

EAST PROVIDENCE SCHOOL DEPARTMENT

East Providence City Hall

145 Taunton Avenue

East Providence, Rhode Island 02914

School Committee Special Meeting

August 28, 2007

Open Session

Mrs. Morris called the meeting to order at 7:00PM. All members were present: Robert Faria, Eileen Lovett, David Medeiros, Steven Santos and Mildred Morris. Also present: Dr. Jacqueline Forbes, Superintendent of Schools, Robert Silva, Esq. and Andrew Thomas, Esq. A motion was made by Mr. Medeiros to move to Executive Session in accordance with RI General Laws, Section 42-46-5 (a) (1) Personnel, (a) (2) Collective Bargaining/Litigation, seconded by Mrs. Lovett. Vote 5-0.

Public Session reconvened at 7:30PM. A motion was made by Mr. Faria to return to open session and to seal the minutes of the Executive Session, seconded by Mr. Medeiros. Vote 5-0.

The Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag was led by Mr. Medeiros and a

Moment of Silence was observed.

Record of Previous Meetings |V A motion was made by Mr. Medeiros to approve the minutes of the July 26, 2007 meeting, seconded by Mrs. Lovett. Vote 5-0.

Chair's Report |V Mrs. Morris reported that this would be the last meeting for School Committee member, David Medeiros and invited him to attend the regular monthly meeting in September to receive a citation. Mrs. Morris stated that Mr. Medeiros's service on the School Committee was impressive and that he would be missed. Also, the School Committee will participate in a tour of all school buildings on August 29th in anticipation of the opening of school. Mrs. Morris attended a production at the Weaver Library recently and thanked the library for providing programs for children during the summer.

Report of Superintendent and Staff

Dr. Forbes advised that the School Department had the opportunity to pave in front of Orlo Avenue School, through the efforts of the City. **Mr. Tavares** reported that parking has been limited around the school and the city offered to do the work to improve the parking area. **Mr. Tavares** requested permission to allocate approximately \$4600. of the \$5000 budgeted for masonry services, toward creating a new parking area on the west side (North Broadway frontage) of Orlo Avenue School. The project would be completed with the cooperation of the

city highway department, who will supply the labor and the equipment; the School Department will assume the cost of the asphalt. With approval, the project could be completed before the opening of school. Mrs. Lovett asked if the Principal, Cheryl Gibbs, had been contacted regarding the work. Mr. Tavares said she was consulted and, a three foot buffer of grass was added from the door to the parking area, to alleviate safety concerns. A motion was made by Mr. Faria to approve, seconded by Mr. Medeiros. Vote 5-0.

Personnel Recommendations ¡V Diane Rodericks presented the following personnel items:

APPOINTMENTS

Scott Hunt Teacher, Spec Ed, Self-contained, EPHS
(Due to a resignation)

Heather Peck (1 year only) Teacher, Sp Ed, Resource, EPHS
(Due to a leave of absence)

Natasha Axelson Teacher, Reading, MMS
(Due to a retirement)

Sarah Yassine Teacher, Reading, Orlo Avenue School
(Due to a leave of absence)

**Michelle Colicci Teacher, Special Subjects ¡V Art
(New ¡V Due to RIDE regulations)**

**Amanda Pugliesi Teacher, Special Subjects ¡V Art
(New ¡V Due to RIDE regulations)**

**Joan Wollin Teacher, Special Subjects ¡V Library
(Due to a declined appointment)**

**Amy Souza Teacher, Special Subjects ¡V Phys Ed
(Due to a declined appointment)**

Motion: Mrs. Lovett/Second: Mr. Medeiros. Vote 5-0.

RECALL

**Diane Hurd Teacher, Grade 2, Orlo Avenue
(Due to a leave of absence)**

Motion: Mr. Medeiros/Second: Mrs. Lovett. Vote 5-0.

RETIREMENT

**Judith Antonio (31 years) Teacher, Sp Ed, Resource, MMS
Close of 2007-2008 School Year**

Motion: Mrs. Lovett with Regret/Second: Mr. Santos. Vote 5-0.

EXTENDED LEAVE OF ABSENCE

Fatima Avila English Teacher, Grade 7, MMS

2007-2008 School Year

Kimberly Chapman Teacher, Grade 2, Orlo Avenue School

2007-2008 School Year

Motion: Mrs. Lovett/Second: Mr. Medeiros. Vote 5-0.

Payment of Bills

Local Operating Bill List

Warrant #000756 8/23/07 \$300,261.90

Motion: Mr. Faria/Second: Mr. Medeiros. Vote 5-0.

2007-2008 Budget Work Session

Dr. Forbes briefly recapped the budget process since last fall when she advised the School Committee and the City regarding a projected deficit for the 2007-08 budget. Dr. Forbes reported that the following actions were taken in an attempt to reduce the cost of education to the City:

„X Requested that bargaining units consider switching to a different health care provider

„X Relief was requested from the bargaining units (teachers and custodians) and the process of contract negotiations began 18 months before the end of the contracts; unfortunately no agreement was reached.

„X The School Committee and administrative staff asked for legislative relief through East Providence legislators; one bill, regarding an increase in the amount of group home reimbursement, was successful.

„X An attempt was made to reorganize schools and review closing some school buildings; however, community response indicated a preference for neighborhood schools.

„X The budget was reduced slightly more than \$1 million by reducing staff through attrition, layoffs and job eliminations. In addition, the School Department is participating in a feasibility study of consolidation of services with the City through Roger Williams University hoping to realize cost savings through greater efficiency.

„X A request has been made to the Commissioner of Education for a waiver for special education class size similar to neighboring states and projected savings could be substantial.

Dr. Forbes related that going forward, the School Department needs to have budgets that are in line with the tax cap legislation; unfortunately, for the 2007-08 budget, the School Department is in the middle of contracts. As presented at last week's meeting, Dr. Forbes listed the six areas of increased expenditures that are cost drivers in the budget: benefits, salaries, tuitions, energy , transportation and

debt service. The Superintendent explained that although the proposed budget requests significant increases, she understands that the School Department will not receive the full amount requested.

Once the City Council determines the amount of their appropriation, she and the School Committee will revisit the budget to make cuts. Dr. Forbes further explained that although the state funding number is known, the City funding level is not final; however, we all know that the cost of educating students is expensive with many factors beyond the control of the local level. The Superintendent reiterated the responsibility of the School Committee to maintain a school budget which does not result in a debt and that the budget presented reflects the best estimates of the operational costs as we know them. Dr. Forbes requested that the School Committee consider a motion for second passage of the proposed budget.

Dr. Forbes invited Dr. Hilton, Mr. Faria, Mr. Capron, and Mr. Medeiros (members of the Finance Sub-Committee) to assist in answering questions regarding the budget.

In response to questions from Mr. Faria regarding a break down of the cost of health benefits, Mr. Kevin Walsh of Group Benefits Strategies (School Department health insurance consultants) was present. Mr. Walsh explained that Blue Cross expected 10% renewal; we are looking at 4%, while Delta is at 7% and he suggested putting the dental out again for renewal and that 13 out of 18 creates possibility of under funding next year. Mr. Faria asked about the buy

back line. Mr. Santos asked Mr. Walsh about comparable numbers and what it would cost the city for United vs. Blue Cross. Mr. Faria asked for an explanation of the benefits line.

Mr. Faria asked about the rest of the line and deferred to Mr. Capron who explained about Cobra money paid by individuals who pay for continued coverage. Mr. Capron explained that for any employee paid by federal grant, the benefits are also paid by the grant. Mr. Santos asked about the buyback numbers. Mr. Faria asked for an explanation from Mr. Capron regarding numbers listed in the benefit line. Mr. Capron explained that there was a large increase in the pension on July 1st and it will go up again next July 1st with over a 16% increase. Mr. Santos asked where we stand regarding funding of pensions. Mr. Capron explained that the state pension is funded at State level and we are paid up to date.

Discussion took place regarding utilities. Mr. Faria asked Dr. Hilton about amount of money allocated for electricity; Dr. Hilton explained that it has not increased over five years. Mr. Santos asked about a substantial increase in oil heat even with new furnaces. Mr. Faria asked to take a look at kilowatt hours which seem high. Mr. Medeiros asked for an explanation of the special education tuitions. Mrs. Waterman, Director of Special Services explained there has been an increase in the number of medically fragile children; federal and state regulations increase and are placed on the local School District. East Providence is above the state average in several categories, which

are made by medical diagnosis. Mrs. Waterman explained the high level of mobility in East Providence (students moving in and out who require services). Discussion about the cost of the East Bay Collaborative program which we receive at a reduced rate. Mrs. Waterman explained that the Collaborative program is a small structured program. Mr. Daft and Dr. Caswell are working on a virtual program (VLA) which will not start until placements are necessary; this program is capable of serving around thirty students at about \$400 per student.

Mr. Faria asked about the number of Individualized Education Plans in East Providence; Mrs. Waterman responded there are 1500 (135 out-placements and 70 served in house). The Watters annex was established as an alternative program for students who qualify for special education services, who, based on a primary diagnosis, require a private setting by law. Mrs. Lovett asked about the average cost of special education vs. regular education. Dr. Forbes reported it is about \$9,000 for regular education vs. \$29,000 for special education students. Our per pupil cost is about \$12,068 which is less than the state average. Dr. Forbes provided information on the per pupil costs; East Providence is listed as #20 out of 36 RI districts. Mr. Santos asked how East Providence compares to other areas.

In response to a question from Mr. Medeiros, Dr. Forbes explained that East Bay Collaborative provides professional development, literacy, science kits, lab classrooms, educational reform efforts and

provided assistance with the PBGR regulations, portfolios and senior projects, moving efforts forward for high performing schools. Discussion regarding professional development; Dr. Forbes would like to review this during negotiations; she would like a 184 day school year and to use the extra days for professional development.

Discussion regarding transportation costs and the possibility of using smaller buses in some cases. Mr. Linneman explained how the buses are used and that using a small bus is not necessarily to our advantage. Mr. Santos asked about the state law regarding special education students on RIPTA buses which could save considerable money.

Mrs. Lovett asked about testing costs; Mr. Daft explained about the NEASC visit to the High School in the spring and the expenses involved in the accreditation process.

Dr. Forbes advised that a copy of the budget will be made available on the website.

Question & Answer Period

Mr. Antone Gouveia spoke regarding volatile items in the budget, which continually change and are best guess estimates only. He presented data and suggested that this data indicates perhaps a 5% increase; B & E auditors suggested 10% in their report three years

ago. A 14.7% increase is being looked at this year and he offered another interpretation of one line item and emphasized the need to use data on a handout; he hoped that the School Committee did not go to second passage tonight, as they need to look at these numbers as there may be significant savings on some items and he asked them to use recent data.

Donna McEnery, 160 Ferris Avenue, asked that the School Committee use their microphones. She advised the School Committee that the East Bay Collaborative is top notch along with the science kits and that teachers do participate in and pay for professional development out side of school hours in order to keep their certification current.

Heather Ryan, 200 Riverside Drive, had concerns regarding the special education tuition line, which was cut last year; she asked if these were actual numbers and about what will be reflected in next years' budget. Also she asked about the number of principals at the middle schools and high school.

Jack Fahey, 2535 Pawtucket Avenue, Chair of the Taxpayer's Association presented copies of a letter to the School Committee. He asked the School Committee to be more aggressive in the pursuit of legislative relief. He asked to reflect on the duties of the School Committee and the need to uphold the laws of the state. He asked the School Committee to reject the budget for further reduction, as it violates the laws of the city and the state regarding the tax cap and

not to have second passage of the budget. He asked for the School Committee to prepare a 3.5% limit on the increase in the budget.

Mrs. Morris said she could not vote on the budget and asked Dr. Forbes to go back and cut another \$2 million. Mr. Santos commented that he did not vote for first passage and still cannot support the budget now.

Mr. Faria voted the first time with a heavy heart, but the numbers need to be worked on to give City Council the best budget we have; he cannot support it now.

Mr. Medeiros said in light of information received tonight, he looked at the numbers in more detail and strong decisions will need to be made.

Mrs. Lovett asked if it is imperative to pass the budget now. Mr. Silva, legal counsel, advised that as a practical matter the City Council will not accept this budget and can make cuts and send it back to the School Committee and that a budget will eventually be adopted by the School Committee. Past budgets have taken more time. He was not prepared to advise the School Committee that there is a provision to pass a budget now; School Department will not come to a crashing halt if no budget is passed tonight from a legal concern; School Committee needs to be comfortable with the budget first as it will be sent back by the City Council anyway.

A motion was made by Mr. Faria to go back to the drawing board, seconded by Mr. Medeiros. Roll call vote: Mr. Faria, aye; Mrs. Lovett, aye; Mr. Medeiros, aye; Mr. Santos, aye; Mrs. Morris, aye.

Dr. Forbes asked for direction; Mrs. Morris asked that the budget go back for more cuts. Dr. Forbes will provide a range of options for the School Committee at the next meeting. Mr. Faria asked if any answer on the waiver requests; Dr. Forbes spoke to the Asst. Commissioner and explained the process.

Mr. Santos asked about a legal opinion on the meeting last week not taped. Mr. Silva explained the process regarding video taping; not a legal issue. Mr. Donovan and volunteers tape the meeting, which are not obligated; written record always maintained.

Point of information, Mr. Medeiros recused himself on the discussions regarding transportation. Motion to adjourn at 10:00PM by Mr. Medeiros, seconded by Mr. Faria.

Respectfully submitted,

Patricia A. Iannelli, Administrative Assistant

Eileen Lovett, Clerk of the Committee