

**WOONSOCKET SCHOOL BOARD MEETING  
WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 26, 2014  
OPEN SESSION MINUTES  
Woonsocket Middle School @ Hamlet, 60 Florence Drive  
Woonsocket, RI 02895**

Meeting called to order by Chairman George Lacouture at 7:00 p.m. in open session.

**Moment of Silence**

**Pledge of Allegiance**

**Roll Call:** George Lacouture, Present; Soren Seale, Present; Daniel Chattman, Present; Susan Pawlina, Present; and Jose Rivera, Present.

**G. Lacouture said Attorney Richard Kearns is here to help the Board when they get to the Unfinished Business section, the temporary hiring of legal counsel; Attorney Richard Ackerman is also here.**

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**Public Good and Welfare:**

**WHS Theatre II Class** – Jen Maiello, Theatre Class Teacher stated since September the students have been working on “Crazy for You”; the show is scheduled for May 15, 16, and 17; it has a cast of 29 actors/students, 17 professional musicians, and they hire professional scene designers, sounds, and lighting; this is all done by the fundraising of the students. The students performed the first scene of the show.

**Lorraine Corev, Woonsocket** – She said under public comment during the last meeting in regards to Full Day Kindergarten some commented that the unknown is scary; if fact, Mr. Rivera said it today on a talk show. Her question is what is unknown and to whom; assuming you are referring to the higher taxes they will face, why do you think this is unknown to us; have you spoken to those who have their homes foreclosed, to businesses who have left Woonsocket, those who are working multiple jobs to stay afloat, or is it the result of Full Day Kindergarten unknown to those who have children attending in an overcrowded school, this is unknown to the teachers who will have the lack of teacher assistants, or is she assuming incorrectly that you were speaking of yourselves, that the unknown is scary to you; if this is the case you should have never voted for Full Day Kindergarten. At the last city council meeting the mayor said those who spoke up regarding Full Day Kindergarten are uninformed; to that comment she is saying we are quite informed; they were informed by the Full Day Kindergarten presentation they heard in this room by Dr. Donoyan; they heard Mr. Partington’s facts presented publicly; they heard the concerns of many teachers and parents; they heard the unanswered questions posed by an experienced former School Committee person and by our city council people; they heard the concerns of the Budget Commission; the only person who has not informed us of Full Day Kindergarten is the very person who claims we are not informed. She is tired of the insults thrown at them and the lack of respect to those of them who want Full Day Kindergarten and who will flip the bill for Full Day Kindergarten; grants do not grow on trees; grants come from tax dollars. They are informed but their concerns have fallen on deaf ears.

**Rachel Zielinski, Advocate for her son** – Her son is currently at the vocational school, he is 17, he has an IEP, and he is a diploma path student. She has brought several issues to the Superintendent, the special education department, RIDE, OCR, the United States Justice Dept, and any place she possibly could so someone could hear her to help her son; she has zero results from the school department. She recently sent a letter on January 31<sup>st</sup> to the Superintendent asking if she could have a closed hearing to go in front of the School Board about the issues and complaints and she received no reply, no phone call, no letter and still has no result. Her son in 2 years time up until now has only accumulated 2 credits and those credits are for construction class, no academics. He is diploma path and his expected date of graduation is 2016. He has repeatedly endured bullying, verbal abuse, received death threats that she has a recording of that she has brought to the School Committee; they told him they had guns and T14s and they are going to shoot him, kill him, and they know where he lives; the school department basically instructed her to have her son stay home and not return back to school for his safety; they did not provide him with any academics; she asked for a tutor and they said no then they finally came up with a tutor but only for 6 weeks; her son spent last summer meeting with a tutor 2 to 3 times a week; the school department did not provide the tutor with any school work and then found out that the tutor was not duly certified so he did not get any credit for any of the work he did. This year her son has been suspended for reasons he did not do and she has proven this. She brought this to the school department’s attention and asked to appeal the suspension and was told by the SpEd director it was denied. Her son was written up a couple of weeks ago again; her son has OCD, tourettes, aspergers, and an IEP; the 1 to 1 that was assigned to him is for safety reasons not for academics because that is how bad he was being bullied; she did not follow his IEP, ripped up his papers and swore at him. She would like to have a closed session to bring these issues to the Board’s attention seeing that she received no reply from the Superintendent and she did send a letter which was hand delivered by her husband on January 31<sup>st</sup>; she called the secretary and asked if the Superintendent got the letter and apparently she did; she is not getting anywhere. The principal at the high school told her she does have the right to appeal while the SpEd Director said she did not. She thinks it is cruel the way her son is being



renewals are based on unknown grant funding, performance issues, some did not reply to their one year leave of absence, and have emergency certifications.

**Motion to approve the Non-Renewals/Terminations/Dismissals based on the Personnel Recommendations as of 2-26-14:**

**S. Seale** 2<sup>nd</sup>: **D. Chattman** Roll Call Vote: 5 Yes

**Motion to approve the Rescission of Non-Renewals/Dismissals based on Personnel Recommendations as of 2-26-14:**

**S. Seale** 2<sup>nd</sup>: **J. Rivera** Roll Call Vote: 5 Yes

**Motion to approve the consent agenda in its entirety:** **S. Seale** 2<sup>nd</sup>: **S. Pawlina** Roll Call Vote: 5 Yes

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**Communications: None**

**School Board Reports:** G. Lacouture stated the Finance Committee met with the Business Manager in which he gave an overview of the school budget for next year; it was very well done in his opinion. This will be reviewed this evening as well.

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**UNFINISHED BUSINESS:**

**1. Discussion/Vote on policy for Administrative Substitute Compensation, P2-5.4a – 2<sup>nd</sup> Passage – G. Donoyan**

**Motion to approve the Policy for 2<sup>nd</sup> passage:** **S. Seale** 2<sup>nd</sup>: **S. Pawlina** Roll Call Vote: 5 Yes

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**2. Discussion/Vote to Hire Temporary Legal Counsel – G. Lacouture**

G. Lacouture stated this was tabled at the last meeting.

**Motion to Approve the Hiring of Temporary Legal Counsel:** **S. Seale** 2<sup>nd</sup>: **No one**

R. Kearns said he thinks this requires a motion to remove this from the table

**Motion to remove from the table the Hiring of Temporary Legal Counsel:** **S. Pawlina** 2<sup>nd</sup>: **D. Chattman**

**Roll Call Vote: 5 Yes**

G. Lacouture said one of the issues that was brought up at the last meeting was the compensation of R. Ackerman in the transition period; he said R. Kearns secured that this would not be a problem. G. Lacouture said before them tonight is the resume of counsel that is willing to work what was set forth by the Budget Commission and agreed to by the WED which runs through June 30, 2014 at the rate of \$50.00 per hour up to 25 hours per work. The resume is for the individual they would like to appoint for this temporary position. S. Seale asked if they will be voting on this specific person or just the approval to hire a temporary legal counsel, G. Lacouture stated they will probably do both separately; the posting allows us to vote to hire temporary legal counsel, in his opinion; he stated R. Ackerman will serve for a period of 2 to 3 weeks, as the Board discussed, to consolidate or work on cases they already have in the pipeline; they will also post for the permanent position as well which will take some time. S. Pawlina asked if it would be prudent of them, since they just received the resume, to go into to closed session for a few minutes to review the qualifications and to make sure this is exactly what they want and make that decision. G. Lacouture said they can't because it was not advertised. He said they will take a minute break so the members of the School Board can look at the resume submitted, then reconvene, and go forward.

**Motion to take a 10 minute break at 7:47 p.m.:** **D. Chattman** 2<sup>nd</sup>: **S. Pawlina (Unanimously Approved by the Board)**

**Motion to reconvene the meeting at 7:58 p.m.:** **S. Seale** 2<sup>nd</sup>: **D. Chattman (Unanimously Approved by the Board)**

G. Lacouture asked R. Ackerman how to proceed because there are 2 issues; one is the issue of temporary legal counsel position and the other is the hiring of Mr. William Connell; do we take 2 votes or do we do it in 1 vote. R. Ackerman said he thinks we can do it in 1 vote. G. Lacouture would like to amend the motion they had to include the hiring of William J. Connell as our temporary legal counsel.

**Motion to Approve the Hiring of Temporary Legal Counsel:** **S. Seale** 2<sup>nd</sup>: **No one**

**Motion to amend the motion to include the hiring of William J. Connell as our temporary legal counsel:** **G. Lacouture**

2<sup>nd</sup>: **S. Pawlina** Roll Call Vote: 5 Yes

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**NEW BUSINESS:**

**1. Discussion/Vote on Copier/Printer Leases – J. Spagna**

**Motion to approve the leases as presented to the Board:** **S. Seale** 2<sup>nd</sup>: **J. Rivera**

J. Spagna stated he presented to the Board this evening an updated schedule and that is the one the he would like the Board to vote on this evening; there are only 3 leases on the spreadsheet because they are expiring; once the other leases come close to expiring, he will bring them forward to the Board; we are saving approximately \$1000.00 a month. G. Lacouture said he would be more comfortable in approving these leases if they went out to bid to see what the market would do instead of going bidless. J. Spagna said the MBA has a price agreement for the state to help us get the best price and service as possible; when we use from this list we are getting the best price of the bidders, which are Konica and Tobisha; he would be very surprised to find a \$12,000.00 a year savings with another vendor.

**Motion to approve the leases as presented to the Board:** **S. Seale** 2<sup>nd</sup>: **J. Rivera** Roll Call Vote: 5 Yes

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**2. Discussion/Vote on FY15 Budget - G. Donoyan, J. Spagna**

**Motion to approve the FY15 Budget: G. Lacouture 2<sup>nd</sup>: S. Seale**

G. Lacouture said they will now have a presentation on the FY15 Budget. G. Donoyan stated that they are extremely proud they are able to present to the School Board, the public and the media at large the Fiscal Year 15 presentation; it has been a long time since the WED has been able to present such creditable, verifiable, honest to goodness true realistic numbers; she thanked Joe Spagna giving us a tremendous amount of time and his staff to make sure everything that is being presented has precedence, documented, it is reasonable, it is prudent, and we are doing our best to ensure we control costs and take a look at efficiencies when possible and not offer any fear for the taxpayer of tax increases; we are a school department who wants to make sure we are creditable. At this time Joe Spagna went through his Powerpoint presentation of the FY15 Budget. The WED is proposing to spend \$67.9M in FY15 which is \$2M more than the projected expense level for FY14. The budget includes the following changes in revenues: \$1.45M more anticipated state education aid and \$262,000 or 1.6% increase in aid from the city. The FY15 budget includes significant increases in employee salaries and benefits over the FY14 projected amounts.

G. Lacouture said they will proceed with tabling this budget until the first meeting in March; there will be a workshop a week from tomorrow here at Hamlet at 6:00 p.m.; at which time he would ask that the Superintendent invite the Mayor and the City Council as well as any Budget Commission members who wish to attend the workshop and maybe a lot of the questions can be answered if they see a detailed go through. S. Pawlina said she would like to have invited, specifically, the City Council President, Dina Dutremble, and the Mayor or her designee, and Mr. Tom Bruce to come and be part of our workshop; so if there are any questions that need to be asked, they are asked at that time so we don't go back and forth during a Budget Commission meeting and go weeks without proper answers; they can be sure that we have crossed all our Ts and dotted all our Is and our commas are all in the right place and this is the time she feels they should be here to ask these questions.

**Motion to table the FY15 Budget: G. Lacouture**

**2<sup>nd</sup>: S. Seale, D. Chattman**

**Roll Call Vote: 5 Yes**

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**Conferences – None.**

**Superintendent's Report** – G. Donoyan said there has been much to debate with the Full Day Kindergarten proposal, the 5/6 Academy, and the future of education in Woonsocket. We have the opportunity in the form of funding, grant and state monies, that will allow us to reinstate a Full Day Kindergarten proposal that includes moving the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> graders to one of the state of the arts facilities; 5<sup>th</sup> graders would learn and enjoy the state of the art facilities one year longer during their 5, 6, 7, 8 career. In fact, our goal has been and always been to educate as many students as possible in Woonsocket. We are also quite cognizant of the fears of the individuals whether there will be tax implications, overcrowding, and program sustainability. We are listening and will continue seek a solution to offer Full Day Kindergarten because that is our job, our charge is to do what's in the right of education for the students in Woonsocket, not to minimize education to emerge education. Education has its economic development and the city is on the verge of moving forward. We recognize that the public has fears; she would like to remind the public that this proposal has been discussed for merely 2 years now in one form or another; the school department not only cognizant of the stresses of the community but we also recognize that it is the children of Woonsocket that deserve better education and better programming; we are not going to stop until we find a solution to this problem. Does it need to stay on the docket, perhaps but for the past 2 years working with the WTG our goal is to bring back Full Day Kindergarten to all children; maybe next year, maybe within 3 years, 5 years, or whatever it may be that goal is our charge and she is going to make sure this happens. This Tuesday and Wednesday, students who needed to score at least partial proficient to ensure that they graduate from the high school on time took a re-assessment of the NECAP scores; this was their third opportunity, amongst many other opportunities we have offered to our students, to make sure that they show up and take that exam; some of them completed the requirement, they showed up, and took the test; those who do not achieve partial proficiency at this juncture will be meeting with the high school staff to determine what those next steps will be which include the waiver the Board has passed recently. On Tuesday the students took the math portion of that test and today the reading portion. RIDE representatives were present and praised our organization and all of the efforts the high school teachers, faculty, staff, and WED in particular have done. We are in a stressful situation but know that the WED does everything it possibly can with the cooperation from all our faculty and staff to do what is in the best interest of our students.

**Motion to receive and place on file: D. Chattman**

**2<sup>nd</sup>: S. Seale (Unanimously Approved by the Board)**

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**School Board Good and Welfare:**

**D. Chattman** – He said that he is hearing that there is still a high content level of iron in the water; we are here to teach education but we are also here for the students health; if we are still questioning the tanks then to him that seems to be a problem because if we still have to flush the tanks then the problem still exists; there has to be something that has to be done because at some point it is going to cost us more to continue to flush the tanks than it is to replace them and do whatever we have to do; with flushing the tanks the iron content is high; he believes that because we are flushing it and the water is not settling it is preventing it from being discolored but because the water is not discolored doesn't mean the iron isn't there. If this is going to cause a problem for the kids then we need to address this and get this situation taken care of; there is something in there that is causing the rust and iron to be in there and we are going to have a problem later on, we are just covering it up.

J. Rivera – He said he received correspondence and rumors that Coleman Elementary will be closing. To his knowledge, he has not received any information closing Coleman; he personally went to Coleman so this is not something he is in favor of. So to the public, it is just that, rumors. This afternoon he was on a radio show and believes the Superintendent will be joining them in two weeks; they covered some topics regarding Full Day Kindergarten; one of the reasons why he went on the radio show is because it's the audience who listens to this radio station have been listening for quite awhile so their perspectives of the school department are very controversial with what happened in the past, with the past School Committee, whose fault it was and how they got where they are; if he can quote the post is that the Committee received false information, which was live on air and people listen to this; he does not agree or disagree with the audience; it is important to reach out to this audience and get your perspective on an issue so there is not confusion as to where they stand as a School Board. It is very important to them, as a School Board, he thinks if they have the opportunity to be a scenarists to take it and not to bad mouth each other or leaders of this city; we need to set the record straight as to what their goals are and make it very clear that our goal is to help the School Department in its entirety; as School Board members we do not run the schools; we get to oversee that they are being run appropriately. He wanted to share this with the public; on the radio today he was able to give his perspective on Full Day Kindergarten and why he voted the way he voted.

S. Pawlina – She said she was asked by the WMS PTO to let everyone know that there will be a basketball show with the Harlem Superstars who will be playing against our own Woonsocket Superstars; there are many members of WED and community members who will be playing; Mr. Nasuti was also to take part in the allstars event but in his place will be his son. They hope everyone will come out and have a good time on Friday, March 21<sup>st</sup> at 7:00 p.m. at the WHS; admission, in advance, is \$10 for adults and students, and at the door it will be \$12; you can purchase your tickets at the WMS, Ciro's Tavern or at WNRI. Leo Savoie has asked her to let everyone know that their PTA is hosting their first fundraiser to build a new playground; the playground will include a play structure, painted games, a basketball court, and play accessories; their first fundraiser is an adult only beer and dynamite; it will be held at St. Joe's backhall on Louise Street on March 7<sup>th</sup> from 6 to 10; tickets are \$10 each; if you are unable to attend, please still purchase a ticket to donate to this worthy cause. She would like you to know what these PTOs and PTAs are doing; the many men and women who are participating for the play structures, by the time it is built their children will not be able to use them because they would have grown up at that school and have moved onto the middle schools and then to the high schools; this just doesn't happen overnight and there is a lot of money they need raise; there are a lot of men and women who are dedicated to do something permanent and that is very worthwhile for future generations at Leo Savoie School. You may think, well should I volunteer, and the answer is yes even if your child is 2 or even if you are older and retired the answer is yes because this for you because it is in your neighborhood and is part of improving your schools; we need people to participate in all of these events because they are for the betterment of our community. As Dr. Donoyan just said, on Saturday we will have Kindergarten registrations; it is very important to come and register your child as early as possible; this is not a wait to the last minute thing; you need to come in with all of your pertinent information and you need to register your child; you also need to sign up for child outreach; every child needs to be seen by child outreach so we may better service them; this is very important that this is done. Lastly, House Bill #7255 which is sponsored by State Representatives Phillips, Casey, McNamara, and O'Brien and what they would like in order for this to be passed is that a passing grade in order to graduate or to pass on to a next class is 70 statewide; this is something she completely supports; however our passing grade is a 60 which is unacceptable; we need to set the bar higher and have higher expectations for our students because they can and will meet them.

G. Lacouture – He said to Lorraine that he is sorry if she was insulted by anybody, that hurts him deeply, and if it was himself he apologizes. Everyone has a right to their opinion whether you like it or not; he said this at the beginning of the presentation of the talk of Full Day Kindergarten; it is a very heated issue in the community; some extremely sensitive concerning the financial aspect; no one should be degraded by a comment which is negative towards somebody. To Mrs. Zielinski, there is a process in every school system as far as what one has to do in requesting or appealing an action by a custodian, a teacher, a department head, a principal, all the way up through the chain of command; it is in your best interest and the protection of your son to follow this as best as you can; your comments are taken seriously but if you wish to file an appeal to the School Board you have to be wronged by an administrator along the line; the best thing you can do for your child is to document dates, times, who was there, what the issue was, and what your solution would be because there has to be a solution to a problem in order for a School Board to make a decision; it can't be this was said, that was said, this was done, that was not done' you would formerly have to have gone through the steps he has outlined if it started with a teacher, then department head, then the principal, the first central office person, and then the Superintendent; if there is no satisfaction after having a hearing with all of those then your next step is with the Woonsocket School Board then ultimately the decision rests with the Department of Education; he is trying to give her an outline as to how she should proceed. To Mr. Partington, the issue of substitutes has been something that has gone on since he starting teaching in 1964; he doesn't think the salary changed that much since 1964; what bothers him the most are those classes that are split up because that is hurting the education of the students who are already in maxed in their classes; he wishes that the Guild would document what has been happening in those classes, which schools; he is not looking at what teachers are absent just the schools, the classes; what you say and what he has witnessed at the Savoie Elementary does not hold true; the classes are not split up at that school when he has been there; if you would provide that documentation he would appreciate it. Next is the naming of a school building; there have been considerable comments on Facebook

as far as naming a school building; he understands that the buildings are owned by the city and not owned by us so the naming rights would go to the city administration not to us and doesn't know what happened at Leo Savoie and how that happened; he would like the Superintendent to look into this and report back to the School Board, just in an email what the process is because he does not want people coming to them; he has his own preference and it's personal and it may not have to do with some of the suggestions. He said to S. Pawlina that he already has his ticket; he bought it but won't be able to go so he gave his ticket to his friend Romeo Berthume and he will mention this on Saturday and raffle it off so there will be some publicity to people we may not reach. The last thing he has is the posting of the position of legal counsel; he has presented to the School Board tonight and to the Superintendent on how he wishes her to proceed and we should have some sort of a timeline for the posting; his observation is that posting of positions and the non-filling of positions is awful in the district; when he hears comments like we saved all this money because of unfilled positions he cringes; that is not our job; our job is to have them filled; the process does take longer and we all know this because we have the Budget Commission but that is not an excuse; it is his goal as they move forward to make sure that there will be no unfilled positions and he will not hear that comment made by any administrator. We have, and he will ask again, taken care of legal counsel finally which has been on the board since July 1; the position of the technology director which they call something else has hit a major setback as far as the candidates who were chosen; he hopes by the next School Board meeting in March that there will be a candidate for HR before the Board to vote on; that should be plenty of time for the final interviews; he will ask the question concerning the special education position that has been vacated for 2 months; his question to Dr. Donoyan has that position been posted. G. Donoyan said she does not believe that position has been posted at this point of time; she will have to check with the interim HR director to make sure that has not been posted. G. Lacouture said it is her duty and obligation to make sure, even though we do not have a full-time HR person. He asked about the job description for the WHS principal; where do you stand on this. G. Donoyan said this is a work in progress at this point; she said they have to bring this to the School Board first; she and Mr. Benoit are making sure that the presentation of that job description is something that not only fits today's recommendations and requirements but also brings us forward and forward thinking; they are combing through national candidate program profiles; they are just not principal positions; most of them are transitional leaders so this will take time; remember it's just not the regular high school principal it is also the high school and career and tech position as well. G. Lacouture says he understands this but he doesn't want to be here 9 months from now like with the legal counsel; they don't have a job description and they don't have someone in that position; he thanks Dr. Bedard for giving them plenty of notice and it is his hope that they have someone by the end of the school year because NEASC is coming and you have to have someone in place through the whole NEASC process. Since this is the second time he brought it up it appears they are not making too much headway; he will be looking on how we proceed in the future.

S. Seale – He said he and S. Pawlina are both on the curriculum committee and they will be meeting tomorrow with Dr. McGee and Dr. Donoyan; he and S. Pawlina are very excited of the prospect of putting curriculum in place and it was very nice that they saw eye to eye on almost every issue that they spoke about for about an hour. He hopes Dr. McGee and Dr. Donoyan are well hydrated and have stretched because they are going to hit the ground running tomorrow; he cannot emphasize enough the passing grade of 70 which is important to him as well as getting our math scores up and our graduation rate.

**Motion to adjourn at 9:15 p.m.: S. Seale**

**2<sup>nd</sup>: S. Pawlina (Unanimously Approved by the Board)**

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**Respectfully Submitted:**

**Kimberly Blais, WSC Recording Secretary**