

MINUTES
WOONSOCKET SCHOOL COMMITTEE
WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 16, 2011
7:00 PM – OPEN SESSION
Woonsocket Middle School @ Hamlet
60 Florence Drive, Woonsocket, RI 02895

Call to Order by Mr. Dubois.
Moment of Silence
Pledge of Allegiance

Roll Call:	Marc Dubois, Chairman	Present
	Eleanor Nadeau, Vice Chairwoman	Absent
	Linda Majewski	Present
	Anita McGuire-Forcier	Present
	Vimala Phongsavanh	Present

Dr. Gerardi and Mrs. Nadeau were attending a conference and were not present. Marc Garceau ran the meeting in Dr. Gerardi's absence.

PUBLIC GOOD & WELFARE:

Melissa Mello, 415 Blackstone Street, Woonsocket: Her child is in an inclusion classroom this year and Mello spoke about the impact that this has had on him. "He has made the most improvement that he has ever had. I don't want to see inclusion classrooms cut. If he goes back to an intensive resource classroom, I'm worried about what will happen. He used to cry every day when he was in the intensive classroom. This is the first year I have had hope for my son and his future." It angers Mello as a taxpayer that this program model might be cut and she feels that it makes our city look bad. "I wouldn't recommend anyone with a special needs child to come to Woonsocket if this service is cut." Mrs. Majewski asked how old her child is. Mello told her that he's 8 years old and in a Grade 2/3 split. Majewski explained that some splits are being eliminated, but not inclusion classrooms. Mr. Garceau added that they actually want to have more inclusion classrooms. "We want to eliminate some of the splits," he confirmed. Mello asked how they plan on making that happen while cutting positions. Garceau explained that we have to do it within the budget constraints that we have. Mello said that her son didn't get his occupational therapy services for five months because everyone they hired quit. She could have sued, but didn't because she knows they will be made up. "How do you think I feel? My son didn't get what he deserved even though it was in his IEP," she said. "I understand your frustration. We have to make some very difficult choices," said Garceau. Mello feels that the school department is giving Woonsocket a bad name. She doesn't want to see her son back at Bradley Hospital. "He's happy to go to school now," she said. Garceau told her he won't be denied an inclusion model next year. Federal law guarantees that your son will receive his services. Mello still feels there are other areas that cuts can be made instead of special education. Garceau explained that these cuts aren't set in stone yet and that enrollment numbers change. Mrs. Majewski added that she sits on the SELAC and has worked with special needs kids for years. They voted to not have Occupational Therapists, Physical Therapists and Speech Therapists get layoff notices because these positions are very hard to fill.

Sue Trinque, Rathbun Street, Woonsocket: Said she was former chairperson of the Social Street School Improvement Team and has substituted since she retired. She wanted to know who calls her to substitute so early in the morning or in the evening the night before. That is when she met Debbie Mitchell, who Trinque said is a person who cares about the lives of children. "If a teacher is absent for more than one day, she puts the same substitute in that classroom. That is very important for our children. She also tries to put the same subs in the same buildings. Unfortunately, she no longer has the power to do this because of AESOP." Trinque spoke about the loss of human contact that has been taken over by this faceless computer program. She spoke about the drawbacks of this program, which asks substitutes to fill out an evaluation form and keeps reminding you to do so if you don't. Trinque also has to keep checking the computer or by telephone to find out if she can work the next day. She has better things to do with her time. "This program doesn't care if it places a different sub in a classroom than who was in there the day before. Contracts are made to be broken," she said. Mrs. Majewski asked Mrs. Trinque for a copy of her comments tonight. She will forward them to the Director of Technology. Mrs. Busby said that Debbie Mitchell is the expert for AESOP and she is still working out the kinks in the program. She told Trinque to contact her about her concerns.

RECOGNITIONS & ANNOUNCEMENTS: Dr. Robert Gerardi

Mr. Garceau read Dr. Gerardi's notes as follows: Gerardi congratulated the Woonsocket Area Career and Technical automotive students Chris Cote, Frankie Soto, John Blain and John Casey for their recent competition at the Ocean State Automotive Technology held in Warwick. Chris Cote and John Casey placed third as a team, in the overall competition and John Casey had the highest written score out of all the competitors. Gerardi congratulated the District Spelling Bee Winner – Jaren Briere, Grade 6 from Woonsocket Middle School- Hamlet, and District Runner-up William Flores, Grade 8 Woonsocket Middle School – Hamlet. Both students were outstanding and showed great sportsmanship to each other. There were 16 district finalists from all the Elementary Schools and Middle Schools combined. The Winner will be competing in the Statewide Spelling Bee to be held on Saturday, March 12th at 10:00am at the Lincoln Middle School on 152 Jenckes Hill Road in Lincoln, RI. He wished Jaren good luck. Gerardi also congratulated Mrs. Papino's Family & Consumer Science class at Woonsocket Middle School for collecting hats, mittens and scarves for those in need throughout the city as a part of their community service project. This is part of the Warm Hearts, Warm Hands project which is now in its 15th year. The items will be distributed to those in need at Because He lives Soup Kitchen and the homeless shelter located on Sayles Street in Woonsocket. Gerardi thanked everyone who participated. Dr. Gerardi reminded everyone that Commissioner Gist will be visiting Bernon Heights on March 3rd and there will be a Community Forum at the Woonsocket Middle School at Hamlet at 6:30pm. The public is invited and he hopes to have a great turnout. Gerardi announced that there will be a PAC meeting tomorrow night from 6:30pm 8:30pm at Woonsocket Middle School – Hamlet Building.

Motion to receive and place on file: L. Majewski

2nd: M. Dubois (Unanimously Approved)

APPROVAL OF MINUTES: February 9, 2011 CLOSED SESSION

Motion to approve: V. Phongsavanh

2nd: L. Majewski (Unanimously Approved)

CONSENT AGENDA:

Motion to approve Consent Agenda as submitted: A. Forcier

2nd: M. Dubois (Unanimously Approved)

CONSENT AGENDA:

1. Personnel Actions – Removed by E. Nadeau

Certified Appointments/
Non-Certified Appointments
Non-Renewals

2. Purchases/Transfers Over \$2,000

Apple Computers/Computers/Sp. Ed, Elem/Local, ARRA, IDEA Grant
CPO Science/Ed. Supplies/WHS/Local
Dell Computers/Computer Equipment/WHS, Sp. Ed/Local, ARRA, IDEA Grant
Judith Keeley/Consultant/Elem. Math/Title I, ARRA
Keystone Information Systems, Inc./Financial Software/Bus. Office/Local
Nasco/Ed. Supplies/Grants & Curriculum/title II Grant
Tech Depot/Printers/WMS, Spec. Ed./Local, ARRA, IDEA Grant

3. Field Trip/Conference Requests:

Freshman Transition Leadership Institute, Philadelphia, PA/WHS/Grant Funded (**removed**)

END OF CONSENT AGENDA

COMMUNICATIONS: Mrs. Majewski said she submitted a letter this week about concerns she had about subcommittee appointments. She has been working with Chairman Dubois and other members involved to come to a resolution.

COMMITTEE REPORTS: Mrs. Majewski announced that the Curriculum Committee will meet on February 28th at 3:30 p.m. They are continuing to look at performance-based graduation requirements and Carnegie units for the districts. The PAC will meet tomorrow night and everyone is invited to attend. SELAC will meet on April 4th at 6:30 pm at Pothier Elementary. Ms. Phongsavanh announced a Health and Wellness Committee meeting at the WMS

Hamlet Building on March 16th. She encouraged everyone to attend. The Charter Review Commission will be meeting next Thursday and she has been appointed to that subcommittee. Mrs. Forcier said that she and Ms. Phongsavanh sit on the Capital Building Committee. She reported that there's a company that works to find grants for districts to help them fix things that are needed in the district to save money. Forcier spoke about the grant and noted that there's a final cost of \$3 million to us that will need to be approved by the City Council, the Mayor and the WSC. "It's a once in a lifetime opportunity. They claim they can save us over \$300,000 a year and that would pay the \$3 million back. The date of the workshop will be announced as soon as they get one," said Forcier.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS:**1. Discussion of FY12 Budget – PUBLIC FORUM**

John McLaughlin, So. Main Street, Woonsocket (Retired Teacher): Under the Freedom of Information Act, he wants to know the salaries of the administrators in the district – not the names, just the salaries. He spoke to Ms. Mello's comments and suggested the WSC make cuts to things that won't affect adults teaching children—someone who isn't in front of kids. He spoke about the LEAs as a possible area to cut. As far as cuts to the Capital Improvement budget, he said, "If I said to you, you can buy my house in Martha's Vineyard for \$200,000 and I said to you that you can get \$160,000 of that back next year—who wouldn't buy it? I don't think we should cut the \$200,000 from the capital improvement line." He also doesn't think cutting five special education teachers is a good priority. He thinks we should look elsewhere and hopes that the City Council doesn't do away with the school committee and put people in who will run the school department like a business. "We need people who care about children—not just about saving money." McLaughlin spoke about the 6-period day vs. the 7-period hybrid schedule. He thinks that the 7-period hybrid would be a much better way to go. "It's money well-spent because the curriculum will be more superior." Mr. Dubois said the budget cuts tonight will only do away with the block schedule—not decide on the 6- or 7-period day schedule.

Mark Lebrun, Woonsocket Elementary Teacher and Resident: Lebrun read a letter from Michelle Frost, the mother of one of his students. Her son is in the second grade inclusion classroom and she heard that they will be doing away with them. Her son is a high performer and was specially chosen to be a model student in an inclusion classroom. She wonders how it will impact other students in his classroom with IEPs. She volunteers in his classroom and noticed that these students really listen more to their peers than to their teachers sometimes. She feels that the inclusion setting helps develop leadership skills in the model students. They spend extra time helping others and it forms a comradeship she hasn't seen before. The parent also has a 5th Grader with special needs and has seen how it works from both sides. Mr. Garceau stressed that there's no plan to eliminate inclusion classrooms. "We are committed to having more inclusion classrooms where possible. There will always be some self-contained classrooms, but we also feel that the least-restrictive environment is the best thing for the students. "So we will see inclusion classrooms at the same level next year that we see this year?" asked Lebrun. "No, not necessarily. We want to eliminate the splits, if possible," answered Garceau and explained why. "That's great. What happens when we have an inclusion classroom next year? Will it be a regular education teacher and a special education teacher in the classroom? Will it be a teacher with a special education background and a regular education background in that classroom all day long?" asked Lebrun. Garceau said that the particulars are still being worked out by Human Resources. "It's not going to be half-day for each teacher—1/2 day special education and 1/2 day regular education," said Garceau. Mr. Lebrun implored the WSC not to mess with the inclusion model we have now too much and spoke highly of whoever sets up the inclusion classrooms and the students that are selected to be model students in those rooms.

Tom Lambert, Local 1137 President: He expressed his concerns about the cuts to his members and being informed the day of the meeting last week being unacceptable. "We made a lot of concessions in the contract. I read the auditor's report and found there was a discrepancy in the square footage they were using. The Facilities Director found that there was a discrepancy of 150,000 square feet." Lambert read a letter to the superintendent about this and he sat down with Mr. Sweeney of the auditors. "They said it doesn't matter. That's a lot of square footage! As far as Barry Field goes, I can tell you right now that the City won't maintain it because they don't even take care of the fields they have now. Some of the teams that play on them take care of them. I don't know if the subcommittee knows about this. I have information from the Tax Assessor's Office regarding the accurate square footage. It was said at the last meeting that the City can plow—they can't even plow the streets! Barry Field was deeded to the Education Department—not the City. People that rent our facilities are amazed at how clean they are and won't rent them if they are dirty and you won't have any revenue. I don't know if the Finance Subcommittee knew all this when making the recommendations for cuts. We have taken cuts since 2003. We are at the bare minimum now. To cut 5 more positions and Barry Field is unacceptable," said Lambert. Mrs. Forcier said she heard about the square footage discrepancy and checked it out at City Hall. She was also told that they don't include closets, basements, attics—so even though the numbers were less, we shouldn't be counting those things. "How do we arrive at the correct numbers?" she asked. Mr. Lambert noted that just the new additions alone don't have closets in them. "Some have

offices. We still have to clean basements. At Barry Field, they didn't even include the grounds!" said Lambert. Forcier asked about the cuts for Barry Field. "The City doesn't have the manpower to do that. I have to wait for Dr. Gerardi to come back to speak to him," she said. "Even if you take out the closets and basements, we are still looking at over 125,000 square feet," Lambert pointed out. "Right now, it's he said—she said," Forcier noted. "We have worked with the administration when it filled positions with subs instead of posting the positions—not one position, multiple positions," said Lambert. Forcier maintained that she did try to get the right numbers and still doesn't have the accurate answer.

John Burns, RI Council 94, Resident at 88 Mill Street, Woonsocket: Reported that they were given this notice of cuts last week before the meeting and they didn't have a chance to dispute it. "Has anyone thought of getting someone with a measuring tape? Cleanliness in schools is part of a child's education also. That's important. We keep getting positions cut and making concessions and five years from now you will hear how the custodians aren't cleaning the buildings properly, but will have forgotten how all these cuts were made." He spoke about consolidation and how people keep bringing it up, but no one has anything on paper. "Tim Duffy found that consolidation actually costs more money. It's a great political buzz word, but it costs more money," said Forcier. Burns mentioned the statewide bussing program and how it ended up costing us more money.

Lynne Renaud, Morris Street, Inclusion Classroom Teacher: She begged the WSC not to change the way inclusion classrooms are set up right now and explained why she felt that way. She spoke about how well the special needs students do in them and making progress.

Jennifer Maiello, WHS Theatre Arts Teacher: Spoke regarding the potential change in the high school schedule, saying, "We are all here to raise test scores and the graduation rate. The kids are struggling now with four classes and we are going to take that and change it to a 6- or 7-period day? Kids at the high school work afterschool to help their families. With six or seven periods, there is a huge risk with electives. Many kids who are at risk, come to school for electives. If you go to 6 or 7 periods, in classes like mine, by the time the kids change and are ready to learn, they will have 20 minutes of instructional time left. We don't see how it will help student grades, test scores or the graduation rate."

2. Approval of FY12 Budget-2nd Passage: M. Garceau/S. Busby

Mrs. Forcier said she would be voting "no" on a decrease in Capital Improvements. She had questions about the LEAs, saying that the audit said we didn't need them. "If principals had to be in IEP meetings during the day, they would be in meetings half of the week," she said, asking if there are any other alternatives. Mr. Garceau said that principals don't have to attend every IEP meeting. "We currently have nine LEAs and Dr. Gerardi's decision is that one position will be lost through attrition because an LEA at the elementary level is retiring and won't be replaced," said Garceau. He thinks there was a misunderstanding that the six positions that will be cut will all be from the high school and that's not necessarily the case. "It's impossible to say how many positions will end up being cut. We are doing the best we can to maximize the classrooms that we have," said Garceau. Mrs. Forcier asked about a social workers being cut from the high school. Mrs. Busby told that this cut has been removed. Forcier was getting nervous because she thought all the positions being cut were coming from the high school. Garceau added that not all the special education positions being cut are from the high school either. Ms. Phongsavanh asked about the elimination of a social worker last week. Mrs. Busby explained that they were able to add it back in with the funds that were found last week. "There was a difference of \$77,000 after some other positions were put back (Kindergarten TAs and 3 utility workers). Plus, it's Medicaid reimbursable," said Busby. Mr. Dubois thanked everyone for speaking tonight and said that they will take their comments into consideration. "It was a long hard process to come up with these cuts. These cuts are based on estimates and balancing the budget is always a moving target because the numbers will change. If we get more funds, we will be glad to restore these positions. We tried to spread the cuts out to all departments," said Dubois. Mrs. Majewski reviewed what Mrs. Busby had reported to them last week as far as projected revenue and expenses. "In 2007, our state aid total was \$47,616 million. Currently, it's \$45 million. We are still looking at a \$2 million shortfall from the state. We know the custodians have made many concessions and see the hard work that they do. It doesn't go unnoticed," said Majewski. She is not in support of making these cuts, but they have no other choice. "Last year the City sued us for not staying within our budget and I don't want to see it happen again this year," she said. "Of the LEAs in the district, how many are at the high school?" asked Mrs. Forcier. Mr. Garceau told her there are four. Forcier pointed out that there are five guidance counselors at the high school for 1700 students and questioned the LEA/special education student ratio versus guidance counselor to students. "It doesn't make sense to me. It's hard to support LEAs when you see these numbers," said Forcier. Garceau said that the administration is looking at this situation. He doesn't disagree that it needs to be investigated.

Motion to approve the FY12 Budget (2nd Passage): M. Dubois	2nd: V. Phongsavanh
Amend to remove Capital Improvements from the vote: A. Forcier	
ROLL CALL VOTE ON AMENDED MOTION: 4 yes	APPROVED

Motion to eliminate \$200,000 from the Capital Improvements line item: L. Majewski
2nd: M. Dubois
APPROVED **Roll Call Vote: 3 yes – 1 no (AF)**

NEW BUSINESS:

1. Discussion of Non-Union February Vacation Days – A. Forcier

Mrs. Forcier reported that the district will be closing all of its buildings during February vacation next week to save \$17,000 a day in utilities. She asked that the non-union employees use vacation days during the shutdown, which amounts to four days because Monday is a paid holiday for all 12-month employees. Mr. Dubois has no idea we were saving that much money a day by shutting down all the buildings. "Nobody likes to pay employees to stay home, but it makes much more sense financially to shut the buildings down. For the non-union workers, especially Dr. Gerardi, I know he is very dedicated and there's a lot of work that can be done at home. He is always on call. I don't think that it's fair that they be forced to use vacation time because we have decided to shut down the buildings," said Mr. Dubois. Mrs. Majewski said that when they voted on the shutdowns, it was not mentioned about people having to use vacation time. It's two days before vacation and she will not be supporting it. Mrs. Forcier felt that it's reasonable for them to use vacation time. "For Dr. Gerardi, he makes \$75 an hour and has six weeks of vacation time. Most companies that shut down force people to take vacation days or go without pay," said Forcier. Mrs. Busby felt that whatever they do, most directors will probably be working from home anyway because they have deadlines to meet. Mr. Dubois said that the WED has very, very dedicated employees. "They work nights and weekends and they are on salary. I don't think it's fair to do it two days before the shutdown. Because of the snow cancellation of the WSC meetings, I don't think it's fair to do it now. It doesn't enhance the good working relationship we have. With the technology we have, I know they will be working from home," said Dubois.

Motion to approve having all non-union, 12-month employees use vacation days during the February vacation week shutdown: A. Forcier
2nd: V. Phongsavanh
NO MAJORITY. MOTION FAILS **Roll Call Vote: 2 no (MD/LM) – 2 yes (AF/VP)**

SUPERINTENDENT'S REPORT: NONE

SCHOOL COMMITTEE GOOD & WELFARE:

V. Phongsavanh: Introduced a favorite quote: "We are faced with great opportunities disguised by impossible situations". She said that this is a time where there becomes a great opportunity while being faced with impossible circumstances. "We need to be more creative than we have ever been. We have to think about things differently. We need to change as a city how we look and think about education. It's tough having to sit here listening to everyone plead for what they believe is right and what we believe is right. There's not much we can do about it. Our hands are tied." Said that she was at a Healthy Snacks Cook-Off this past Saturday at the middle school and it was fun. Congratulated a student on his recipe. Apologized for having to make the cuts they made tonight.

M. Dubois: He received many phone calls this week about the cuts discussed last week and appreciates the input. When he asked where we should get the money, no one had an answer. "There wasn't one specific area targeted. Every year we go through this." He congratulated Carnell Henderson for being named Coach of the Year. Dubois had a chance to judge the Spelling Bee and thanked Donna Blais and Linda Filomeno for their hard work on this event. "It was very intense and went 25 rounds." He thanked Commissioner Gist and Governor Chafee for choosing Globe Park School out of all the schools in the state to pick from to visit. "The students looked great in their uniforms and it was great to hear all the positive comments." It made him proud to be associated with this district.

L. Majewski: She congratulated Globe Park on their gains in the NECAP testing. She is glad that the Commissioner held off on her three-tiered diploma system and is giving districts more time to put supports into place. She acknowledged that some good points were brought up about the 6- and 7-period day schedules. "No matter what schedule you choose, there are pros and cons to both. I don't think there's a perfect schedule. There will be challenges for students carrying seven classes, but it will help prepare them for college. It will help them with organizational skills and managing their time." She spoke about the budgeting process being flawed in her opinion. "What we put together tonight is a best estimate." She is glad we didn't layoff OTs, PTs and speech pathologists because they are hard positions to fill. She thanked Henry Trudeau for his due diligence in notifying the superintendent of the roof problems, saying that her hat is always off to the custodians. "I hope they don't take these

cuts personally.” Majewski thanked everyone for coming and mentioned that Mrs. Nadeau and Dr. Gerardi are both at a conference tonight.

A. Forcier: Spoke about the comments regarding the inclusion classrooms and recalled that when they were first presented with this idea, parents were so against it. “It’s a total switch tonight. Now everyone loves it. We need to be open-minded. The same old thing isn’t working. We have been doing block scheduling for a while now and it’s not working. I’m amazed to hear the stories about inclusion classrooms. It’s wonderful!” She congratulated Globe Park on their test scores, adding that “if they can do it, our other schools can do it”. She congratulated the students at the WACTC on their hard work and wins. Congratulated Carnell Henderson, saying that it didn’t surprise her that he was named Coach of the Year. Forcier reported that Senator Tassoni is working at the State House on an anti-bullying policy and she is working with him to put teeth into the bullying laws. She congratulated him and is glad someone is trying to make a difference. Forcier asked about “Race to the Top”, saying that we accepted it. “Our goals are to increase graduation rates and to implement the new teacher evaluation system.” She asked Mr. Garceau about a pilot of the new evaluation system in Citizens’ Elementary. He noted that we are piloting the AFT version right now. There are two versions. Forcier was very happy about that. She asked for statistics at the next meeting on Kindergarten attendance because she has heard that attendance is down since we went to half-day kindergarten. Mr. Garceau said that they get a report at the end of every month from Tom Connors and aren’t seeing any changes.

Mr. Dubois reminded everyone that the next meeting is on March 9th at 7 p.m.

Motion to adjourn at 9:00 p.m.: A. Forcier

2nd: L. Majewski (Unanimously Approved)

Respectfully submitted,

Nancy G. Belisle, WSC Recording Secretary