

EAST PROVIDENCE SCHOOL DEPARTMENT

East Providence City Hall

145 Taunton Avenue

East Providence, Rhode Island 02914

School Committee Special Meeting

October 30, 2007

Open Session

Mrs. Morris called the meeting to order 6:00PM. A motion by Mr. Faria 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 7:45PM. Motion by Mrs. Lovett to return to open session and to seal the minutes of the Executive Session, seconded by Mr. Faria. Vote 5-0.

Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag was led by Mr. Santos and a Moment of Silence was observed for Jed Schifino.

Record of Previous Meetings – A motion was made by Mrs. Lovett to approve record of previous meetings, seconded by Mr. Faria. Vote

5-0.

Report of Superintendent and Staff

Awarding of Bids – Reinsurance Bid – Mr. Kevin Walsh of Group Benefits Strategies attended the meeting along with Ginger Hastings of Delta Dental. Mr. Walsh explained that competitive quotes were received for the stop loss renewal, which protects the employer against catastrophic claims. Discussion regarding the rate and claims experience. Mr. Walsh recommended to award to Blue Cross/Blue Shield at \$150,000 deductible. Mr. DeCastro said he had a discussion with Blue Cross and he was happy about the reduced rate; he asked if we had looked at \$175,000 in order to save more money. Mr. Walsh explained that they look at the claims experience also. Mr. DeCastro discussed this with the West Bay Group, who are at \$175,000 and this works well for them; if we could join that group, we could save more money. Mr. Walsh agreed with the logic to move to \$175,000. Mr. DeCastro spoke with Blue Cross and they indicated that it would be alright to delay this until November 13th. Mr. Walsh said he was not aware of that and had a concern with delaying this with one more month of claims. Mr. DeCastro found that East Bay Group surpluses are pooled, but not so with West Bay; if we are looking to save on administrative fees, he would not want to burden East Providence with the pool situation. He thinks West bay might be a good option. Mr. Walsh stated that Blue Cross would be more competitive with administrative fees. Mr. DeCastro asked to

postpone this award pending negotiations with West Bay. Mr. Walsh said if he had assurance from Blue Cross, they would be able to work something out. Mr. DeCastro said this involves a lot of money on the table with administrative fees; we are looking at over \$400,000 and this is a pretty big number to wait a couple of weeks. Mr. Walsh said that Blue Cross made proposals to these groups and he is not sure anything will change in two weeks, but it could be tabled. Mr. DeCastro is interested in West Bay; we would have the same type of deal we have today, but at the end of the year, we would be responsible for the surplus or loss. It was decided to vote to award the bid to Blue Cross at \$175,000; motion by Mr. DeCastro to award the bid - \$18.35 per contract with stipulation that we will try to work out an arrangement with the West Bay group to use their insurance rate, seconded by Mr. Faria. Discussion: Mr. Faria said that he would like all back up on bids in the future. Mr. Santos had a concern with how this would effect United Health proposal. Mr. Walsh said it will take weeks to see the final proposals, but he sees Blue Cross possibly reducing administrative fees. Mr. Walsh said there are three components: administrative fee, reinsurance and claims charges. Vote 5-0.

Ms. Hastings of Delta explained the renewal for the school department regarding dental insurance renewal – 11/1/07 in year two with Delta with a 5% rate cap in year two. The actual increase is coming in at 18. She recommended another competitive quote next year. Mr. DeCastro felt that the collaborative groups will be an

advantage to the School Department.

Energy Savings Proposal – Mr. Capron explained that the State Energy office loans money to correct inefficiencies in buildings. Mr. DeCastro said his first concern was the legality of going out to bid. Mr. Silva looked at the proposal and it is not awarding a contract, but seeking the authority to ask the City Council to take out a loan; when work is needed, then seek proposals. Mr. DeCastro had concerns with asking the City Council to borrow money, but we are not sure until we go out for proposals how much money we will be able to save; it does not feel right to go to the City Council without anything to go out to bid. Mr. Capron said the push was for utilities savings in the winter. Mr. DeCastro said there should be a Request for Proposals for anyone interested in doing this kind of work. Dr. Forbes recommended tabling for more information and how this fits into the Five-year Facilities Plan. Mrs. Morris also had concerns. A motion was made by Mr. DeCastro to table, seconded by Mrs. Lovett. Vote 5-0.

Personnel Recommendations – Mrs. Diane Rodericks informed the School Committee regarding the implementation of the new automated answering telephone service effective November 1, 2007. Calls will be directed through a menu prompt. Dr. Forbes thanked the School Committee for approving moving to the automated system and moving the School Department into the twenty-first century.

Mrs. Rodericks presented the following personnel items:

Appointments

Jessica Pasquarelli English, High School (Teacher Resignation)

Geoffrey Higginbotham English, High School (Teacher Resignation)

Darlene Hale Math, High School (Teacher Resignation)

Annette Schofield Math, Martin Middle School (Teacher on Leave)

Marissa Lombardo Math, Virtual Learning Academy

Brian Petsch Girl's Basketball, Martin Middle School

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

Retirement

Theresa Lopes Supervisory Asst., Hennessey

Effective: October 26, 2007

Janice Frese Grade 5 Teacher, Silver Spring

Close of 2007-08 School Year

Resignations

Candace Harper Basketball Cheerleading Coach, High School

Effectively Immediately

Tammy Crowther Bio-Med Teacher, Career/Technical School

Motion: Mrs. Lovett/Second: Mr. Faria

Family Medical Leave

Kerry Gravina Grade One Teacher, Whiteknact

Approximately 11/20/07

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

Facilities Update – Mr. Joseph Tavares advised that the boilers are in place at the high school and we are still awaiting the installation of gas meters. The project is about 95% completed and heating with oil.

ATC is still working on some minor glitches and the fencing for the generator and outside vents is scheduled to be completed by the end of the month. It has been discovered that one of three water mains into the high school is severely deteriorated and could pose a major problem. A proposal will be obtained for the cost of repairing the water main located in an obscure area under the pool. Also, the water department offered to donate a new water meter to the school; however, the School Department would be responsible for the installation and the initial proposal is approximately \$34,000. The replacement would provide a more accurate reading. At Hennessey School, the new boiler is in place and should be operating shortly. Mr. Tavares thanked all involved for a quick response to this situation. At Watters School, a crack was discovered in a section of the boiler and repairs will be made.

Dr. Forbes thanked the Mayor and the City for a quick response and assistance with the Hennessey School heating system.

Unfinished Business

Ratification of High School Heating System Agreement – Dr. Forbes advised that the City's bond counsel has requested approval and

recommended School Committee approval. A motion was made by Mr. Faria, seconded by Mrs. Lovett. Discussion: Mr. Santos asked about the legality. Mr. Silva advised that he and the City Solicitor, Mr. Conley, reviewed this document and it was evident that it needed to be executed by the end of October; this resolution is to make sure when the loan is due that the money will be used for this purpose. Mr. Silva agreed with Mr. Conley to save the School Committee and City from incurring loss. Mr. Silva asked for ratification. Vote 5-0.

Copier Analysis (Mr. DeCastro) – Mr. Capron presented breakdown of the costs requested by School Committee member, Mr. DeCastro, regarding copier and risograph costs, the lease agreements, and maintenance agreements. Mr. DeCastro had questions about the reasonable number for run lengths and if there were any possibilities of consolidating to get the run length up. Mr. Capron can ask the company for normal run length and if we would be better served using copiers on some rather than risographs. Some copiers are about eight years old and have significant amount of repairs; we can review and give recommendations and possibly training for staff on run length. Mrs. Morris said she always asks about copiers and has never received a report similar to this. Mr. Daft advised that a study was conducted regarding risograph use at the high school a few years ago and some machines are reserved for certain departments and some may show greater use than others. Mr. DeCastro would like to see something from the company during difficult times and maybe we can retire some machines. Mr. Faria said that during

budget season this would have been a good tool for evaluation when putting the budget together; he was a little disappointed with receiving it now. Dr. Forbes advised that as we move forward, we can provide additional information.

FY 2007-08 Budget – Dr. Forbes reported that the School Department is committed to providing the highest caliber of academic instruction, educational programming and support to our students and that East Providence holds a statewide reputation as a successful urban ring district that holds the highest mathematics achievement amongst other similar districts. All schools are high or moderate performing. Due to the lack of resources provided in the 2007-08 budget, our academic standing may be seriously jeopardized. As this is the culminating year of the new Board of Regents graduation requirements and also part of a NEASC accreditation status. The high school's accreditation warning status was removed in 2003 and may be realized once again. Dr. Forbes hoped that this would not occur again. Additionally, the lack of any new programs in the past five years, operating at a bare minimum, and the reduction and elimination of programs would limit our district's growth and the competitive edge we have provided to our students in the past. Dr. Forbes continued that further reductions to the School Committee approved budget will negatively impact our students, their families, our staff and the residents of the community. Given the present circumstances, the district will not be able to meet its contractual, legal and regulatory obligations in the next fiscal year. Additional

reductions will only lead to a larger projected deficit and diminished educational services and opportunities for students and families in the city of East Providence. Dr. Forbes asked for direction from the School Committee as to where to make reductions. Mr. DeCastro suggested that he would be looking to make cuts from the salary and benefits accounts as he hopes to be able to save some money on Blue Cross, even though we would still need another half million on top of that. He said there is no magical line item number and that we should try to save where we can through negotiations, copiers, and do all we can to do the best we can, but he is not in favor of cutting programs. Mr. Faria asked if any feedback with the buyback issue. Dr. Forbes advised that when we cannot pay the bills, she will have to notify the School Committee and City Council. Mr. Faria said they tried to reduce the budget without impacting students, but there is no simple solution. Mr. Santos said there is no answer; looking at not implementing certain aspects of contracts, however, there are not a lot of alternatives. Mrs. Morris does not want the budget cuts to affect the students. Mrs. Lovett said the money will not be there after the first of the year. Dr. Forbes will look at salaries and benefits and appreciates the help of the School Committee to reduce expenses and to provide the best education we can at the least cost.

Dr. Forbes asked Mr. DeVall, Principal of Martin Middle School, to attend regarding the Assistant Principal position at Martin. Mr. DeVall advised that Martin has four functioning houses and new procedures regarding fire drills, etc. Administrators have rolled up their sleeves

to help and are working to capacity as seasoned veterans and they are getting through. They depend on department heads; worried about personalization piece; it has been challenging. His concern – he is proud of his high performing school and invites all to visit; at breaking point and he hopes nothing else is taken away; he has security concerns. Mr. DeVall said he could not operate without the seasoned administrators he works with and they could all use the extra help especially regarding security; he worries that administrators are working hard and he sometimes has questions about who he can get to help. He would love to start the 2008-09 school year with a full administrative staff. Mrs. Morris asked that he come forward to Dr. Forbes with any changes in this position. Mr. DeCastro appreciates his effort and enthusiasm of the team; it needs to be stressed that there has been a reduction of students, but administrators have been cut in half; he commends the team and hopes to be able to look at this next year. Mr. DeCastro suggested doing something with technology to solve the security issues. Mr. Faria commented that the staff does a phenomenal job, but the parents have concerns about the environment and he agrees with the personalization aspect that not enough is being done to reach out to kids as they move into the middle school especially as it relates to reading and math levels. Dr. Forbes thanked the staff during these tough times.

Dr. Forbes requested that the School Committee consider replacing the Assistant Athletic Director position; she was concerned about

sports opportunities for students at the High School. The stipend is approximately \$5000. Mr. Daft advised that it takes two people to run the office properly and there would be issues with one person. Mr. Santos asked if volunteers could help. Mr. Daft advised that a person is needed in that position; there at least five activities per day. Dr. Forbes explained there are contractual issues with supplanting or replacing. A motion was made by Mr. DeCastro to reinstate, seconded by Mrs. Lovett. Roll call vote: Mr. DeCastro, aye; Mr. Faria, aye; Mrs. Lovett, aye; Mr. Santos, nay; Mrs. Morris, aye. Vote 4-1.

New Business

Mr. Faria stated that there is a need to revisit the educational process in East Providence as there is a disconnect between the effort and output of students. He asked if a group could be put together to look at the process of curriculum at the middle level to fine tune it. Dr. Forbes would take a look at that middle school concept and incorporate into strategic plan; if a group is needed, it could be part of strategic planning.

Payment of Bills

Local Operating Bill List

Warrant #000771 10/18/07 \$ 3,949.49

Motion: Mr. DeCastro/Second: Mr. Santos. Vote 5-0.

Federal Bill List

Warrant #000773 10/25/07 \$ 218.02

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

Question and Answer Period

Mr. Fahey of the East Providence Taxpayers' Association asked about passing grades being adjusted. He asked about the policy manual being available. He was concerned about the budget deficit; what is new since preparation and the last message; what controls to shrink the time of awareness.

Dr. Forbes reviews the monthly bills and is required by the Auditor General to complete quarterly reports which are forwarded to the City; we will probably be officially notifying the City. Mr. Fahey wanted to know what prevents controls from real time. Mr. Fahey does not think the quarterly report is adequate and there should be daily advice and that this is a policy matter for the School Committee to look into. Mr. Faria explained that they look at the history of other years' budgets; Mr. Capron is fully capable of the due diligence required on the budget. Dr. Forbes will do all to notify city officials. Mr. Fahey referred to the past when there were budget problems and the School Committee and Superintendent were well aware of budget issues. Contract issues contributed to the deficit and increased it at the time four out of five members had serious conflicts with members of their families working or benefiting themselves. In July 2007, we

are still talking about the deficit, contractual agreement, wages and \$1.56 million in the letter to the Auditor General.

Mr. Faria said the School Committee is working diligently and thanked Mr. DeCastro for his work. Mr. DeCastro shared some of the same concerns and restored some of the cuts; negotiating what we can and may have more to report at next meeting.

Mr. Bill Murphy spoke regarding concerns with the budget, conflicts of interest regarding contracts and the importance of contracts as it relates to the City Charter and State Law. Mr. Murphy said there will be a bill slipped to the taxpayers and he asked the School Committee to look at the issues presented and give careful thought to obligation, responsibility and political pressure. Also he said there are a number of students below average in reference to the comments about commitment to students and reference to high performing. He had a concern about the language regarding this.

Mrs. Morris asked about conflicts regarding contracts. Mr. Murphy said there are questions about the extension of contracts and those who negotiated benefited by it.

Mr. Silva stated that he would pass on a letter received this evening which relates to conflict of interest. He asked to read and record as part of the minutes. Mrs. Lovett read the letter which concerned Mr. Carlin's withdrawal of a request for the Ethics Commission to review

a vote taken by Mrs. Morris.

Mr. Silva addressed the personal animus and questioned rumor and innuendo and subjecting the reputations of public officials to damage.

Mr. Tony Gouveia hoped the School Committee will listen to the taxpayers' association suggesting their interpretation of breaking the law by being in deficit spending; break the law or break contracts, which is illegal. The representation is wrong with animal house decorum and writing a letter to a governing body and ethics commission slandering people. He is ashamed of the representation. This is pie in the sky to a difficult situation, when not one penny was cut from the city budget.

A motion was made by Mr. DeCastro to adjourn at 10:50PM, seconded by Mr. Santos. Vote 5-0.

Respectfully submitted,

Patricia A. Iannelli, Administrative Assistant

Eileen Lovett, Clerk of the Committee