

To be Approved 03/08/2005.

5.1

NEWPORT SCHOOL COMMITTEE
Special Meeting, 6 p.m.
Tuesday, February 14, 2005

MINUTES

Call to Order. Chairperson Dr. Charles P. Shoemaker called the Special Meeting of the Newport School Committee to order at 6:00 p.m. at the Sullivan Elementary School Gymnasium, 35 Dexter Street, Newport, Rhode Island. Committee Members: Dr. Charles P. Shoemaker, Vice Chairperson Robert J. Leary, David R. Carlin (absent), Hugo J. DeAscentis, Jr., Jo Eva Gaines, Dr. O. William Hilton, Jr. (arrived 7:15 p.m.), and Thomas S. Phelan; School Department: Superintendent of Schools Dr. Mary C. Canole, Director of Property Services Paul Fagan. City Council members in attendance included the Honorable John J. Trifero, Mayor, At Large Councilor and Vice Chair Jeanne-Marie Napolitano, 1st Ward Councilor Charles Y. Duncan, 2nd Ward Councilor Stephen C. Waluk (arrived 7:15 p.m.), 3rd Ward Councilor Colleen McGrath (arrived 7:15 p.m.), At Large Councilors Stephen R. Coyne, Mary C. Connelly (absent).

ROLL CALL.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE.

1.0 Elementary School Realignment.

6:00 p.m. to 7:15 p.m.: Coggeshall School.

Dr. Shoemaker welcomed everyone to the first of six elementary school realignment meetings and reviewed the handouts that were provided:

- 1.1 Decline in Student Population memorandum dated January 25, 2005
- 1.2 Projected FY 2005-06 Budget Expenses (1.1.1)
- 1.3 Realigning Grades; Not Closing a School memorandum dated January 21, 2005 (1.5.1)
- 1.4 Closing One School memorandum dated January 21, 2005 (1.5.2)
- 1.5 A Community Call to Action for Newport Public Schools letter dated February 14, 2005

Dr. Shoemaker indicated that a decrease in enrollment has resulted in severe deficit problems for the school department. For the fiscal year ending 2004, the school department deficit exceeded \$1.5 M dollars, for the year ending 2005, a projected deficit of approximately \$1.0 M dollars and for the year ending 2006, a projected deficit of approximately \$2.1 M dollars. As indicated on the handouts 1.5.1, realigning grades without closing a school could achieve \$600K in savings; 1.5.2, closing one school could realize \$1.1M in savings. Dr. Shoemaker reported that the school department

cannot continue to look to the city for tax increases to meet the projected budgets. Cost savings must be looked at that would improve the educational process.

Dr. Shoemaker indicated that the following ground rules would be in effect during the realignment hearings: a) each speaker is asked to speak only once, to allow everyone to be heard, b) due to our time limitations, each speaker (except the Principal and Key speakers) are asked to limit their remarks to 2 minutes. Dr. Shoemaker also requested that everyone in attendance please sign in at the table near the entrance, and he asked each speaker to please sign in at the speakers table.

Dr. Shoemaker reported that the School Committee recently received word that 40% of our students are reading below grade level. With the new Promotion and Retention Policy that the School Committee recently approved and is in effect this year, the District is looking at a potential 800 students in summer remedial programs this year.

Dr. Shoemaker indicated that parental involvement in the educational process is very important. He reported on A Community Call to Action, a public forum to rally the community around the schools. This Call to Action is modeled after a successful effort in Durham, North Carolina where community leaders set out to address inequalities between whites and minorities. Dr. Shoemaker hopes to look at the achievement gaps between Newport and our neighboring communities. He urged all in attendance to attend this forum scheduled for 7:30 p.m. Monday, March 14th at the Frank E. Thompson Middle School Beatrice Berman Bazarsky Performing Arts Center and Cafeteria, 55 Broadway, Newport, RI.

Dr. Shoemaker introduced Hugo J. DeAscentis, Jr. who will captain the Coggeshall School presentation. Hugo J. DeAscentis, Jr. recognized the city council members in attendance, and reported that the decision to close a school has not been decided – it was not a done deal. He also indicated that these meetings are not intended to pit one school against another, but to highlight the positive aspects of each school.

Mr. DeAscentis introduced Robert Frizelle, Principal of the John Coggeshall Elementary School. Mr. Frizelle reported that the PTO and Teachers are what makes the Coggeshall community and they would be speaking to the committee. Becky Bolan, Co-President of the PTO was introduced and indicated that there would be four primary speakers on behalf of Coggeshall: a) Wendy Morin speaking from the teachers and staff perspective on the accomplishments and learning climate at Coggeshall, b) Alison Kates, a Coggeshall parent speaking about the Coggeshall community playground, c) Becky Bolan speaking about the challenges we face in our community and Cathy Campbell will present information on the direction and future of Newport Schools.

Wendy Morin, a first grade teacher at Coggeshall for the past 5 years, addressed the committee (a copy of her remarks are attached). She indicated the Coggeshall was the only high performing school in the district, a Regent Commended school, and a school with the past three years of testing data reveal steady improvement in both Math and English Language Arts. The Parental SALT survey had a 99% response rate. Coggeshall School is a professional learning community. Staff members have become

life long learners and the staff has developed strong bonds with families. Opposed to closing Coggeshall or any elementary school in the district.

Allison Kates, longtime resident, parent, volunteer, PTO member, addressed the committee about the community playground at Coggeshall School. The idea of a new playground for Coggeshall began in 1999 and was realized with the opening of a new playground in May 2002. Designed from the drawings of neighborhood children, the PTO raised over \$13,500 to make the playground a reality. The PTO has established a Coggeshall Playground Maintenance Fund, which is funded by 10% of the proceeds from the largest PTO fundraiser. This past September, the fund paid over \$1,000 for new surfacing of the playground. The Coggeshall Community Playground is one of the best playgrounds in the city.

Becky Bolan, Co President of the PTO addressed the committee. (copy of remarks attached). She reported that although the School Department has been asked to "trim the fat", the fat has been trimmed for many years and now we are seriously cutting into the "meat" of the program. As a volunteer in her son's class, she noticed the sad condition of the furniture. A picture of the chairs from a Coggeshall class was passed to the committee. She indicated a long term plan for the elementary schools needs to be developed and put into place. It's time for a long range plan that would include a new school with state of the art equipment as part of the solution.

Kathy Campbell, a parent of a 1st and 4th grader at Coggeshall, addressed the committee. She indicated that the school department has to reverse the momentum of the negative perception of Newport schools. Newport needs to restore and rebuild education and work hand in hand with the City Council. A few years ago, Newport had 6 low performing schools. Budget cuts lead to the elimination of positive enrichment programs. Newport developed a stigma that Newport Public Schools were not the best. Her experience with the leadership and staff at Coggeshall dispelled that stigma, but now with the talks of closing a school, that stigma is back and deteriorating. Newport Public Schools provides a middle of the road education. The staff often makes out of pocket contributions for needed classroom supplies.

Hugo J. DeAscentis, Jr. indicated that throughout these meetings, issues that are raised will be examined and corrected. The committee wants to take a broad approach and not settle on a narrow solution, but look toward improving the overall school climate. Topics addressed included Kindergarten Centers and Sister Schools and school cultures.

Dr. Shoemaker asked Wendy Morin how teachers have improved and are working together. Wendy Morin replied that teachers are dedicated lifelong learners dedicated to the families of Coggeshall and a team approach to community. Coggeshall has 2 3rd grades and there is collaboration amongst all grade levels. There is a sense of collegiality in meeting the students needs.

David Hanoes, a parent of 4 children, 3 at Coggeshall, 1 now at Thompson, spoke to the committee. He questioned the laying off of the reading teacher, who has done

tremendous work in helping to improve English Language Arts scores. He believes that a larger portion of parents need to be involved in education. He also indicated that Coggeshall School is expandable. An addition could be built that could address handicapped accessibility.

Lousia Boatwright, a parent of a Coggeshall Kindergarten student addressed the committee. She reiterated Coggeshall's high performing categorization, the 99% parent response to the SALT survey, PTO cohesiveness, school leadership and grounds as positive factors to consider for keeping Coggeshall open.

Kathy Viera, a parent of 3, a 1st Grader at Coggeshall and 2 at Thompson, spoke to the committee. As a teacher in Portsmouth, she believes that one of Newport's successes is the small class size. She is amazed at the progress her first grader is making.

Audrey Stanwood-Ford, a parent of 3 children at Coggeshall, spoke to the committee of the dedication of the teachers and their respect for the leadership at the school which has lead to a safe caring community environment.

Jillian Waugh, parent spoke of the teachers familiarity with each of the students.

Paul Ford, parent echoed remarks made previously by other and asked the committee not to close Coggeshall School.

Liz Mathinos, a grandparent, asked the committee why they would close a high performing school. She asked the committee to think of the children first.

Donna Kelly, long term substitute teacher at Coggeshall, asked the committee what are the plans for recruiting and retaining a highly qualified staff? What is the appeal to new teachers to want to come to work in Newport Public Schools?

Dr. Shoemaker responded that he believes that Newport Public Schools professional development program is one of the biggest appealing items to our certified staff. He reported that in his conversations with people about professional development, he is always hearing that Newport is way ahead of other districts in the area of professional development.

Bill Boatwright, parent addressed the committee and suggested that creative funding for education needs to be addressed. More funding sources need to be found.

Beck Bolan suggested that the committee consider a grant writer.

Robert Frizelle, Principal thanked the committee for hearing the Coggeshall presentations and asked the committee to always put the children first.

Hugo J. DeAscentis, Jr. thanked everyone for presenting tonight.

The meeting recessed.

7:30 p.m. to 8:45 p.m.: Carey School.

Dr. Shoemaker called the meeting to order at 7:30 p.m.

Dr. Shoemaker welcomed everyone to the second of six elementary school realignment meetings and reviewed the handouts that were provided:

- 1.6 Decline in Student Population memorandum dated January 25, 2005
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Dr. Shoemaker introduced Robert J. Leary who will captain the Carey School presentation.

Mr. Leary thanked the parents and community members for attending tonight. He recognized council members in attendance and introduced the head table. He indicated that the purpose of these meeting is not to pit one school against another, but to hear from all schools with an open mind. Mr. Leary introduced Kimberly Homer, Principal of Henry R.A. Carey Elementary School and Mary Sheehan, President of the Carey PTO.

Kim Homer thanked the committee for the opportunity to present Carey schools position on elementary school realignment. She indicated that the committee will hear from a parent and staff perspective, why one of Newport's two ESL schools should not be considered for closure.

Mary Sheehan, President of the Carey PTO, addressed the committee (copy of remarks attached). She spoke of the shared vision with clear benefits that makes Carey School a special learning community. While Carey School was in danger of facing choice, the dedication of the staff and the hard work of the students have moved the school into a moderately improving and performing categorization. The hard work of the Carey community was recognized by the recent visit from Governor Carcieri. When looking at the latest 3rd grade writing scores, 49% of the Carey students met the state standard, almost 2 ½ times what the district average was. This result was the product of a lot of hard work and a shared vision. The 21st Century Community Learning Center grant was received and implemented this year.

Dale Blaess, Kindergarten Teacher, addressed the committee (copy of her statement attached). She highlights spotless facilities, recent building improvements, close proximity to many community agencies, (Salve, Preservation Society, RHS, Morton Park). She also remarks on a well defined vision for improving student learning.

David Fickel, a single dad with 3 children, 2 at Carey, 1 at Thompson, praised Carey for the improvements he has seen in his children's self esteem. One of his daughters failed 3rd grade in New York and is now thriving and doing well in the Carey community. His son was crying and in tears about starting a new school, he had little motivation to succeed. Now he loves school. Carey is absolutely the best thing that ever happened to me and my kids.

Heidi List Murphy, a parent of 2 Carey students, and the Founding Director of the List Academy of Music and Arts, 5 Harrison Avenue, Newport, RI, expressed how much Carey School has helped the client base of the List Academy due to the proximity to Carey School itself. (Letter attached). Students from Carey and Underwood can walk to the List Academy. Closing Carey or Underwood would result in a loss of students for the List Academy.

Paullette Reed, a parent of three Carey students, K, 2nd & 4th Grade, addressed the committee. A Navy family, Mrs. Reed was accustomed to paying for private education. She has always been against public schools. Mr. Reed had met Kim Homer, the

Principal and had a tour of the school. He wanted to give Carey School a chance. Mrs. Reed relented and allowed the children to be enrolled at Carey. She indicated Carey stole her heart. While stationed in Japan, the Reed's lived next to the local school. One of Mrs. Reeds daughters was being bullied in school and one day the daughter walked home. The local school never contacted Mrs. Reed, and when she called the school, they didn't even know her daughter was missing. Last year, in Japan, her daughter could not read. This year, after working with Dale Blaess, her daughter is reading by recognizing "sight words". Mrs. Reed told the committee that it was the LOVE at Carey school that makes it special – L for leading children to learn, O for the open minds and hearts to people of all nationalities, V for victory for student's self esteem and E for encouragement. What does Carey have to celebrate? A brighter future. Keep the doors of Carey open.

Leo Albea, a Naval father of a Carey School 1st grader, spoke about the positives of Carey School. His last duty station was in San Diego, and his son attended an inner city school. Carey offers his son much more in after school activities and is a much warmer environment than the inner city school in San Diego. Mr. Albea told the committee that if he is transferred someplace else he would want to keep his wife and son in Newport.

Raymond Gomes, parent of 5 children, addressed the committee citing the recent academic achievements realized, and the location of Carey School (his elementary school for grades 2-5). Mr. Gomes is an abutter to Carey School. The location of Carey makes it convenient for field trips to Kings Beach and Morton Park. Mr. Gomes said that Carey interacts with the neighbors and uses the neighborhood to its benefit.

Donna Kavlavich, parent of a daughter in 4th grade at Carey, told the committee that Carey provides students with the passion to learn and they provide an extended family feeling to learning.

Mary Catherine Dunst, a military Naval War College family, indicated that the welcoming community of Carey is one of its positive features.

Dr. Shoemaker asked Dale Blaess about the professional development opportunities afforded teachers and if she felt at a disadvantage being a single grade teacher in a school. Dale Blaess replied that in her fifth year of teaching Kindergarten, being a single grade at Coggeshall did not effect her. She regularly collaborates with the grade 1 teachers, and attends monthly Kindergarten Grade Level meetings with all the K teachers in the district. She also attends quarterly Kindergarten professional development sessions in Writer's Workshop and Math Investigations that are provided by the district.

Carol Halvorson, the spouse of a Naval War College officer and parent of 3rd and 4th graders at Carey, remarked that Kate Fillaramo has done tremendous work with her 3rd grader. His previous school was a magnet school in Virginia Beach, and Carey had given him confidence to learn.

Richard Kelly, spouse of Carey staffer, retired educator, neighbor, spoke about the negative impact of closing any elementary school. He urged the committee to keep every school open.

Wendy Edwards, a Naval spouse, indicated she recently was in San Diego and underwent school closures. The children will be well taken care of because of the dedication of the staff.

Meg Edward, parent of a 2nd grader, reported that she recently moved to Newport from New Jersey and they were considering private schools. They took a chance on Carey and they have never found a better nurturing caring environment.

Diane Campbell, parent of 2 Carey students, disagreed with the methodologies of the closure process. The schools in Newport are to be celebrated. All the parents are passionate about their schools. I'm disappointed in the School Committee pitting the schools against each other like this. It's antagonistic. It creates a negative spirit.

In closing, Principal Kim Homer told the committee that the Carey staff goes beyond the contract for the shared vision of the students.

2.0 Executive Session. No Executive Session was held.

Adjournment. Dr. Charles P. Shoemaker, Chairman called the meeting adjourned at 8:45 p.m.



Charles P. Shoemaker, M.D.
Chairperson



Mary C. Canole, Ed.D.
Clerk