

# **EAST PROVIDENCE SCHOOL DEPARTMENT**

**East Providence City Hall**

**145 Taunton Avenue**

**East Providence, Rhode Island 02914**

**December 11, 2007**

## **Open Session**

**Mrs. Morris, Chair, called the meeting to order at 6:00PM. All members were present: Stephen DeCastro, Robert Faria, Eileen Lovett, Steven Santos, Mildred Morris. Also present: Dr. Jacqueline B. Forbes, Superintendent of Schools, Robert Silva, Esq. and Andrew Thomas, Esq. A motion was made 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. A motion was made by Mr. DeCastro to return to open session and to seal the minutes of the Executive Session, seconded by Mrs. Lovett.**

**Vote 5-0.**

**Mrs. Morris reported on a vote taken in executive session relative to settlement of a workers' compensation reimbursement for medical**

expenses paid, as well as worker's compensation settlement of an individual suit. Mr. Silva asked for a vote for settlement (less 1/3) \$28,000 reimbursement to the School Department; also payment for medical expenses and compensation, etc. A motion was made by Mr. DeCastro to approve, seconded by Mrs. Lovett. Roll call vote: Mr. DeCastro, aye; Mr. Faria, aye; Mrs. Lovett, aye; Mr. Santos, Mrs. Morris. Vote 5-0.

The Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag was led by Mrs. Lovett and a Moment of Silence was observed.

Record of Previous Meetings – A motion was made by Mr. Faria to approve the minutes of the meetings held on October 30, 2007, October 31, 2007 and November 13, 2007, seconded by Mrs. Lovett. Vote 5-0.

### **Chair's Report**

Nate Lovett, Student Liaison, presented a report on various high school events and activities.

Mrs. Morris advised that the Superintendent volunteered to a reduction in pay raise to 2.5%, eliminating merit pay, effective 11/1/07-08. Mrs. Morris thanked Dr. Forbes. Mrs. Morris reported that a music grant and a wellness grant were presented to the School Department by Senator Moura. Mrs. Morris attended a concert at the

**State House with Dr. Forbes recently where the grants were presented. Mrs. Morris was very proud of the music program and the fact that East Providence had the most representation at the State House concerts. Mrs. Morris also noted that East Providence High School graduate, Jaime Silva, was recently named an All American Player. Mrs. Morris wished everyone happy holidays.**

**Hearings - None**

**Reading of Communications – None**

**Report of Superintendent and Staff – Dr. Forbes related that she is proud of all the wonderful holiday programs in the schools; concerts, community giving activities to the needy and of the excellent teaching and learning opportunities in the classrooms. Dr. Forbes thanked parents and staff for providing a myriad of opportunities for students.**

**Report of the Superintendent and Staff**

**FY 2007-08 Financial Report – Dr. Forbes requested that Mr. William Capron, Interim Director of Administration and Finance present the report. Mr. Capron stated the current projected deficit is \$3,346,615. Mr. DeCastro commented regarding reductions and the negative adjustment in tuitions. Mr. Capron replied that this amount is based on the enrollment at the time the budget is formulated. Dr. Forbes**

replied that six new tuitions were added and that the tuition account is volatile, changing all the time. Mr. Capron stated there are nine additional tuitions than at the time the budget was prepared; he explained how he calculates the rate, which is closer to \$65,000 each. Dr. Forbes believed the increases were due to students moving in, but could not give the exact number; she explained that students are placed out of district, if their particular needs cannot be met within the system. Mr. DeCastro noted that at some point in time, if students keep moving in, we will need some legislative help, since our budget increases while the other community's budget decreases; we need to figure out a solution to this problem, since the estimated \$600,000 is not accounted for in the budget. Dr. Forbes will continue to work with the legislators. Mr. DeCastro asked about the health plan change to be implemented in January; through October, this would save about \$600,000 over ten months, which is not reflected in the \$3.3 million deficit. If successful, this would help reduce the deficit.

Dr. Forbes reported two major problems: A \$3.346 million projected deficit and a cash flow running six months behind on special education bills. She explained that salaries are paid bi-weekly (\$1.7-\$1.8 million) and wires transfers are made weekly to Blue Cross/Blue Shield (\$50,000 to \$300,000); everything else is paid on the monthly bill list. The City caps the bill list limit at 1/12th of the budget minus payroll and health benefits (\$1.4 million per month to pay our bills) and we are six months behind on paying special education services. Dr. Forbes wanted to inform the School

**Committee regarding this situation and provided a list of the vendors and the amounts due. She explained the impact of the projected deficit: vendors will discontinue services and there will be ramifications, going forward, no new educational programs; limited implementation of full day Kindergarten plan, five year facilities plan and a negative impact on the strategic plan. There will be no math mentors or coaches; we will delay implementation of the technology plan. Dr. Forbes had concerns that the NEASC accreditation may be in jeopardy due to limited resources at the high school**

**Budget Reductions: Actions taken to minimize: Reduced 19 positions, no funds for professional development; supply budgets reduced supplies and materials; reduced textbook account, eliminated CTC Co-op student position and eliminated the GED Testing Program. In addition, School Committee action taken: new reinsurance contract savings, \$3.2 million cut in health insurance, salaries, and special education tuitions. The School Committee is obligated by law to have a balanced budget; they took further action with one insurance plan at a \$600,000 savings, but there is a potential liability if not successful with the arbitration award. As Superintendent, Dr. Forbes appealed to the School Committee to seek additional funds from the City of East Providence, which is the only step open at this time. Mrs. Morris asked if the School Committee wanted to take a vote on holding a workshop. Mr. Faria said although he was not happy with previous workshops, he would go forward to brainstorm some ideas. Mr. DeCastro said he placed an item under**

**New Business and he believes the School Committee shares the Superintendent's concerns; however, he thinks other things can be done to reduce the budget; one item would be some other type of health insurance with the West Bay Collaborative . He would like to put together a presentation in three areas: where we have been; where we are today and where we are going, which is the important part. The School Committee's budget was reduced by the City Council, we need to figure out what to do, and it is important to have a workshop to explain where the School Committee is coming from. The School Committee has approved a budget and any additional money would have to come from the city budget; we need to make the best effort we can. The \$600,000 expenditures for tuitions is a problem and needs to be outlined; we need to ask for help from the City Council. Mr. DeCastro said he is all ears on ways to solve these issues; we need one evening a month to discuss as we are headed into a brick wall and will run into some issues. There are some other health options to save some money and make a dent in over spending. Mr. Capron explained that we are one month into the new fiscal year and we do not have a full month's experience on expenditures.**

**Mr. DeCastro noted that salary line is at 6.99% will only be at 8.33% and will this catch up in December; it is important to explain this. We are not filling some positions and there are additional savings from the contract (approximately \$44,000).**

**Dr. Forbes explained that she will be updating as we go along, but the savings are not at \$3.3 million.**

**Mr. DeCastro said that most bills are 45-60 days from the invoice date, but should be aged from the due date; they may be 120 days, but not 163. Dr. Forbes wanted the School Committee to be fully aware of all past due items. This was alarming to Mrs. Morris. Mr. Faria would like a column added showing where we stood last year (percentage) to be able to compare. Mr. Santos asked where we stand regarding the discussion at a prior meeting regarding the meals tax. Mr. Faria thought the Superintendent would ask the City Manager. Dr. Forbes added that according to acceptable audit principles, we need to find out the appropriate auditing practices; this is her assumption, but we can check with the City manager. Mr. Capron advised that all revenue in the current budget has to be applied to the current budget before applying to the cumulative deficit.**

**Mr. Faria would like to follow up with the meals tax, which was only for the deficit. Dr. Forbes can discuss this at the workshop and ask about the meals tax then; Dr. Forbes will have to talk with the auditors and lawyers, as there are different positions on this issue.**

**Personnel Recommendation – Mrs. Diane Rodericks presented the personnel items:**

**Appointments**

**Kelsey Quinones Competition/Basketball Cheerleading Coach, High School**

**Michael Almeida Boys' Track Coach, Martin Middle School**

**Motion: Mrs. Lovett/Second: Mr. Faria. Discussion: Mrs. Morris questioned the Cheerleading Coach position. Mr. Daft explained the competition is a new position through the Interscholastic League; in order to participate in competition, have to do both basketball and competition).**

**Vote 5-0.**

**Retirement**

**Judith Walsh Teacher Assistant, Riverside Middle School**

**Close of 2007-08 School Year**

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

**Family Medical Leave**

**Melissa Aniello Speech/Language Teacher, Meadowcrest – Approx. 2/4/08**

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

**Ray Francis Temporary Night Supervisor**

**Motion: Mrs. Lovett/Second: Mr. Faria. Discussion: (Mr. DeCastro asked about savings. Dr. Forbes explained that due to language in the new contract, Mr. Francis' present position will not be filled; realizing a savings of \$43,000) Vote 5-0.**

**Approval of E-Rate Consultant – Mrs. Lori Ann Fox, Director of Information Technology requested that the School Committee approve the hiring of a consultant to perform district E-rate services. Three quotes were received and Mrs. Fox requested that Mr. Tony Terceira be appointed for \$9600, based on his experience in several other districts. Mrs. Fox explained that information from telephone bills, internet, computer wiring are e-ratable items and we need to keep better track of these items through Mr. Capron; E-rate funding allows us to submit costs and we receive a percentage of those costs from the Schools and Libraries; 60% for internet for all schools along with telephone, long distance and cell phones. Mr. DeCastro asked about savings on voice over IP. Mrs. Fox explained that we need to show in our technology plan how we committed funds to technology and the district has not done this; she did ask for additional funds to be allocated to technology . Mr. DeCastro said he does not know what the capital cost is but we should be doing whatever we can to support it if there is a pay back (\$8-9,000 per month). He asked what we have to do to fast track this. Mrs. Fox advised that the City already is in the process; Mr. DeCastro noted that we could get a better price with both departments going on at the same time. Mrs. Fox said she would put one comprehensive system for the school to come on board. Mr. DeCastro asked what it would cost to put the School Department on it, as we would be held hostage on any bid in the future, after the city adopts a system. He recommends starting from scratch and including the School Department; he suggested an addendum on the bid; five to six months out we would get the benefit**

of a better price. Mrs. Fox explained that most would hold the pricing, etc and the vendor realizes it is E-rate funding. She explained the voice over IP as data and voice systems together, all fiber based and lines for computers and phones all under one system. We would have one vendor and maintenance would fall under one vendor. Mr. Faria asked if it would be a problem with Mr. Terceira handling other school departments. Mrs. Fox said that he is highly recommended and very creative with how to position for a better E-rate. A motion was made to approve by Mr. Faria, seconded by Mrs. Lovett. Vote 5-0.

Facilities Update – Mr. Joseph Tavares thanked retirees, Manuel Realejo, Day Foreman and Mr. Richard Pimentel , Night Foreman, who are retiring from the School Department. Also, Mr. Tavares advised that there are still minor adjustments being made to the new boilers at the high school; concerns regarding the Oldham School roof and is working with the Interim Director of Administration and Finance to ascertain if it will be included in the city’s capital improvement plan for this year. He thanked Mr. Medeiros at the RI Hospital Maintenance Department for a donation of hand sanitizer refills. Mr. Tavares also advised that lunch trucks will need to be inspected in January and he feels they will not make it past May with at least four of the trucks.

Mr. DeCastro suggested researching and contacting companies who have taken Purell products off the shelves with expirations up; a

significant amount goes to recycling and we may be able to get some close to expiration dates.

Mr. DeCastro met with Dr. Forbes and staff regarding energy savings and some of the things we could save on such as natural gas. His challenge to staff is to figure out how to save money there and use the savings to purchase truck(s) replacements. A significant amount of money is spent to burn gas and oil; if we contact the state; he would calculate the gas and oil. Gas dropped 5-8% lower than the day we met and it is dropping rapidly. Dr. Forbes will follow up with the staff. Mr. Faria asked about the valve under the pool. Mr. Tavares is still monitoring and if it leaks, he needs to replace it. Mr. Faria asked to send a letter of thanks to Mr. Medeiros at RI Hospital for the Purell donation.

**Requests for Home Schooling – None**

**Field Trip - Mrs. Marilyn Whittet attended and requested approval of an overnight trip to New York City with her Spanish students for a cultural activity. Dr. Forbes recommended approval. Rate of chaperones 1:10 (five chaperones). Motion by Mrs. Lovett to approve, seconded by Mr. Faria. Vote 5-0.**

**Curriculum Report – Mr. Edward Daft, Assistant Superintendent reported on several grants: \$2500 for a wellness grant. Kathleen Reese, R.N. attended and explained that this is the second grant**

received from the state designated for wellness and the funds will be used to purchase physical fitness equipment. Ms. Reese also thanked the Rumford Lions for their assistance with vision screenings again this year.

Mr. Abrahamson of the Music Department related that a grant had been received for five computer work stations for instructional use. He acknowledged Mr. DeVall and Mr. Rick Vars for their support and leadership.

Manuela Duarte, ESL Coordinator, explained that a Title III Award in the amount of \$24,500 will be used to assist immigrant students by providing after school tutorial programs at the high school and Martin Middle School for homework; the second parties for technology at the elementary schools. The program involves about 16 students at the middle school and 18 at the high school.

Mr. Jim Thompson, instructor at the Career/Technical School explained that auto is now a rolling computer and students need to be able to diagnose problems through the computer. A Champlain Grant for \$100,000 will be used for an auto resource lab; this new program will increase learning by 15-20 weeks. Mr. Daft advised we are fortunate to have grants which enhance teaching and learning.

Report of Sub-Committees – Mr. Faria asked that a list of contracts be placed on line.

**Mr. DeCastro stated that over the past 45 days we have met with all unions and have asked to open negotiations; only one, the custodial union obliged. Others have passed on the opportunity and we will have to wait until the season of negotiations for the contract expiring in October 2008.**

## **Unfinished Business**

**VA.5 Tuition Students - Amended Policy Second Passage – Dr. Forbes asked for second passage of the policy . Motion by Mr. Faria, seconded by Mr. Santos. Roll call vote: Mr. DeCastro, aye; Mr. Faria, aye; Mrs. Lovett, aye; Mr. Santos, aye; Mrs. Morris, aye..**

**I.E. School Committee By-Laws – Amended Policy Second Passage – Mrs. Lovett said that additional changes were made in #3 (5 minutes) and #9 the word “negative” and omitted specifics about who can speak. Mr. DeCastro asked for clarification on #2 and on #9; he asked who determines if there is negative discussion; what about employees doing something improper. He believes most of these items are at the discretion of the Chair as to what is proper or improper. Mrs. Morris said that personnel issues should be directed to administration. Mr. DeCastro said if the chair feels it is improper, it is up to the Chair to have the responsibility for proper decorum. Mr. Santos asked about whose discretion regarding the representative of a group. Item #9 should state that individual students or employees**

shall not be the subject of negative discussion and that the Chair will exercise discretion. Motion by Mr. Faria to approve the policy as updated, seconded by Mrs. Lovett. Vote 5-0.

Health Insurance Update - Mr. DeCastro said he proposed to change the health plan as quickly as possible; however, the date is actually January 1st. The Superintendent will be sending out a memorandum.

The Superintendent and he met with the West Bay Collaborative and they will be coming to give a proposal in January for us to join. He believes everyone will be happy about the administrative fees and stop loss policy; he believes the savings will be substantial and will cut the administrative fees in half. There are a significant amount of other areas to save. We would be paying the working rate each month like a premium; at the end of the year, a refund would be made to us according to claims or we would receive a bill if there are more claims. The City should take a hard look at this plan also, as it probably could save money and he will bring it up at the workshop. Mr. DeCastro asked Superintendent to put together a comparison of the old plan and the new, and he read the differences. He said this is an emotional issue and he has received a number of emails and letters from employees; he read one from a member of the teachers' union and he read his response. A signed copy of his response is available in the Superintendent's office. Mr. DeCastro said he is trying to do the best he can with this situation.

**New Business**

**Nepotism Policy - Mr. Santos noticed there was no language to address this issue in our policy; there are ethical standards, but it does not pin point nepotism. He contacted the RI Association of School Committees and other School Committee members to find out about other policies and he took that information and constructed a policy to handle these issues as we go forward. He read the draft policy, which would provide a concrete policy and guidelines to follow. Mr. Santos asked Mr. Silva about problems based on the by-laws previously adopted, if we need to hire a relative. Mr. Silva advised that the goal of the policy should be not conflicting or contradicting and he would like to look at it more carefully in order to make a determination. He advised that policies should be non-contradictory and nepotism is part of a significant regulation of the RI Ethics Commission; what is allowed or not and backed up by cases. We need to be careful not to be contradictory to the Ethics Code and we need to make sure this is parallel to that regulation before we venture off on our own. Mr. Santos considered the policies of other districts. Mr. Silva had no idea whether or not this would create inconsistencies with other policies we may have. We could violate the inherent right of an individual or prevent or affect someone's right to a position. If we are making a decision not to hire someone because they are related to someone else, we need to be cautious to make sure what is implemented should not violate someone's rights. Mr. Santos felt these would be guidelines. Mr. Silva said he was not prepared to render an opinion this evening; the**

devil is in the detail and this requires review and assessment. It is difficult to draft a myriad of what-ifs. Mr. Silva will be happy to give an opinion. Dr. Forbes was concerned that we may be impacting the job fair and contractual obligations and how would we implement a policy regarding friendships. We need to look at those items; can the School Committee implement this as it could limit the candidate pool too much. Mr. Silva asked to hold off passage for tonight. Mr. DeCastro could only support the language regarding “one relative supervising another.” He felt that just because someone is related, it should not prevent them from being employed; he supports only laws about voting, but he was not happy with the waiver part. Mrs. Lovett commented that each individual should be hired on merit not on that they know and the ethics code would take care of that. Mr. Santos said that Narragansett School Department’s language is very similar to other school districts and they addressed the issue in an attempt to further define it. Mrs. Morris can only go with the discrimination part; she felt that everyone is entitled to apply for a job regardless of who they are. Mr. Santos asked to refer the matter to counsel for review with the Superintendent and remarks will be shared with the School Committee at the next meeting.

Dr. Forbes asked for details on the Budget Workshop with City Council; suggested dates are January 3, 7, 14, 2008.

**Payment of Bills**

### **Local Operating Bill List:**

**Warrant #000781 12/5/07 \$1,460,017.97**

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

### **Federal Bill List:**

**Warrant #000782 12/5/07 \$ 450,924.07**

**Motion: Mr. Faria/Second: Mr. Santos. Vote 5-0.**

### **Question and Answer Period**

**Mr. Tony Gouveia commented that he believes the School Committee has lost its real focus, since not once has anyone mentioned education. He has attended meetings for a decade and there have been budget problems before, but the focus should be on why the School Committee is here; it does not seem to be about education. The School Committee should be concerned about Graduation Proficiency Requirements (GPR) not being completed by students at the High School; if they are not completed, students cannot graduate according to RI Department of Education regulations. He believes that Dr. Forbes should be involved with educational issues and we need to find out what to do about the graduation rate with less pandering to political groups and more focus on education. He believes the School Committee does not have to ask the City Council to do anything with the meals tax as it is set up for it to go to the deficit. The School Committee is responsible for 5800 students and they are forgetting that focus; they should keep hammering the**

**legislature on special education. Regarding an issue from the last meeting, he said there is no gray area about what is left in the contract about health benefits and why not spend energy on educational issues. If we break the contract now with no gray area, don't bother negotiating.**

**A motion was made by Mr. Faria to adjourn at 10:15PM, seconded by Mrs. Lovett. Vote 5-0.**

**Respectfully submitted,**

**Patricia A. Iannelli, Administrative Assistant**

**Eileen Lovett, Clerk of the Committee**