

MINUTES
WOONSOCKET SCHOOL COMMITTEE
WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 9, 2015
OPEN SESSION
Woonsocket Middle School @ Hamlet
60 Florence Drive, Woonsocket, RI 02895

Meeting called to order by Chairman George Lacouture at 6:35 p.m. in open session.

Roll Call by Superintendent Patrick McGee:

George Lacouture, Chairman	Present
Soren Seale, Vice-Chairman	Present
Jose Rivera	Present
Susan Pawlina	Present
Donald Burke	Present

Motion made to convene in closed session for the purpose of discussing potential litigation in accordance with R.I. Gen.

Laws § 42-46-5(a)(2) at 6:35 p.m.: D. Burke 2nd: S. Seale Roll Call Vote: 5 Yes APPROVED

Motion to reconvene into open session at 7:05 p.m.: S. Seale 2nd: D. Burke Roll Call Vote: 5 Yes APPROVED

Moment of Silence

Pledge of Allegiance

Roll Call by Superintendent Patrick McGee:

George Lacouture, Chairman	Present
Soren Seale, Vice-Chairman	Present
Jose Rivera	Present
Susan Pawlina	Present
Donald Burke	Present

PUBLIC GOOD & WELFARE:

Cindy Stepanian, Elm Street - She wants to express as a parent, as many parents have expressed, in regards to the School Readiness Policy, going with the WHS dress code is the best fit. This is on the agenda this evening and would like the SC to consider the possibility of leaning towards the WHS dress code. As you know some are having complications with following the uniform policy which is bringing concerns to the teacher's classrooms and to the principals.

RECOGNITIONS & ANNOUNCEMENTS: Superintendent Patrick McGee made several announcements:

1. The Building Capital Committee that was tentatively scheduled for tomorrow has been scheduled for September 24th at 3:00 p.m. at the McFee Conference Room.
2. The Parent Advisory Council (PAC) is scheduled for Wednesday, September 16th from 6:30 to 8:30 p.m. at the WMS-Hamlet Building, Room 124.
3. The Special Education Local Advisory Council (SELAC) is scheduled for Thursday, October 1st from 6:30 to 8:30 p.m. at the WMS-Hamlet Building, Room 124.
4. The Parents of ESL Organized (PESLO) is scheduled for Wednesday, October 7th from 10:00 a.m. to Noontime at WMS-Villa Nova, Room 124.

Sodexo food services is ready to begin its annual Backpack Program for the 2015-16 school year; the Backpack Program seeks to eliminate hunger on the weekends by providing backpacks filled with nutritious easy-to-prepare foods for students who are at risk of hunger on the weekend. Thank you to Ellen Shalvey and Sodexo. Congratulated Charles Myers, Construction Teacher at the WACTC, for being named one of the fifteen finalists nationwide for one of six \$100,000 grants from Farmers Insurance; this is part of the company's "Thank America's Teachers" Program; good luck Mr. Myers. Congratulated Chef Paul Jalaf, Culinary Arts Teacher at the WACTC, for receiving a \$2,937.00 grant from the RI Hospitality Education Foundation.

Motion to receive and place on file: S. Seale 2nd: D. Burke (Unanimously Approved by the Committee)

APPROVAL OF MINUTES: None.

CONSENT AGENDA: Motion to approve the consent agenda: S. Seale 2nd: S. Pawlina
G. Lacouture took out of order the National Youth At-Risk Conference in Las Vegas. We received faxes concerning purchase orders and thought we could not use faxes only originals. G. Lacouture said in the past the SC discussed that they want to send teachers to conferences; therefore, he would have liked to see a classroom teacher attend this conference. He has been told that one of the attendees has withdrawn his name to attend;

therefore he would like to approve three people to attend this conference and hopefully there would be a staff member from the WACTC, since this is a Perkins Grant, attend. P. McGee said if they cannot find a teacher who is willing to attend could they send W. Webb. G. Lacouture said the motion is to amend so three people could go. Motion made to amend conference request to have three people attend this conference: G. Lacouture
2nd: S. Pawlina Roll Call Vote: 5 Yes APPROVED
Motion to approve the consent agenda in its entirety: D. Burke 2nd: S. Seale
Roll Call Vote: 5 YES APPROVED

COMMUNICATIONS: None.

SCHOOL COMMITTEE REPORTS: S. Pawlina reported that last Wednesday evening the Policy Subcommittee met to discuss the School Readiness Policy; they will speak more about policy which is on the agenda this evening. G. Lacouture spoke on behalf of the Building Committee and reported that there has been a lengthy discussion about the cost of taking over the WACTC with the \$3.1M; this money can only be spent on the WACTC as to the improvements of the building and new programs; this work is approximately 60 percent done. The second part of this discussion is the closing of schools; they had a study done which indicates the use of schools, the potential of closing a school in the future, and moving the fifth grade to the middle school. The numbers, because of the charter schools, are showing the decreased in population which will necessitate moving the fifth grade over to the middle schools and closing a school. This is not in the plan for next year; this something the committee is looking at for the future. A school has not been indicated and there will be a lot more coming forth to the public and input from the city hall, parents, SC, etc. Thanked J. Mathews and the committee for their diligence in proceeding in a positive way and they are not overreacting.

CONFERENCES/DISCUSSIONS – None.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS:

1. None.

NEW BUSINESS:

1. Discussion/Approval on the Appointment of the Citizens' Principal – G. Lacouture, P. McGee
Motion to approve: G. Lacouture 2nd: S. Seale
P. McGee read his letter of recommendation to appoint Mrs. Danielle Costa as the Citizens' Memorial Elementary School Principal.
Roll Call Vote: 5 Yes APPROVED

2. Discussion/Approval on the Amendments to the School Readiness Policy – J. Rivera, S. Pawlina
Motion to approve: S. Pawlina 2nd: J. Rivera
J. Rivera stated last year he and S. Seale met and revised the uniform policy; they heard from and met with parents, principals and leaders of the district and came up with the policy that is in place at the beginning of this year. They promised the public that they were going to look into this policy again prior to the start of this school year which did not happen. The subcommittee met last with requirement data from each principal. After reviewing the data, the subcommittee decided to eliminate the uniform policy across the district. One concern was do we send out letters to parents tomorrow knowing that most parents already bought the uniforms for the start of this year; therefore, they are proposing to bring this to the parents and district starting January 1st. S. Pawlina said they sent out a notice to all principals and asked them how the uniform policy was working; with three different levels of a uniform policy they received feedback in three different ways. She then read out loud feedback they received from the principals; the pros and cons of said policy; these results show that the drawbacks outweigh any benefits of this policy. J. Rivera stated the originators of the original uniform policy know that the Mayor who appointed them had a part in introducing the uniform to the district; as an appointed body we have to work with her. However, the required facts and data across the district made this determination; we, as a SC, need to do what is best for the children. S. Seale likes where they are going with this policy but one issue he has is that new families into the district purchased clothes with no notice; thinks the appropriate time to change this policy is at the end of the school year. D. Burke agrees with S. Seale; August is the time for back to school shopping and parents purchased this clothing already. G. Lacouture asked if either S. Pawlina and/or J. Rivera met with the mayor concerning these changes; he then stated before SC approves he would have expected them to do this because this is something that is very important to her. He feels this should start next year. J. Rivera said they chose January 1st for the start of this new policy so administration does not have a need to enforce something that is going to be taken away. S. Seale said it is difficult for him to vote for the January 1st date when parents already purchased clothing for the school year and knowing that there are challenged families in the district who are trying to adhere to the dress code and will get very little bang for their buck. J. Rivera understands what S. Seale is saying but when people listen or hear about this meeting, they will ask why bother with the policy today when it will be gone January 1st. S. Pawlina added that the date of January 1st also came about because elementary children grow quickly and around the holiday time parents buy them clothes. She also noted that several

parents requested waivers to opt out of the uniform policy and there are parents prepared to go to the ACLU if we don't change this policy. S. Seale stated they received a legal opinion last year that school districts are well within their right to establish extremely strict dress codes to include public uniforms. G. Lacouture is more inclined to have this start next year rather than immediately. The motion on the agenda has this policy starting tomorrow unless someone motions to change it for next school year.

Motion to amend the readiness policy to begin on January 2, 2016: S. Pawlina 2nd: J. Rivera
Roll Call Vote: 3 No (GL, SS, DB) 2 Yes (SP, JR) Motion fails

Motion to have this policy start at the end of the regular school year prior to the extended school year: S. Seale
2nd: G. Lacouture

S. Pawlina said we are going to continue to punish kindergartners through 8th grade who may wear appropriate clothing but inappropriate colors and stand with this policy for the rest of this school year. G. Lacouture said the policy that is in effect at this moment will continue for the rest of this school year because the subcommittee wasn't able to get the revisions done prior to the start of this school year. J. Rivera asked if it would be fair to come back with this addressing how this will be enforced throughout the schools. G. Lacouture said the enforcement of any policy is really up to the superintendent; if the superintendent is not enforcing the policy then the SC would have to be aware and take appropriate action towards the superintendent. J. Rivera asked if the superintendent chooses not to allow principals to enforce the uniforms then would the superintendent be in the wrong. G. Lacouture said yes. P. McGee stated we came to an agreement that at the elementary level there would not be a punitive component to the school readiness policy in that administration could not, for example, take away recess. What we do at the elementary school now is make phone calls to parents; having said this, the level of enforcement is reaching out to the parents, try to find out the reason why the child is not wearing the right colors and then try to assist the parent if they need clothes; at the middle school level, the punitive nature is not as relaxed as the elementary level and knows that last year students were given detention. He will certainly enforce the policy of the SC but at the elementary level there is not a lot of enforcement other than contacting parents.

Roll Call Vote: 2 Yes (GL, SS) 3 No (DB, SP, JR) Amendment Fails
Roll Call Vote on the main motion: 3 No (GL, SS, DB) 2 Yes (SP, JR) Readiness Policy does not pass

SUPERINTENDENT'S REPORT: Superintendent Patrick McGee announced that beginning this week there will be a bus that will be picking up our student athletes from the WHS at 2:30 each day and bringing them to Barry Field for their practices. Announced that freshmen orientation was on August 31st which was a great success; students met with their teachers, student mentors and navigated the building; an inspirational speaker addressed the 9th grade class and a barbeque was served. This was a great opportunity for the 9th graders. We are beginning to explore partnerships with RITES; he had a meeting with Howard Dooley who is the RITES Coordinator at URI and had great conversations regarding concurrent enrollment; we have an opportunity starting next year to offer an AP Computer Science Course for Seniors and they will be receiving 8 credits that they will be able to use at URI. We need a HS teacher who would be willing to train this year and over the summer; that teacher would gain an associate professor position at URI by taking these courses. NEASC visit is October 18th through the 21st; at the next meeting C. Henderson and his leadership team will be presenting to the SC more information regarding this visit. Approximately 70 computers have been delivered and installed at the WHS Library; next step is to install the software and printers. The Governor has provided in her budget \$20M across the state for school districts to submit applications for health and safety repairs. He and B. Peryea are drafting a letter which will be sent out tomorrow and hopefully we will be able to be part of the \$20M in addition to our own Five-Year Capital Improvement Plan. J. Wolfgang updated the SC on the personnel situation and stated they will have a name for appointment to the Asst. Superintendent position for SC approval by the next meeting.

SCHOOL BOARD GOOD & WELFARE:

J. RIVERA: From what he just observed this evening, we are going to continue with the Uniform Policy we have today. They did not agree on when to eliminate so they did not approve it. When he worked on this policy last year with S. Seale, he personally called the Mayor and invited her to come to the meetings with the understanding of what her position was on this subject. This was not a new topic to introduce her to; we are well aware of what the Mayor's intentions were regarding the uniform and its importance to her; however, he was not appointed to do what the Mayor feels is important to her but to do what is important for the children in the schools and in this district. He wants this to be known by the SC members that whatever he does as a subcommittee member, in general, and/or voting wise he does not have any responsibility to include the Mayor; although he was appointed by her, he was appointed to do what is best for the schools and students. He will try to reintroduce this policy to the SC again. He truly wants to move on from this subject.

D. BURKE: Congratulations to the administrators, teachers and students on a great beginning to the school year; he hopes that the positive start made by all will continue as the year moves on.

G. LACOUTURE: Wished Carol Robinson, Secretary at Governor Pothier, a speedy recovery; she became ill just as school opened. He thanked Alan Graham, Sheri Thibeault, Tom Connors, Carolyn Girard, and Kimberly Blais who helped fill in on a very hectic morning at Pothier and did an admirable job. Thanked Mike Capasso who has been filling in at Citizens; he is an excellent person and we are lucky to have him. On opening day of school he started at Citizens, Pothier and then to Coleman and noticed that the crosswalks were not painted; he noticed all of the other school crosswalks were painted and that is not fair. He does not know whose responsibility it is but he called P. Fontaine and he took care of it within a couple of days. A taxpayer asked him about our audits; 2014 and 2015 audits have not been completed; he checked with the former SC Chairperson on how they were preceded when an audit happened; she stated the audit was always presented to the SC. He wants the SC to be made aware of what the audit said and in particular the recommendations of the audit; this is very important to the SC. B. Peryea told him that he will get something to the SC so they can look review the 2014 audit; he also wants this on the website. He asked where is the money coming from for the bus to Barry Field. B. Peryea stated 2015 General Fund; he asked if this needed SC approval and no one replied. He was happy to see that the non-union benefits policy went out to the non-union people. Hopefully by the next SC meeting P. McGee would have completed his recommendations for length of contract.

S. SEALE: Congratulated and welcomed Mrs. Costa to Citizens' Memorial; she does have big shoes to fill. Former Principal Mr. Lopardo was able to really invigorate the community base; two years ago the PTA had three members which was a joint PTA with Pothier; last year he had regularly 20 parents in attendance per meeting. He is excited to have her and that is a school where we really need our best and thinks they chose the right person for the job. Welcome back to school everyone; the beginning of school went very well and glad to know that most of the positions are filled.

S. PAWLINA: Welcomed Mrs. Costa and echoed S. Seale's sentiments that you have big shoes to fill; however, feels she is very capable of doing this. It is a very exciting and challenging school and thinks it is a school that has been overlooked; she has seen some exciting things that have started and looks forward to seeing her follow through and come in with her own visions; they are looking forward to a leader to lead and she looks forward to seeing that in her.

Motion to adjourn at 8:15 p.m.: S. Seale

2nd: S. Pawlina (Unanimously Approved by the Committee)

Respectfully submitted,

Kimberly A. Blais
WSC Recording Secretary