3.5 million deficit and are working through the corrective action process to determine where we stand.

4. Resolution of Opposition of BILL 2010H- 7581 School/Teacher Arbitration- R. Gerardi

Dr. Gerardi explained that Councilman Ward has urged the school committee to vote on this resolution since the City Council has already voted on a similar resolution. He asked that the school committee vote to approve this resolution.

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

2nd: L. Majewski
APPROVED

SUPERINTENDENT'S REPORT: Dr. Gerardi

Dr. Gerardi said he is very concerned about the financial health of our city and schools. He is hopeful that the actions that we are taking will resolve these problems so that we can focus the academic success of the children of the city of Woonsocket

Motion to receive and place on file: E. Nadeau

2nd: M. Dubois/V. Phongsavanh
(Unanimously Approved)

SCHOOL COMMITTEE GOOD & WELFARE:

E. Nadeau: She supported the letter requesting the investigation, noting that she didn't find out until tonight that the school department is owed \$1.2 million in federal stimulus funds. "I will fight for every dollar that is owed to us— especially when we have had to cut all day kindergarten and music, sports and extracurricular activities!" she said.

V. Phongsavanh: She also supported that letter because she feels we need to have a system of checks and balances. "It's only fair that the WED gets a fair audit and funds that it's due."

M. Dubois: In regards to approving the letter to Mr. Hoyle and Mr. Deckett, he noted that this request was discussed at length – not for just 30 minutes during open session tonight. “It’s something we have known for a while and have tried to get resolved for some time. It’s nothing we have just rushed to judgment on. The City leaders point their fingers at us every chance they get and we aren’t going to just sit back and take it anymore! We did our homework before voting on this tonight.”

L. Majewski: Noted that they have made some very difficult cuts and have tried to be good stewards of the money that is appropriated to us. “We can only manage the money that we receive. I see the letter as a first step and second step. I’m not against the letter,” she said. Majewski asked if Dr. Gerardi has gotten a response from the private schools regarding bussing and our school calendar for next year. Dr. Gerardi told her that the letter has been sent with no response. She asked that another letter be sent. Majewski stated that she has received phone calls from parents about their senior having a non-sufficient portfolio. She has been requesting for three years that parents be notified earlier than April of their child’s senior year if their portfolio is non-sufficient. Majewski said she will be addressing this issue at her Curriculum Committee meeting next Tuesday and she would like the policy reviewed on the PBGRs and the appeals process. “On October 1, 2009, 362 seniors were enrolled at the WHS. We are graduating 207. What happened to the rest of them? Did they drop out? Transfer? Fail?”

A Forcier: Said that everyone needs to come together to focus on getting an equitable fair funding formula passed in RI. “It’s our only hope.” She hopes to see City Council members at the upcoming rally on May 11th, as well as parents and others. “As Atty. Robinson said earlier, we are taxed a lot harder to give our children less.”

Motion to adjourn at 9:50 p.m.: A. Forcier

2nd: E. Nadeau (Unanimously Approved)

Respectfully submitted,

Nancy G. Belisle, WSC Recording Secretary