

EAST PROVIDENCE SCHOOL DEPARTMENT

East Providence City Hall

145 Taunton Avenue

East Providence, Rhode Island 02914

School Committee Meeting

March 11, 2008

Open Session

Mrs. Morris called the meeting to order at 6:00PM. Four members were present: Stephen DeCastro, Robert Faria, Steven Santos and Mildred Morris. Also present: Dr. Jacqueline B. Forbes, Superintendent of Schools 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 Mr. Santos. Vote 4-0.

Public session reconvened at 7:35PM. A motion was made by Mr. Faria to return to open session and to seal the minutes, seconded by Mr. Santos. Vote 4-0.

The Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag and a Moment of Silence were observed.

Record of Previous Meetings – A motion was made by Mr. Santos to approve the minutes of the open session meetings held on February 12, 2008 and February 26, 2008. Vote: 3-0. Mr. DeCastro abstained from voting as he was not present at the February 12, 2008 meeting.

Chair’s Report - Mrs. Morris commented on the article in the Providence Sunday Journal regarding Senior Projects and the experiences of an East Providence student and his family while completing the process; she felt that it was an interesting article and hopes that it raises public awareness to the new RI Department of Education graduation requirements.

Appointment of Clerk – Action postponed until such time that the fifth member of the School Committee is appointed by the City Council to finish out the term of Mrs. Lovett.

Student Liaison – Nate Lovett reported on High School activities.

Roger Williams University Feasibility Study – Mrs. Morris requested that Dr. Forbes send a letter to the City manager to arrange workshops with the City as soon as possible to discuss the report.

Mr. Santos attended the 2008 Legislative Workshop at the Rhode Island Association of School Committees and reported out on some major issues, such as legislation on further pension reform and Bill

#H7207 pushing the date for lay-off notices from March 1st to June 1st. Also, regarding the new Chart of Accounts, East Providence is a pilot and the district will be up and running July 2008; special account numbers will be able to create a statewide data base to be able to do a return on investment comparison. He felt it would be a good tool to analyze and compare our district to others, as will be able to drill down to the most minute details of expenses and this will be a good tool for the School Department to go forward with budgeting. Also discussion regarding a state-wide transportation system; the plan is to get contracts in line in the state by 2009 and then get started. There is nothing concrete now, but we will see some progress on this within a couple of years with out of district transportation.

Mr. Faria asked if the Roger Williams Study meeting would be a department workshop. Mrs. Morris thought it would be the City Council, City Manager, School Committee and Dr. Forbes, to discuss the report and find out what direction we are going in. Dr. Forbes advised that this discussion will take quite a few meetings; the City Manager will present to the City Council on March 18th.

Hearings - None

Reading of Communications – Dr. Forbes received a letter from Mrs. Ensign, President of the Friends of the East Providence High School Band; in January there was discussion at a meeting about concerns

regarding the costs of police, fire, and maintenance personnel which is pricing the band activities out of the high school. Dr. Forbes will make a recommendation to the School Committee at a later date as to what can be done; the money from the band programs goes directly to students and she wanted to bring this issue to the level of the School Committee. Mrs. Morris advised that she will be attending a meeting on March 20th with Dr. Forbes regarding this issue. Mr. DeCastro cannot attend; he said this is a custodial and maintenance issue and asked if custodians are in the building on Fridays anyway, why would there be an extra cost involved. Dr. Forbes will be meeting with the head of the union. Dr. Forbes explained there is a requirement for police and fire to be present during any event which charges admission due to a new law/code for fire and police. Mr. DeCastro said it makes no sense why the requirement is only in force at night and not in the day. Dr. Forbes will meet with the leadership and will try to get a sense of reasonableness.

Educational Program Report – Mr. Faria requested a robotics demonstration, but that will be postponed to another meeting. Dr. Forbes requested that the Director of Special Services, Sharon Waterman and Assistant Superintendent, Edward Daft present a PowerPoint on the new regulations affecting special education and how implementation in the district will occur. Dr. Forbes related that it is her understanding that we are required to develop a School Committee policy for staff; Ms. Waterman has not received formal guidance on this aspect yet. Forms will be sent out this year but we

have until next year to develop a policy, if the district is making significant changes and if not, the significant difference from last year. Mrs. Waterman will be submitting all the documents. Mr. DeCastro asked if it was correct that in 2009, we will be responsible for more students who do not attend East Providence schools. Mrs. Waterman explained that has been the case since the IDEA and that Rhode Island is the only state left requiring that students who are placed in private schools by a parent have full IEP rights. East Providence only eligible for a share of public dollars. What makes it different is that East Providence has a number of private schools and especially on evaluations, the federal law is not changing. In 2009 there will not be IEP rights, just maximum amounts. Dr. Forbes thanked Mrs. Waterman and she looks forward to receiving more information and guidance.

Report of Superintendent and Staff

Dr. Forbes stated that: “she wanted to set the record straight regarding the events at Whiteknact School on February 26th and that at no time were the students or staff in any danger; she has every confidence in the staff at the school who investigated an odor in a classroom, called the necessary personnel and determined there was no emergency. If the staff determined that there was an emergency situation, the building would have been evacuated immediately and the fire department notified. Fire drills are practiced for this very reason. School buildings are on the average fifty years old with

on-going maintenance issues and recently two other schools had similar problems, which were handled by staff with no hysteria or public panic. What was different at Whiteknact School on February 26th was that the situation was caused by a parent who called a public official who did not confirm any information with the school staff or Superintendent and unilaterally made a decision to call the fire department. A full complement of fire engines and police showed up at the building without the school's or the Superintendent's knowledge. This situation created panic and no one at the school knew that the fire department had been called. Neither the public nor the media have all the details or the information required to make informed decisions which results in misinformation and mischaracterization to the community. The facts of the incident are that odors were reported and investigated by staff and no emergency situation was determined. In fifteen different buildings, situations occur and are dealt with daily in a calm and competent manner. These situations are on-going and Dr. Forbes meets with staff, fire and police departments to debrief our responses to make the next one more effective. Dr. Forbes advised that each school has a "Tools for Schools" Protocol developed by the EPA, which is considered the gold standard for air quality issues in schools according to the Rhode Island Department of Education. All independent air quality tests indicate that there is no imminent health risk or regulatory violation at Whiteknact School. Once the roof is reinforced during April vacation, subsequent air quality tests will be conducted by the Department of Health and the fire department. Carbon monoxide detectors have

been installed in each building's boiler room and a certified boiler inspector company is conducting a review of each boiler."

Dr. Forbes met with the City Manager today asking for his assurance that the city departments will cooperate with and assist the school department in maintaining safe schools without creating unnecessary panic or disruption to the education of students.

Mrs. Morris commended Dr. Forbes for her efforts, energy and for doing a great job. Mr. DeCastro asked to give out the EPA website; we can always do better with communications. This may have caused hysteria, but we need to let everyone know what is going on and explain why we did it. Tools for Schools Website is www.epa.gov/iaq/schools/actionkit.html.

FY 2007-08 Financial Report – Mr. William Capron presented the report which indicated a \$3.13 million dollar deficit with updated estimates on healthcare and tuitions and a brief analysis of the deficit and problems going forward. Mr. DeCastro asked about the estimated cost on health insurance and had a question on the charge of \$300,000 in July; which is a self-insured run out for claims paid at beginning of the fiscal year. Mr. Capron explained that this is not essentially a budget issue as one could cancel out the other at the end of the year; this is an accrual back to the prior year. Mr. Capron said it was July and not October, because when we move to WB we will still have a run out to Blue Cross and will be paying claims to

Blue Cross. The deposit for the new plan has nothing to do with the run out. He does not have a rate yet from July to October from WB. Mr. Capron said we will pay WB the monthly rate in July and claims will still be coming in from Blue Cross; he had meeting today with WB and this was not the case; from July 1st, WB will be paying claims with our working rate. Mr. DeCastro hoped there might be money saved there. Mr. Capron said we would have to make it up next year (46000 on the average) as most reimbursement in June is for people paid on federal grants, etc. Discussion on the claims activity. Mr. Capron advised these are just estimates based on this year and this month's projection is based on 7%. Mr. Santos asked about having the working rate with WB possibly by next meeting. Dr. Forbes said possibly by the April meeting. Mr. DeCastro asked about lower administration fees. Mr. DeCastro asked about spending at the same level as last year - \$1.65 million deficit. Dr. Forbes explained the school department has a multi year structural deficit.

Personnel Recommendations – Mr. Barham presented the personnel items:

Appointments

Charles Eastman Coach, Boys' Lacrosse, High School

Jessica Pasquarelli Coach Girls' Lacrosse, High School

Motion: Mr. Faria/Second: Mr. DeCastro. 4-0.

Resignations

Sophia Sotis Gonzalez Spanish Teacher, High School

Effective Close of 2007-08 School Year

Motion: Mr. Santos/Second: Mr. Faria. Vote 4-0.

Family Medical Leave

Mylissa Moon Teacher, Special Ed, Resource, Martin MS

Approximately May 2, 2008

Amy Moran Teacher, Social Studies, Martin MS

Approximately May 8, 2008

Motion: Mr. Faria/Second: Mr. Santos. Vote 4-0.

Fine Arts Department Chair – Mr. Barham explained a proposal to establish a Fine Arts Department at the high school which would encompass visual arts and performing arts. The performing arts include: band, chorus, music classes, and potentially theater and dance. Dr. Caswell, High School Principal, explained that the consolidation will result in one person being responsible for maintaining awareness of all art graduation requirements and to supervise all teachers working together for the same proficiency, using outside activities. Dr. Caswell said there is a need to afford more opportunities for proficiency reasons and this is definitely moving in the right direction; proficiency can be met outside of the classroom and this would be part of the department head's responsibility; job specifications and posting will be worked out. Dr. Caswell supports this. Dr. Forbes recommended this position. A motion was made by Mr. Faria to accept the recommendation to go forward with the performing arts department head, seconded by Mr.

DeCastro. Mr. Santos asked do we have a vision. Dr. Caswell said she needs to plan as a team with staff members; but she would like to see students begin to obtain proficiency at the middle schools in order to have a seamless transition to the high school. Roll call vote: Mr. DeCastro, aye; Mr. Faria, aye; Mr. Santo, aye; Mrs. Morris, aye;

Facilities Update – Mr. Tavares reported the following:

Whiteknact School – The outdoor air dampers and the controls on the univents in rooms 17 and 18 were replaced and the compost bins in the courtyard have been moved away from air vents. During school vacation in April, the roof will be reinforced. A determination will be made to either repair or abandon the boiler which has been shut down. At the high school floor tiles will be replaced due to water damage caused by a faulty sprinkler head; clean up and associated costs including textbooks are covered by insurance. Mr. Steve Lussier, the general contractor for the heating system has agreed to be present at the meeting tonight to address any concerns.

The rear staircase at Waddington School has deteriorated and plans are being developed to repair or replace the stairs. In the meantime, a temporary fire evacuation plan has been agreed upon with the Fire Marshall.

Dr. Forbes explained that representatives of the University of Rhode Island, Department of Health and faculty will work together regarding

the composting bins at Whiteknact School to ensure they will not cause any problems in the school. Mr. DeCastro would like to involve everyone in moving the bins. In response to a question regarding a smell coming from the boiler. Mr. Tavares explained that the fire department took readings in the boiler room three different times; one outside company, ATC, received a positive reading when testing right on the door of the boiler. At this point, the Building Inspector asked to shut down the boiler. There was no odor outside the boiler room and in his opinion would not have been the cause of the odor. Mr. DeCastro said communication is key; there was misinformation out in the community. Dr. Forbes clarified that she went into the boiler room and asked to shut it down because of a seal problem; she then had to make a decision to do a bypass through a sole source procurement. Dr. Vanderslice of the RI Department of Health also did not think this was the source of the smell in Room 18; if the meter were held next to the door of any boiler, it would most likely get a miniscule reading. The Building Inspector tried to shut it down. Dr. Forbes believes the smell was related to removal and cleaning of univents earlier that morning; Department of Health explained that people can get sick from a "smell." Mr. Tavares said there were no leaks at Whiteknact over the weekend with all the rain; today, there was a small lead near the chimney and a roofer has been called to repair it. At Waddington School, Mr. Tavares had been discussing repairs to the stairs with the principal and fire marshall when the next day we received a building violation to close the stairs and to plan a new egress and evacuation plan. The City will be doing the work

during April vacation.

Mr. Lussier of ATC was present to address School Committee and to answer questions regarding the high school heating system. He explained that the boilers and oil tank were replaced and what transpired was a failure on the part of ATC to judge the qualifications of the burner company. IC is a world renowned company; when the boilers were started up in October, adjustments had to be made and we finally got to the point of burning clean. Coke ash was collecting in the back of the boiler; the conclusion was that the oil was not spreading out and there was a process of tuning the boiler. When the representative came out, he recommended changing nozzles; the boiler was running on gas; and mystery water problem was solved and will be repaired. Today there was an adjustment made on fittings. Dr. Forbes explained that there has been constant communication between Mr. Lussier and the department. Mr. Feola explained that at the high school there has been a change in the boilers since the representative worked on them and made adjustments which caused major changes in burning the fuel. Mr. DeCastro asked how the vendor was chosen and its efficiency. Mr. Lussier said he reviewed the oil usage; there was basically a handicap of 20,000 gallons; he explained there is a difference between boiler efficiency and combustion efficiency. Mr. DeCastro asked about reimbursement for the oil; burned more oil than we should have. Mr. Lussier replied that it was not a performance contract. Mr. DeCastro asked if we can push IC by going the route of

how much were our expenditures. Mr. Lussier explained it is a well built boiler and everything is documented; all the expenses were paid by the company and the warranty has not started yet. Dr. Forbes thanked Mr. Lussier for his assistance.

Field Trip Requests – A request was submitted for students to attend the International Career Development Conference on April 25-30, 2008 in Atlanta Georgia. A motion was made by Mr. Faria to approve, seconded by Mr. Santos. Mr. Faria would like a report of achievements as a follow-up. Vote 4-0.

Martin Middle School requested permission for 7th grade students to participate in an educational field trip to URI Alton Jones Campus on April 21 and 22, 2008. Mr. Kevin Riley, Science Teacher was present and responded to questions regarding number of students and chaperones. A motion was made by Mr. DeCastro to approve, seconded by Mr. Faria. Vote 4-0.

Requests for Home Schooling – A request was submitted and Dr. Forbes recommended approval. Motion by Mr. Santos to approve, seconded by Mr. Faria. Vote 4-0.

2008-2009 School Calendar – Motion by Mr. DeCastro to approve, seconded by Mr. Faria.

Vote 4-0.

Report of Sub-Committees – Mr. Faria reported there are no dates set for negotiations. The Finance Committee is making plans to present information to the Superintendent. Mr. Faria and Mr. Santos went to the State House to testify at hearings regarding legislation on contracts; he felt something would be imposed regarding a strike. Also, he hopes some positive will come out of it. Mr. Santos related this bill has the support of RIASC; he is not sure where it will go from here. Mrs. Morris said there is a problem regarding hearings on issues we do not know about.

Unfinished Business

II.F.3. Wellness Policy – Amended Policy – Second Passage – Dr. Forbes reported that the amendments put the district in compliance with the new law. Motion by Mr. Faria to approve, seconded by Mr. Santos. Vote 4-0.

Potential Budget Deficit - Mr. DeCastro said based on the fact that the Superintendent has workshops planned and the City Manager will be making a presentation next week, this issue is being taken care of.

New Business

April School Committee Meeting Date - Mr. DeCastro had a conflict with the April 8th meeting date and asked to change the meeting to the day before; Motion by Mr. DeCastro to move the School

Committee meeting up by one day, seconded by Mr. Faria for discussion. Mr. Faria had a problem with April 7th; Mr. DeCastro asked about April 22nd. It was decided to leave the meeting as scheduled for April 8th. Mr. DeCastro will be out of town and unable to attend.

Publishing Agenda Items on-line - Mr. Santos would like the public to be able to view documents pertaining to the School Committee meeting on line before the meeting, such as financial reports, curriculum changes, etc. which may have an impact on parents and students. Providing more information will help people feel a part of the process and help them understand what the School Committee is trying to do. Dr. Forbes said she was not sure how we could do this, but would review it with staff to see what can be done. She will report to the School Committee at the next meeting.

Payment of Bills

Local Operating Bill List:

Warrant #000805 3/6/08 \$ 863,281.52

Motion: Mr. Faria/Second: Mr. DeCastro. Vote 4-0.

Federal Bill List:

Warrant #000803 3/4/08 \$ 589,627.76

Motion: Mr. Faria/Second: Mr. DeCastro. Vote 4-0.

Question and Answer Period

Kathy Blackmar had questions about the arts program going down to the Grade 6-7-8 level and how fast this program will be in effect at the Middle Schools in order to count for portfolio. Dr. Forbes will try to move in that direction as soon as possible; it is difficult with a deficit; Mr. Daft and the secondary team will be looking at this. In reference to a question about how substitute teachers are chosen, Mr. Barham explained that we are always seeking substitute teachers and are using the Aesop Computer Program to which substitute teachers can gain access. All teachers must be certified by the state and the pay is \$80 to \$100 per hour. There is no bid process and we hire as many as we can. Mrs. Blackmar talked about the process; there is no consistency with subs; a student could have five different subs in class in one week and he would like same substitute to have access to additional days if the absence is longer than one day. Mr. Barham explained that subs can monitor their computers; they do not have a guarantee of substituting for additional days. The principal can call Mr. Barham, as we control the system and are still learning about it. This matter will be addressed at the Administrative Council meeting. An adjustment can be made.

Mrs. Morris said that teachers can pick their substitute, but it is not happening. Mr. Barham explained that teachers can list their top five and the computer will call them; this has been a learning process for

all teachers and administrators. He thinks this is a good system; there are some glitches. Most subs have a substitute certificate, but are not content area certified. This is true in all Rhode Island because there are not enough content area subs in the state. Mrs. Blackmar wanted to know when a teacher is out for extended leave, who chooses the sub? Mr. Barham responded that if a teacher recommends a particular sub and if the principal and or department head at the High School agrees, he interviews the person and a collective decision is made; a department head may over rule a teacher.

Nancy Gage supports keeping French in the Middle Schools; Martin and Riverside are not equal and once it is taken away, it will never return. She implored the School Committee to consider restoring French to both middle schools.

Dr. Forbes explained that the Program of Studies was recommended by the secondary administrators and had been voted on and approved. Mrs. Gage asked for this to be revisited. Mrs. Morris will talk to colleagues about it. Mr. Santos had a general concern about this change and would like to revisit it; there is concern about teachers and unequal numbers of students.

Tony Gouveia commented on the improvement in the fine arts department at the High School. At the Middle Schools, six students received Gold Key awards and two high school students received

Silver Key Awards and perhaps they could be recognized. As a supporter of the School system, he questioned if the budget submitted was a real number. The Superintendent submitted the budget in October, cuts were voted on, and in November, a \$3.4 million dollar deficit was being bantered about. If so convinced they were passing a real budget, what happened between then and now? This is not a real budget; the layoffs are totally unrealistic at 100 teachers with 40 retirements, which is approx 20% of the work staff who will not be working next year; will there be a 20% decrease in student enrollment? When layoffs are made, no one hears the name, school and what the person teaches. He asked who will teach core subjects if there are layoffs. He wants to be supportive of the budget, but no School Committee member asked Dr. Forbes about the educational impact; he knows the layoffs are to save money. Mrs. Morris said she did not vote for the additional layoffs because she did not think it was necessary. Mr. Gouveia said he needs something to hang his hat on; the layoff is a scam with NEASC coming in. He was concerned about NEASC, the accreditation, the impact on education; the budget needs to be real from the beginning.

Mr. DeCastro commented that the City Council cut an additional \$600,000 from the budget and unfortunately people need to come to City Council meetings to demand that schools get their fair share; there is still more work to do with the City Council to reduce the deficit; even with no increase of expenditures this year, with a 3 ½% increase on income side we are already at \$1.6 next year. Mr.

Gouveia said the community needs to know the positions are included in the layoffs; how many math, English, etc. to rile up the community just like the French issue.

Mrs. Morris said only two parents supported the budget out of 1500 who showed up at the school closing meeting and the School Committee needs parental support at workshops and hopes to get help regarding the budget. Public support is needed. Mr. Gouveia has a concern about the educational process.

Charles Mello, Willet Avenue, said it's the same old crap and nothing changed after five months He thought it was absurd that the School Department has no scanner. He asked when the Roger Williams study will be released to the public. He thinks a change is needed in the community with the way things are done.

Patti Streit said that one of the things not put out there was anything over a 3.5% increase; as a parent she would have been out there rallying. It was not politically correct. Hand the education perspective out there.

Mr. DeCastro answered that at the October meeting, the only increase was on the expenditure side and he hopes the City Council will not cut the budget on the other side.

Mrs. Streit said this is only a fraction of what we need; she will get

parents to rally if the information is put out there; the School Committee needs to step out of the box and put a vision out there and they will get the support. A motion was made by Mr. DeCastro to adjourn at 10:40PM, seconded by Mr. Faria. Vote 4-0.

Respectfully submitted,

Patricia A. Iannelli, Administrative Assistant

Steven Santos, Clerk of the Committee