

**WOONSOCKET SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEETING  
WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 13, 2013  
OPEN SESSION MINUTES  
Woonsocket Middle School @ Hamlet, 60 Florence Drive  
Woonsocket, RI 02895**

Meeting called to order by Vimala Phongsavanh at 6:35 p.m. in Open Session.

Roll Call: V. Phongsavanh, Present; E. Nadeau, Present; J. Donlon, Present; C. Roberts, Present. A. McGuire-Forcier, Present.

Motion to convene into Closed Session in accordance with RI Law 42-46-5-(a)(1)–Job Performance; 42-46-5-(a)(2)-Collective Bargaining at 6:35 p.m.: V. Phongsavanh                      2<sup>nd</sup>: J. Donlon                      Roll Call Vote: 5 Yes

Motion to come out of Closed Session: V. Phongsavanh                      2<sup>nd</sup>: C. Roberts                      Roll Call Vote: 5 Yes

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Meeting called to order by Vimala Phongsavanh at 7:00 p.m. to reconvene in open session.

Moment of Silence

Pledge of Allegiance

Roll Call: V. Phongsavanh, Present; E. Nadeau, Present; J. Donlon, Present; C. Roberts, Present. A. McGuire-Forcier, Present.

V. Phongsavanh stated to the public that the School Committee approved the Superintendent’s evaluation 5 to 0 and also approved the collective bargaining resolution by the Budget Commission. From the November 6<sup>th</sup> School Committee meeting, the Committee voted to approve the settlement of litigation Attorney General Peter F. Kilmartin vs. Woonsocket Superintendent’s Office based on the settle agreement and that was voted on 5 to 0.

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**Public Good and Welfare:**

**Citizens’ Memorial Elementary School** – Teacher Linda Barrett said she teaches grades 3, 4, and 5; her students are here to present a little Thanksgiving skit; student names are Alexander Paturzzio, Matthew McClary, Derek Navarro, and Bianca Perry. V. Phongsavanh thanked the teacher and the students and wished everyone a Happy Thanksgiving.

**Superintendent Recognitions:** G. Donoyan gave a warm thank you to Sodexo for continuing their own tradition of donating a Thanksgiving Dinner Basket to a family in need at each of our schools. This tradition, as well as the Sodexo’s weekly backpack program supports the children and their families of Woonsocket. Congrats to the WHS Football Team for winning the Division IIA Championship. The football team will be in the first round of the playoffs this Saturday at 1:30 at Barry Field. They will be playing St. Raphael Academy. Good luck to the players and the coaching staff. The Washington Leadership Training Institute conference in Washington, DC was held in late September. Each state SkillsUSA officer needed to complete some research on Perkins legislation and develop a powerpoint or brochure on how Perkins is used in their schools. There were over 350 students at the conference and William Douang of the Woonsocket Area Career & Technical Center made the top 5 presentations. Congratulations to William and we look forward to hearing more about this student’s achievements. Great Job! Harris Elementary 5<sup>th</sup> Grade Student Singers under the leadership of teacher Kimberly Picard will be performing at the RI State House on Friday, December 20<sup>th</sup> at 10:30 a.m. for an exciting musical salute to the holidays and this event is also opened to the public. We are proud that these students are able to share their musical talents with others in the Ocean State. Best wishes for a great concert.

Motion to receive and place on file: V. Phongsavanh                      2<sup>nd</sup>: E. Nadeau                      (Unanimously Approved)

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Approval of October 23, 2013 Open/Closed Minutes; November 6, 2013 Closed Minutes:

Motion to approve October 23, 2013 Open/Closed Minutes and November 6, 2013 Closed Minutes:

A. McGuire-Forcier                      2<sup>nd</sup>: V. Phongsavanh                      Roll Call Vote: 5 Yes

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**Consent Agenda:**

Motion to approve the consent agenda in its entirety: V. Phongsavanh

2<sup>nd</sup>: J. Donlon, A. McGuire-Forcier                      Roll Call Vote: 5 Yes

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Communications: None

Committee Reports – None.

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**UNFINISHED BUSINESS:**

**1. Discussion/Vote of the Family Medical Leave Act Policy – 2<sup>nd</sup> Passage – G. Donoyan**

G. Donoyan stated the School Committee approved 1<sup>st</sup> passage of this policy on October 23, 2013. In accordance with policy, it is required that there are two passages; therefore, she is seeking approval for 2<sup>nd</sup> passage.

**Motion to approve the Family Medical Leave Act Policy for 2<sup>nd</sup> Passage: V. Phongsavanh**

**2<sup>nd</sup>: J. Donlon**

**Roll Call Vote: 5 Yes**

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**NEW BUSINESS:**

**1. Discussion/Vote for approval to post for Secretary to the Director of Curriculum position – G. Donoyan**

G. Donoyan presented the job description for the Secretary to the Director of Curriculum; it is an out of the union position; it is a budgeted position; she is seeking approval to post for this position as soon as possible.

**Motion to approve: V. Phongsavanh**

**2<sup>nd</sup>: E. Nadeau**

C. Roberts asked what is the salary amount. G. Donoyan said budgeted approximately at \$29,000.00. A. McGuire-Forcier said the job description says this person will serve as the Secretary to the office of the Director of Curriculum, Superintendent, and School Committee. G. Donoyan said this secretary will be the back up to the Executive Assistant. C. Roberts said #9 and #10 covers this. A. McGuire-Forcier requested to delete the words Superintendent and School Committee from #1.

**Motion to approve: V. Phongsavanh**

**2<sup>nd</sup>: E. Nadeau**

**Roll Call Vote: 5 Yes**

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**2. Discussion/Vote for approval to post for Chief Information Officer position – G. Donoyan**

G. Donoyan presented an updated job description to post for a Chief Technology Officer; this individual will seek to do the job vacated by J. Gallishaw but in addition to that there have been improved job description and duties for this role; this job description has been worked on collaboratively with RIDE and members of the subcommittee of the Budget Commission. She is seeking approval to post for this position as soon as possible.

**Motion to approve: A. McGuire-Forcier**

**2<sup>nd</sup>: J. Donlon**

C. Roberts asked what is the purpose of changing the name. G. Donoyan said the industry recognizes Chief Technology Officer and the roles and responsibilities are much clearer than the Director of Technology. C. Roberts stated no other school district is calling their position this so it might be difficult, when we post this position on Schoolspring, for people to search for this type of position on Schoolspring. G. Donoyan said it will be put on Schoolsprings under the title of Director of Technology or within that subcategory. E. Nadeau asked when the legal counsel position will be filled. G. Donoyan said the Budget Commission approved a two-month extension so we will need someone for January. E. Nadeau said, for the record, that School Committee voted to extend his contract until January.

**Motion to approve: A. McGuire-Forcier**

**2<sup>nd</sup>: J. Donlon**

**Roll Call Vote: 5 Yes**

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**Conferences – None.**

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**Superintendent’s Report** – G. Donoyan stated on this occasion of the last elected School Committee meeting in the City of Woonsocket, I’d like to offer, on behalf of the Woonsocket Education Department, parting words of gratitude for your service to our children, families, and staff. During these past two years, though it was often difficult due to internal and external pressures, you, the Woonsocket School Committee, have kept children at the forefront. There is no doubt in my mind that each of you are dedicated public servants. Collectively, you have been a model of President John F. Kennedy’s belief that “Our most basic common link is that we all inhabit this planet. We all breathe the same air. We all cherish our children’s future”. For this you will be remembered. I wish each of you health and happiness.

**Motion to receive and place on file: V. Phongsavanh**

**2<sup>nd</sup>: J. Donlon (Unanimously Approved)**

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**School Committee Good and Welfare:**

A. McGuire-Forcier – She thanked all the community members who went out and voted during the election and thanked everyone who supported her during this election and past elections. Unfortunately we are moving to an appointed School Committee. A couple of years ago the perfect storm was created; the School Committee has taken a lot of heat because we cannot survive on a \$59M budget so we gave up our rights in electing the School Committee to appointing them; however, now we had the State come in and look over our budget, the Finance Committee tore apart our budget, the Budget Commission tore apart our budget and found out that there was no way we were able to survive on a \$59M budget. Because we jumped the gun, we gave up our rights to vote. She wishes the future School Committee the best of luck for the next three years. She feels that financially we are far more stable than we have ever been and she has been on the School Committee for 8 years. Since she has been on it has been cuts, cuts, and cuts; every year it’s deeper and deeper. It would have been nice to serve on the School Committee in better times when we could add programs, have the opportunity to bring back full-day Kindergarten, sports, and more electives. She is hoping that she will be able to watch the appointed School Committee do this within the next 3 years. She has enjoyed serving her community for the last 8 years; she has learned a lot about our community, education, school level, city level, state level, and politics, things she likes about it and many things that she doesn’t like about it. She has met some wonderful people that really care deeply about this community and that does not mean that they have to be elected officials to care about this community; everyday people try to make

a difference and she has also met people who just like to complain; she will not focus on them and only focus on the good people in our community; there may be fewer and far between but those are the ones she will focus on and thank greatly with the word gratitude. A lot of the people of Woonsocket forgot what that word is and take people for granted, situations for granted and we need to stop. Whether we like the person or not we need to appreciate what they bring to the table especially when it is coming from their heart and their soul. She said most of you here know that she has served 8 years and she is honest and passionate; she cares deeply about her community and deeply about all children whether they are hers or not; she sees all children as hers/ours; she does believe it takes a community to raise children; she thanked everyone again for their support and hopes the new Committee is successful in trying to return things that have been cut over the past years; she understands that at the administrative levels there are a lot of positions that we need to have filled which were not filled but feels we should be filling the trenches like bringing back more teacher assistants and bringing back full-time Kindergarten; she feels that these should take priority over administrators. She will be listening and watching and hopes that the people who come here often do the same and make sure our children come first.

C. Roberts – He said he does not think there is anything to say other than what Anita has just covered; he echoed her comments. It was exciting to get elected 2 years ago and it has been a pleasure to serve; we have been through a lot of poor times and hopefully the next School Committee who has inherited a lot of ground work that they have made will continue to move this district forward. Again, he would echo all of Anita's comments and thanked the people who have supported him over the last 2 years; he looks forward to serving his city again in some role, in some way in the future.

E. Nadeau – She said she has served 12 years on the School Committee; she served in the 70's and came back in 2005. If she was looking for members to be appointed, which she thinks is the worst nightmare that every hit the city, she would look for honest people who are not self-serving, whose first concern are the kids in this city. Her experience has taught her that many people pretend to be but really are not pro education, they are pro pocketbook; it is how it affects my pocketbook, the major concern other than parents who have kids in the system who truly want their children to achieve. She does not think the real focus has ever been on education because we live in a city with a very low economic base and we have so many problems; she would hope in the future that changes. If you do not invest in your children, you are not investing in the future; this is one of the biggest mistakes that any community can make; if they do not have a solid well-rounded school department nobody wants to move here, raise their children here because that is one of the first things that people who want to move into a community look at. We know that if our kids got what North Kingstown and Barrington get we would be a lot better off. We also know, because we served all this time that equal education does not apply in the state we live in. Unfortunately, she does not know if it ever will but if she had the perfect situation that is what she would want for our kids.

J. Donlon – He thanked the residents of the city for allowing him to serve them for the last two years; it has been challenging and he has learned an awful lot very quickly. So when they were sworn it that night, they found out that they were walking into a massive deficit; working as a team, along with the Superintendent, we have been able to come up with a balanced budget and a sound financial footing for the future. He thinks they are leaving the school department in better shape than when they first came in and he thinks this is a result of them working together as a team.

V. Phongsavanh – I want to thank the citizens and especially the students of Woonsocket for the honor of serving this city for the past four years. When I was first elected in 2009, I wanted to change our school system because I believed that we needed to provide the best education the state had to offer, and if we didn't then we weren't doing our jobs as public servants. In reality this experience has changed me. The lessons I learned in this position have brought me to a full circle. From a daughter of refugees and an ESL student at 5<sup>th</sup> Ave elementary to the chair of the school committee and non-profit leader, I couldn't have asked for a better opportunity than this. I have always believed in lifelong learning and that we should never pass up an opportunity to learn, because that only creates ignorance. Not only has the City of Woonsocket provided me with a high school diploma, but it has provided me with the foundation to graduate from college and soon graduate school, and in addition the city continues to teach me life's most important lessons each and every day that we can't learn from a book. Every day we face and see injustice in our schools and in our communities, and we all want to change it. We may have different philosophies about how we should do it, but that's what makes this country great. Change takes generations and centuries but eventually we'll get there. Although I didn't get to accomplish everything I came here for, I believe we survived Woonsocket's toughest days, and that is an accomplishment in itself. Although there's still a much needed strategic plan to finish, an attendance policy to implement, and more professional development opportunities for staff to understand the cultural differences in our new communities, I'd say we did a hell of a job. In this four-year span we have made it clear to our community partners that we are open for business. We are in the business of education and collaboration. Our school department works with many different organizations to increase our capacity and create sustainability. We've received millions of dollars to run out of the box programs and grants with our partners and have developed important relationships with philanthropic organizations who are invested in us. We are leading the state in community health programs for our schools and our most vulnerable students. With the first family planning policy in the state, we have been able to create programs that prevent long-term costs to our city and state. We took off our blindfolds and took on teenage pregnancy head on, and we've been successful. And we've led the state in Expanded Learning Opportunities or ELOs. Our students have travelled to Africa and back, they've built rain gardens, and have created plans for sustainable living. We're great. And we're going to

become even greater in the next few years because we've finally set a foundation to build upon. I'm lucky. I'm lucky for chance to make policies that push education forward; I'm lucky for the great teachers and mentors who have guided me throughout my young journey. I'm lucky for my most critical peers and the cynics; because of you I strive to be a better version of myself each and every day. The best is yet to come, and I look forward to working with all those who share my vision for education for this city. Thank you again for the honor to serve you, I wish this school department the best. I've developed lifelong friendships with many throughout this process, I believe in all of you, and I believe that our kids deserve the best of what we've got. And I'll be here for anything you need, today, tomorrow and into the future.

**Motion to Adjourn at 7:35 p.m.: A. McGuire-Forcier**

**2<sup>nd</sup>: C. Roberts (Unanimously Approved)**

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**Respectfully Submitted:**

**Kimberly Blais, WSC Recording Secretary**