

EAST PROVIDENCE SCHOOL DEPARTMENT

School Committee Meeting

East Providence City Hall

145 Taunton Avenue

East Providence, Rhode Island 02914

August 26, 2008

Open Session

Mrs. Morris called the meeting to order at 6:00 PM. School Committee Members Present: Stephen DeCastro, Robert Faria, Anthony Carcieri and Mildred Morris. (Steven Santos arrived later). Also present: Dr. Mario F. Cirillo, Jr., Superintendent of Schools, Mr. Daniel Kinder, Esq. A motion was made by Mr. Carcieri 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. Faria. Vote 4-0.

The School Committee returned to public session at 7:45PM. All members were present. A motion was made by Mr. Faria to return to public session and to seal the minutes of the executive session, seconded by Mr. Santos. Vote 5-0.

Mrs. Morris reported out on a vote taken in executive session to pay the Superintendent the annual rate of \$140,000 until a contract is

completed; the salary to be adjusted accordingly. Mr. Carcieri made the motion to approve, seconded by Mr. Santos. Mr. Carcieri, Mr. Faria and Mr. Santos voted aye; Mr. DeCastro and Mrs. Morris voted nay.

The Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag and a Moment of Silence observed in memory of Mr. Richard Croke.

Report of the Superintendent & Staff

Personnel Recommendations – Mr. Barham presented the following personnel items:

APPOINTMENTS

Nicholas Hurd Special Subjects - Music

Nicholas Reed Asst Band Director, EPHS

Michael Lefort Social Studies – EPHS

One year only

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

RETIREMENTS

Dolores Bliss (19 yrs) Bus Assistant

Effective October 17, 2008

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

RESIGNATIONS

Linda McCoart School Nurse-Teacher, EPHS

Kathleen Marchetti School Nurse-Teacher, 1:1EPHS

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

LEAVE OF ABSENCE

Laura Laviano Special Ed, Resource, MMS

Approx. September 28-December 16, 2008

Kerri Scandura Physical Education Teacher, MMS

Approx. September 8, 2008

Dana Brodin Occupational Therapist, Meadowcrest

September 12, 2008 to end of school year

Mario Andrade Head Coach, Boys' Soccer, EPHS

One Year Only

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

EPTAA – Bus Assistants Presentation – Maureen Bucket, President of the East Providence Teacher Assistant Association, 47 Bullocks Pt. Avenue, Riverside - Shocked regarding the firing of 28 bus assistants and provided numbers for justification of the savings; she asked that the School Committee reconsider their decision. Nancy Melo presented signatures of East Providence taxpayers against the privatization of bus aides who serve a special population of students; to privatize is to jeopardize.

Debbie Branco thanked Mrs. Morris for voting for the bus aides to

keep their jobs; misinformation about getting moved to First Student; all the bus aides may not have a job in the end; they are the lowest on the totem pole as far as pay; not fair since these jobs are in the bargaining unit and they were not given the chance to see what they would give up.

Karen Victoria, 100 Leonard Avenue, served four years as a dedicated bus aide and hoped the School Committee would rethink their decision.

Elaine Nunes, 160 Sutton Avenue, has been a bus assistant for 18 years working with students with special needs that need consistency; they are concerned about the students and the fact that they will not get the same care.

Sheila Wildenhein, 131 Earl Avenue, bus assistants care for the children; School Committee elected to do what is best for all the students in EP; this is a disservice to kids; keep special education students safe; she asked the SC to reconsider their actions.

Delores Conway, 1014 County Road, Barrington, certified special needs bus assistant – here for the students they serve – works day to day with students; has concern and connections with the students; makes a difference in the lives of students and parents.

Diana Neves, 16 Reynolds, lives with a special education student

every day and hates to see different aides; when kids melt down in the morning, it lasts all day; our bus aides care about the kids.

Mrs. Morris asked Dr. Cirillo if he had any comments. Dr. Cirillo said that the aides play a tremendous and valuable role and add to the culture and dynamics of our organization. They have made a passionate plea and he thanked them for coming up to articulate their position and he believes we need to hear them. Mr. Carcieri noted the difference in costs.

Mr. Barham thanked the aides; the department is in dire straits which will be shown in the budget presentation. First Student will take and train the bus aides. The School Committee has directed him to review the number of years they have worked and how close they are to ten years; School Committee will estimate a cut-off date and will allow aides to remain on the job until their ten years are completed; he will do an analysis for a future meeting. The School Committee is not trying to throw anyone under the bus; they will provide a transition especially for those close to retirement. Mr. Barham reviewed the savings of approximately \$346,000 to the school department by contracting the bus aides through First Student. Mr. Carcieri asked about facilitating the switch over of the bus aides to First Student.

Mr. Linneman explained that First Student has a procedure for hiring; they agreed to accept applications; the applicants must meet their

qualifications and receive training; no one wants to see any one lose their job. Mr. Carcieri asked if there were guidelines by First Student for having the same person with the same student every day. Mr. Linneman related that the same aide would have the job for the entire year as we do; a sub would be put in the same way as we do; the bid process is the same as ours.

Mrs. Morris said the prior vote on the bus contract was 4 to 1; she asked the School Committee to reconsider the vote; special needs children need continuity. Mr. Carcieri called a point of order because the item was not on the agenda. Mr. Kinder advised that the School Committee could not take a vote on this matter tonight; only if a proper agenda item.

Maureen Bucket explained that all 28 people will not be involved; she not sure the School Department will receive the same kind of service; the aides have experience with the most needy; this one of the hardest jobs in the union.

Mrs. Morris will talk with the attorney and Superintendent to put this item on the agenda.

George Victoria – Leonard Avenue, all bus assistants live in East Providence; he talked about the Superintendent moving to East Providence; thought they should bargain with the aides; get rid of some management positions; make cuts in pay to keep the most

dedicated employees. He hoped the School Committee would sit down with them and look for what else to cut in order to keep the aides and save some money.

2008-2009 Budget Presentation – Dr. Cirillo made a presentation; highlights as follows:

Motion by Mr. Carcieri to follow the recommendation of the Superintendent to approve first passage of the budget as is, seconded by Mr. Santos.

Discussion: Mr. DeCastro cannot support the way the budget as written; over \$7 million over the 3 ½% cap; he has seen this before and no way can he support it; he has a lot of questions for now or the next meeting. His first question is that no salary increases are in the budget, no health care co-pays; he asked if the savings from the bus contract/bus assistants were included in the budget; if not, we would be short more. He said the budget changed over the weekend; legal

is now \$350,000, which is a 100% increase over last year; the first budget was \$225,000 less. Mr. Carcieri asked what the budget was before for legal.

Mr. Cirillo said that between negotiations and some type of legal response down the road, there is no way shape or form things will be normal; where we are today has been building up to where we are today. Discussion:

Mr. DeCastro – City Council will not give 7.9% over the 3.5 cap.

Mr. Carcieri – is it not our job to bring this budget to the City Council?

Mr. DeCastro – our job is to bring what we can live with.

Mr. Carcieri – there is no co-pay yet; we can work toward it.

Mr. DeCastro – cannot support this budget

Mr. Carcieri – these are real numbers.

Mr. DeCastro does this point to Caruolo action.

Dr. Cirillo – there are legal avenues we may need.

Mr. Kinder explained that the School Department has a massive deficit and cannot pay bills; this should be worked out with the city to come up with a resolution that will not destroy the basic education plan; if not, the responsibility of the School Committee is to pay their bills and provide an education and they did not get paid last year and must be paid this year; either it will be paid for or School Committee will be sued by vendors and others and it will run into legal either way.

Mr. Carcieri wants an open discussion with the city fathers; there is a very small group involved; he would like citizens to get involved to show everyone where their money is spent; this is not fabricated; the Superintendent is trying to lead us to a better place; we have to pay the bills.

Mr. DeCastro cannot support the budget; the Superintendent has to find ways to cut the budget.

Mr. Carcieri said that people attending the meeting tonight are not happy to be cut; people not happy about more taxes; it is a real problem; unearth it, uncover it and put it out for everyone to look at and hope we can come up with solutions; the dollars are real; the bills are real; no one wants to give up anything and East Providence is sucking wind now. If it were our personal finances, we would figure it out. We should support the Superintendent's recommendations and get to City Council for open discussion.

Mr. DeCastro asked if the budget has been placed on line.

Dr. Cirillo did some investigation of the 2007-08 budget and the Superintendent was directed to make cuts last year and adjustments were made, which were not recommended by the Superintendent; adjustments were made by the School Committee and two million was cut from the budget; the cuts were not realized (health care, transportation and special ed tuitions) and they were added to this years budget. This was an exercise in futility; will not come near covering the deficit in this budget. We can relive before or get on top

of it now; this can be solved within two to three years or we can go in a downward spiral if continued.

Mr. DeCastro – need \$8 million more from taxpayers.

Dr. Cirillo – we will not get more than the cap from the City Council; we need to mobilize everyone to break the log jam.

Mr. DeCastro – you can fill the Dunkin Donuts center, but the reality is we will not be getting more from the City Council and we cannot find one item for \$8 million; he would like the Superintendent to come back with numbers.

Mr. Carcieri – we have a list of bills aging 4-5 months dealing with companies in the private sector.

Dr. Cirillo – when dealing with vendors in that manner; we pay premium costs for work done in our schools.

Mr. Carcieri – we have bills and we have to deal with them and he does not see how; we have to tear the system apart to search for coins under the cushion. When he first became a School Committee member, the Superintendent wanted to cut French at Martin Middle School for a small number of students; they made the cut recommended by the Superintendent and he received phone calls about it. That was a little tiny item; there are some items Mr. DeCastro said we should be involved in and we do not have the time. The Superintendent unearthed this package and put it on the table; In the resolution process, you first acknowledge that you have a problem and secondly, you work together to resolve it; he wants to get the city involved; the problem did not start this year, but we can straighten this out and move in another direction

Mr. DeCastro – the discomfort will be on the tax payers.

Mr. Carcieri – people want sports, safe facilities, and other such items; the School Department demonstrated they cannot pull this together and needs help from a lot of people. He had a motion on the floor to get the process going.

Mr. Faria – The Superintendent made same recommendations last year and the School Committee said cut tuitions, benefits, etc. and work on cost savings on health benefits; nothing transpired that had an impact; we cannot count on anything; we are going down the same path and wake up with a \$3.5 shortage. As far as legal, Mayor Ramos talked about consolidation; Mr. Faria said he brought this up two years ago along with other positions and we have moved at a snail's pace; we are not moving; we had discussions and nobody moved; these are daunting tasks as a School Committee to try to get City Council to approve an appropriation.

Mr. DeCastro – asked about the consultant for health care for \$28,572 (p. 80) and buyback for \$475,000; The School Committee is setting itself up and there are other items like that; just four of those is \$128,000; there is no line item for \$7 million.

Mr. Carcieri asked for the shortfall number.

Mr. Faria – we had to pay the buyback last time.

Mr. DeCastro does not believe that number should be in the budget.

Mr. Santos asked how you can approve something not in there.

Mr. DeCastro – do it now or later.

Mr. Barham explained that the consultant charge is down to \$28,000; this is a value to us; he brokered the stop loss policy this week and

prying a deal with Blue Cross; he is working diligently with us.

Mr. DeCastro – That consultant’s recommendation was for another collaborative which was higher.

Roll Call Vote: Mr. Carcieri, aye; Mr. DeCastro, nay; Mr. Faria, aye; Mr. Santos, aye; Mrs. Morris, aye. 4-1

Mrs. Morris will send a letter to the City Council requesting a joint meeting.

Mr. Faria – last year it was effective to take the budget meetings on the road and he asked to schedule meetings again this year.

Mr. Carcieri asked people to participate in their city’s business.

Question & Answer Period

Mrs. Roberta Brady spoke as a parent with a concern regarding her child; she applied for early enrollment to Kindergarten and received a letter that the child would be attending school. She found out by calling yesterday that there will not be a spot for her child this year in Kindergarten. She is very dissatisfied with the situation; how many other parents are in the same boat who were not notified about this the week before school starts, after they were lead to believe that everything was all set. She has a child expecting to go to school and asked for a response from the School Committee. Dr. Cirillo will follow through and get back to her. Mrs. Morris asked how many other parents were involved. Mrs. Brady asked why parents were not notified; the situation is very frustrating. Mr. Rodericks said letters were sent out yesterday to 12-18 parents who requested early

admission to Kindergarten; the schools have filled up with neighborhood kids and there are no Kindergarten seats available now. Mr. Carcieri –classes are limited to 25 students by contract.

Mr. Rodericks – we will have some no-shows the first week; people move and don't tell us, so we may have some room available; anyone else will be bused to available spaces in the district; there is not much more which can be done; he tried to accommodate these students, but we are facing tight spaces and classes are closed everywhere, except one school right now.

Mr. Carcieri asked if children could be added to a full class; maybe change the contract to a bigger class size. Mr. DeCastro was concerned with parents being notified in advance or at the last minute; this is a communication issue and you can't over communicate. Mrs. Brady invited School Committee members to her class with 25 students to one teacher; her concern is the timeliness of parents being informed; she would have had no idea unless she called; her concern as a parent is that she should have had more notice; this is unconscionable; a child excited about Kindergarten and now she needs to readjust with less than a week until school. Are the parents and children really in the forefront?

Patti Streit, Riverside parent, said she was one of the five parents who attended workshops for about nine years and if School Department is going that route, please change the time from 3:00 in the afternoon if you want parental input; there was a lot of effort on

her part to attend meetings in the afternoon last year. She was also frustrated because there was no public input; she wanted the School Committee to go to the City Council last year and waited to support education as a parent. She asked that evening meetings be scheduled to include public input session.

Antone Gouveia – shares in community input; School Committee has to change their attitude with being confrontational with those who come up to speak. The budget reality is he does not know whose budget it is but there is a recommendation of a 9.4% increase; who will say this is my budget; don't look for help. He applauds the transparency, but needs more explanation; example: the legal fees that are much higher. He asked when that process even took place and if it was public. There was an opening of bids, but he was not sure it was voted on in public. If support is wanted, get together because the perception is it was under the table and did we follow rules.

Mr. Carcieri – we are trying to include the City in decisions and trying to do the right thing.

Mr. Gouveia – on comments, it is not happening; need performance audit; need more people to speak at meetings and the School Committee should listen

Mrs. Morris – She and Mr. Faria went to the bid opening for legal services and she felt it was a fair process, which the School Committee voted on in public.

Mr. Gouveia asked for a formal statement on why fees are 100%

higher.

Mr. Faria invited the public to his house on Saturday for coffee at 6PM to meet Dr. Cirillo, Superintendent of Schools. Motion by Mr. Santos to adjourn at 9:50PM, seconded by Mr. Faria. Vote 5-0.

Respectfully submitted,

Patricia A. Iannelli, Administrative Assistant

Steven Santos, Clerk of the Committee