

MINUTES
WOONSOCKET SCHOOL COMMITTEE
WEDNESDAY, JUNE 26, 2013
7:00 PM – OPEN SESSION
Woonsocket Middle School @ Hamlet
60 Florence Drive, Woonsocket, RI 02895

Call to Order by Vimala Phongsavanh.
Moment of Silence
Pledge of Allegiance

Roll Call:	Vimala Phongsavanh, Chairwoman	Present
	Eleanor Nadeau, Vice-Chairwoman	Present
	John Donlon	Present
	Anita McGuire-Forcier	Present
	Christopher Roberts	Present

Ms. Phongsavanh reported out that the WSC had voted in Closed Session to approve the tentative agreements for both the teachers and the paraprofessionals.

PUBLIC GOOD & WELFARE:

Tony Cosentino, WHS Teacher: Said that he strongly opposes the proposal on tonight's agenda to outsource the FATE and FOCUSS programs, adding that when these programs were created, they saw an incredible reduction in the number of out-of-district placements. They are wondering why 40 kids are going to be outsourced. According to the Special Education Department review that's on tonight's agenda, they found that there were some concerns that these students provide a safety concern in the school. Mr. Cosentino disputed that theory, referring to school law regarding educating students in the least restrictive environment. He maintained that if these students are outsourced, we would be in violation of this law. "We are potentially creating a very serious situation because these students won't have the supports they need. We also need an attendance policy so we can go to court to compel students to go to class," he said. He highlighted points that make a case for not outsourcing to private enterprises and posed questions that need to be asked, such as "What is the length of time for these contracts?" and "What is the line-by-line cost comparison?", "What is the graduation rate from these programs?", "How will the WED be billed for non-attendees?" He maintained that the last few years, the WED has fought hard to bring these students back to the school system to decrease the cost of out-of-district placements. He and the program teachers feel that the costs of outsourcing will only increase over time.

Christine Brennan, Social Worker, FATE & FOCUSS Programs: She has worked for the WED for 22 years. Having worked in the elementary schools, she feels that this type of student is continuing to come to the high school level because they come from troubled and traumatic environments. She remembered one boy who was throwing desks in elementary school. He is now at the high school and there is a great difference in his behavior since he has been in the program. "He will come to me and say he's having a problem before he acts out. These students require small classrooms. I am right around the corner and available to them while they are there. We prevent a great amount of issues in the high school. We had 8 kids graduate last year from our programs. Without these programs, these kids will drop out. If you think there are problems in the high school now, I'd hate to think about what will happen without these programs."

Stacey (FATE Program Graduate): She graduated this year and said she joined the program halfway through her second year at the high school. She only managed to graduate because of this program and has matured so much. Now she is going on to college.

Stacey's dad: He stated that his daughter was going down the wrong path and this program help get her back on the road again. He doesn't think that outsourcing is the right thing to do. "They will be for-profit and are they really going to care about our kids?" he asked.

Jeff Partington, WTG President: Thanked the WSC for approving their contracts tonight. Now that we've hit the bottom, he looks forward to only going up from here on out.

RECOGNITIONS & ANNOUNCEMENTS: Dr. Giovanna Donoyan, Superintendent

Dr. Donoyan thanked the entire school committee for all the work they have done this last year. She thanked everyone for their commitment and recognized the students, parents, and all those who continue to value education.

She recognized the WSC for always putting the children first during these trying times and wished everyone a restful, safe and happy summer. She encouraged everyone to read books or maybe learn a new language.

NEW BUSINESS: (taken out of order by unanimous consent)

1. Presentation of the RI Philharmonic – R. Ackerman, G. Donoyan

Dr. Donoyan recognized Atty. Richard Ackerman for being an instrumental part of the WED and school committee for the past 40+ years. "He is leaving a legacy by donating the gift of music through the RI Philharmonic," announced Donoyan. She presented him with a certificate commemorating his donation. A representative from the RI Philharmonic described the "Listen Up" program at the elementary level, which includes listening to music for five minutes every day for five days in a row of each piece. It's an introduction to music and increases the students' love of music. This will take place at all six elementary schools for the next five years thanks to Atty. Ackerman's generous donation. They want to pilot the program at one school for a few months first, and then expand it to all of them. Atty. Ackerman said he decided a few months ago to step aside after 42 years with the WED, adding that he has had a great relationship with them through good times and bad times. He learned about this program through a former classmate of his and found out about it. He thought it would be a wonderful thing to provide to the kids in Woonsocket and remembers the impassioned pleas of students coming before the WSC begging not to have their music programs cut. Ackerman said he is going to enjoy his retirement thinking about all the kids who will enjoy this music for the next five years.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES:

- **May 22, 2013 Open/Closed Minutes** – Motion to approve: C. Roberts 2nd: A. McGuire-Forcier
Roll Call Vote: 5 yes (Approved)
- **May 30, 2013 Open Minutes-** Motion to approve: V. Phongsavanh 2nd: J. Donlon
Roll Call Vote: 5 yes (Approved)
- **June 5, 2013 Open Minutes-** Motion to approve: J. Donlon 2nd: C. Roberts
Roll Call Vote: 4 yes – 1 Abstain (VP) Approved

CONSENT AGENDA:

Motion to approve Consent Agenda: C. Roberts 2nd: A. McGuire-Forcier (Unan. Approved)

COMMUNICATIONS: None

COMMITTEE REPORTS: Ms. Phongsavanh announced that the Policy Committee met and they did discuss the Attendance Policy. That group is working hard to develop a policy before the start of the next school year.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS:

1. Discussion of Kids Klub Contract – J. Spagna

Mr. Spagna reported that we are currently under a contract dated 2009. He met with the president and agreed that the funding is outdated. He did some research and found that we are way below the other districts in the revenue we are receiving from Kids Klub. "It's a work in progress," he said. Some districts gave him copies of their contracts to look at. He would like some more time with this to gather more information before making a recommendation. "Is this an expired contract?" asked Mr. Roberts. Spagna explained that the contract has just been rolled over from year to year. There's no end date. He doesn't believe there is wording in the contract where we have to give them notice about terminating our contract with them. Mr. Donlon thanked Spagna for coming up with these figures for them and asked if Kids Klub pays rental fees for use of the park. "They pay \$1,000 for the summer; \$500 per month," he said. Mrs. McGuire-Forcier would like to go out to bid as soon as possible because we are losing a lot of revenue from this. "You found no evidence of a proposed contract after 2009?" asked Mrs. Nadeau. "No. Even the president of Kids Klub couldn't either," Spagna said. "We did discuss rate increases when Dr. Gerardi was here, but I don't know how this fell through the cracks. They are for-profit and we are basically doing a give-away program here," said Nadeau. Ms. Phongsavanh thanked Spagna for looking into this and said there seems to be an inequity here.

2. Discussion/Vote to Recall Teachers on Layoff – G. Donoyan, K. Lombardo

Mrs. Lombardo reviewed the report provided in the WSC packet, adding that they planned for the worst-case scenario as far as layoffs were concerned. Initially, 42 people were non-renewed or dismissed. Then an additional 18 were non-renewed or dismissed, bringing the total to 60. Of the 60, one person quit and 7 won't be returning from leaves of absence, leaving 52. On 5/30/13, 28 teachers were recalled. A job fair was held on 6/13/13 and 16 teachers are being recalled into vacant positions. We are recalling 3 teachers laid off in 2012 and 2011 and had recall rights for a total of 19 recalls. There are 8 people still on non-renewal status, one of whom will be recalled when he finishes his required credits to have his emergency certification renewed. Of the remaining 7 teachers, 2 are non-tenured and will not be recalled. The other 5 are still on the recall list until a position for which they hold the appropriate certification becomes available. Tonight, she is asking for the recall of 19 people. Dr. Donoyan said that this information is just an FYI. "You have already approved the 19 recalls under the Consent Agenda. There are 8 people still on non-renewal status," she added.

NEW BUSINESS:

2. Discussion/Vote on Collective Bargaining – V. Phongsavanh

Since this vote was taken in Closed Session tonight and reported out at the beginning of Open Session, the committee agreed to withdraw this agenda item.

3. Discussion/Vote to Post for an Assistant Principal Position – G. Donoyan

Dr. Donoyan requested permission to post the position for a 10-month Assistant Principal at the Woonsocket Middle School.

Motion to approve: A. McGuire-Forcier	2nd: J. Donlon
Roll Call Vote: 5 yes	APPROVED.

4. Update on Bid Awards – J. Spagna

Spagna reported that on Monday, the Budget Commission approved three capital projects that went out to bid. He explained that they went to the Budget Commission first because of a time issue in order to get the work done before September. The projects approved were for roofing at the WHS, paving at Citizens and Bernon parking lots, and refinishing the gym floor at the WHS. "They all came in at a net of \$35,000 less," he noted. Mr. Roberts said he was notified about the poor condition of the stage in the high school auditorium and thinks that the company doing the gym floor should be able to do that also. He doesn't want to hold them up, however, and asked if we could have that done also. Spagna said that if it's not the same type of work, we may have to go out to bid. He will check with the Facilities Director. Mr. Donlon asked if anyone has checked out the quality of the work these companies have done previously. Mr. Fontaine said he has checked them out and has worked with the roofing company before. He feels confident about them.

5. Update on May 31, 2013 Financial Report – J. Spagna

Mr. Spagna reported no change to report. With one month left to go, we have spent 84% of our budget. "The Budget Commission approved our budget this week?" asked Ms. Phongsavanh. Spagna said they had and he has provided it to the WSC. Phongsavanh asked about the health care plan changes. Dr. Donoyan noted that Mrs. Nadeau had said that the original budget that was presented used the figures that were provided by the Budget Commission and we have had to increase that. "Those rates caused an increase of about \$1.5 million over the original budget," reported Spagna. Mrs. McGuire-Forcier noted the oil cost and asked about it. Mr. Roberts explained that there was a faulty valve that caused this increase because more oil was being burned.

6. Presentation/Discussion/Vote on the Special Education Dept. Review Recommendations - G. Donoyan, C. Lerner

Dr. Donoyan reported that a great amount of work has been done to make sure they have accurate numbers to support what they say at this point in time. "The most important issue here is to make sure that these students get the individualized services that they need. Our staff does a fine job and this is in no way, shape or form meant to undercut the job that they do. This program is meant to guarantee that these students are in school and will drive up our attendance rate. The recommendations are being made so that our students' needs are being met," said Donoyan. Mrs. Lerner thanked Dr. Thomas DiPaola and Susan Moore for their assistance with this study. She

reported that there isn't any big surprise coming out of this report. She reviewed the report and the recommendations that were made. "They compared Woonsocket to other districts with similar populations. However, these districts were smaller than we are. Pawtucket was the closest. Our staffing considering the need in the district was low. Frequent changes in leadership in our buildings, particularly in our elementary schools and the impact that it has, was noted. They feel we need more interventions earlier for general ed students to prevent more special education students later on. We have the highest percentage of special education students out of the urban districts in the state. We don't have integrated preschools, which pushes up our special education numbers. One of the most important observations was when they looked at the high school alternative programs. It wasn't about the staff serving these kids. They were looking at the social, emotional, and behavioral needs of these kids and the concept of what is the least restrictive environment for them. We don't have the resources to get these kids into school," said Lerner. "We don't have the amount of staff necessary to provide for the needs of these students," she added. Lerner reviewed the absences of 37 student enrolled in the FATE program this year as well as suspensions. "This was a hard decision for the special education department staff. We have been trained to try to keep our students in-house. When we looked at programs, it was imperative that the program be located in Woonsocket. We wanted programs that ensured that the kids attend school every day. They provide door-to-door transportation and, if necessary, pull them out of bed. We looked at programs that involved families. Programs that provide kids with opportunities that would make them want to come to school. We are very fortunate in Woonsocket to have these agencies located here. There are two agencies that we are recommending to you so that families have a choice," said Lerner.

Motion to accept the recommendation: V. Phongsavanh
No vote taken. Discussion and vote continued under Item #7 below. 2nd: J. Donlon

7. Discussion of FATE and FOCUSS Program – C. Roberts

Mr. Roberts said he sees this as something that needs to come to them in a workshop. "The fact that we paid \$20,000 to these consultants and there's no one here to explain the report bothers me. If 59 people have cycled through, what if there are only 44 slots?" he asked. Lerner noted that we have other programs that will stay at the high school. "Where is the recommendation that we close these programs?" asked Roberts. Lerner directed him to Page 5 of the report. "If we had a workshop, we could have compared the data. I don't understand how an off-site agency can guarantee attendance," said Roberts. Dr. Donoyan explained that it's a 100% guarantee for Medicaid purposes, which is tied to attendance. Mr. Roberts said he wasn't comfortable supporting this tonight at all because he has a lot of questions. He thinks it needs to be left in place at least for next year. "Has anyone been notified that this program is being closed?" he asked. Dr. Donoyan said that they have not closed anything. "These positions are in the budget. It was brought to my attention after I started that there were some issues with these students. Some were transitioning back from the training school. The individuals that did the report were unable to make it here tonight. We wanted to bring it to you before the end of the fiscal year so any preparations can be made for September," said Donoyan. Mrs. McGuire-Forcier spoke about all of the problems that students we serve have. She isn't comfortable trying to remove children from these programs and requested a workshop also with the people who did the study. She also thanked the people who spoke under Good & Welfare, saying she isn't convinced that we will save money by sending these kids to outside agencies. "We cannot punish these children," she said. "I want it proven to me that this will save us money. When Feinstein was closed, it was supposed to save money also. Not so," she added. Mr. Donlon asked if they included the savings of not having to have a police officer there. Spagna said they don't take that into consideration for the report. Mr. Roberts presented letters from staff members that they received that the WED sent to them saying they were dismissed due to the closure of that program. He doesn't know who sent them out, but someone feels that their authority overrides that of the WSC. "What are the plans that you intend to make because there does seem to be a higher ratio of administrators to staff working directly with the students," asked Phongsavanh. Lerner said that they compared the positions of other communities with ours. Phongsavanh thinks we need to see how we can fix our own programs first and see how we can change the staffing structure before out-sourcing.

Motion to Table and programs will stay intact until further notice and a workshop will be scheduled: A. McGuire-Forcier 2 nd : C. Roberts (Roll Call Vote – 5 yes)
--

8. Discussion/Vote on the Superintendent's Evaluation Process – C. Roberts

Mr. Roberts thought that some dates should be set. July 17th is the date that the superintendent would submit her self-evaluation to the WSC and they would do their evaluation and have it to her by the August 14th meeting.

Motion to approve: C. Roberts
2nd: J. Donlon (Roll Call Vote: 5 yes)

CONFERENCES: None

SUPERINTENDENT'S REPORT: Dr. Giovanna Donoyan, Superintendent

Dr. Donoyan said she is pleased to report that months of negotiation have produced the tentative agreements that the union approved today. "Mr. Spagna has shown that the projections were very, very close to the actual expenditures for this fiscal year and that is only because we have left a number of positions vacant, among other things. To grow, we need to find additional revenues." She spoke about the seniors graduating this year and the trials they have endured, yet they have met the requirements. "It has been very difficult with all the challenges and negativity. No one expected us to be where we are right now."

Motion to receive & place on file: V. Phongsavanh

2nd: A. McGuire-Forcier (Unan. Approved)

SCHOOL COMMITTEE GOOD & WELFARE:

C. Roberts: Thanked Atty. Ackerman for the substantial gift he made. Thanked the members of the union negotiating team that he spent part of the weekend with for their hospitality and the food.

J. Donlon: Echoed Mr. Roberts' comments and wished all of our students a safe and happy summer.

E. Nadeau: She was happy to hear that the Budget Commission added back to the medical line items that should have been there. Thanked Atty. Ackerman for his generous donation.

V. Phongsavanh: Thanked Atty. Ackerman for his generous gift and said there aren't enough words to express her gratitude. Congratulated the school nurses and Susan Rosecka after they were featured in a Valley Breeze article. Encouraged students to stay safe and read this summer.

A. McGuire-Forcier: Thanked Atty. Ackerman. Pointed out that when it comes to union contracts, the Woonsocket Education Dept. staff always steps up to the plate. She thanked them.

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

2nd: V. Phongsavanh (Unan. Approved)

Respectfully submitted,

Nancy G. Belisle, Substitute WSC Recording Secretary