

EAST PROVIDENCE SCHOOL DEPARTMENT

East Providence City Hall

145 Taunton Avenue

East Providence, Rhode Island 02914

School Committee Meeting

June 9, 2009

Open Session

Mr. Carcieri, Chairman called the meeting to order at 6:00PM. School Committee members present: Luisa Abatecola, Shannon Barbosa, Robert Faria, Steven Santos, Anthony Carcieri. Also present: Dr. Mario F. Cirillo, Jr., Superintendent of Schools, Mr. Edward Daft, Assistant Superintendent, Lonnie Barham, Chief Operating Officer, Daniel Kinder, Esq. and Sara Rapport, Esq.

A motion was made by Mr. Santos, to move to executive session, pursuant to R.I. Gen. Laws 42-46-5 (a) (1), in order to discuss: A personnel matter involving a former employee of the Department. This person was notified in writing that the Committee intended to convene in executive session to discuss his/her former employment, and he/she has declined to have this discussion take place in open session. Mr. Santos also moved, pursuant to R.I. Gen. Laws 42-46-5 (a) (2), to discuss collective bargaining with respect to the teachers'

contract, the teachers' assistant contract, the secretaries' contract, the principal's association contract, and the custodians' contract, and to discuss litigation. Motion was seconded by Mrs. Barbosa. Roll call vote: Mrs. Abatecola, aye; Mrs. Barbosa, aye; Mr. Faria, aye; Mr. Santos, aye; Mr. Carcieri, aye.

The School Committee returned to Public Session 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 Mrs. Barbosa. Vote 5-0.

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

Report Executive Session Votes – None

Student/Teacher Recognition

 The Martin Middle School Boys' Track Team and the Riverside Middle School Wrestling Teams were recognized as State Championship teams; team members received certificates and were congratulated by School Committee members.

 Emma Dunn, a Kent Heights Elementary student was recognized for receiving an artistic award.

 Professional Development - Beth Salzillo, Curriculum Coordinator recognized “teachers as leaders” who have opened their classrooms for collaboration with other teachers: Nelia Milhouens, Jen Howard, Natasha Axelson were presented with certificates.

 Technology – Kelly Ahrens, Technology Director recognized five teachers: Rob Perry, Karen Conti, Sue Robertson, Maggie Saunders, and Amy Watson.

 Student Portfolio Presentation – Laura Messier presented her Senior Project.

Public Comment-Communications

Substitute Teacher – Mr. James Schifino, 111 North Broadway, was terminated in March and never received a telephone call about it; he requested public information on policies regarding termination and witness statements. Mr. Barham responded that he sent the information out today. Dr. Cirillo explained that substitute teachers are “at will” employees and Mr. Schifino was terminated as a substitute teacher in March due to an incident wherein he exercised poor judgment, made physical contact with students by blocking egress, and left the school early before speaking with school

administrators about the incident. Mr. Schifino said he was not able to obtain witness statements and that no investigation was done; he said he did not assault a student, but knows who did. Dr. Cirillo explained again that substitute teachers are “at will” employees.

Rollback/Public Comment Policy/Special Education Budget Deficit

Mary Texeira, a teacher at Silver Spring School spoke about the Public Comment policy, which she felt was not timely with the agenda posting; i.e. discussion about a guidance position at the last meeting with no public input before School Committee voted on; parents had no opportunity to comment on the Bradley Partnership discussion. She believes there is a pattern whereby dialogue is being minimized. She said the School Committee serves the public; in Barrington, all residents can speak and do not have to be on the agenda. She would like the School Committee to consider looking at their policy. Her thoughts were that the same pattern has been extended to teachers through a roll back of salary mid year, personal days taken back and unfair benefits among employees. In her own situation, she has a masters degree, has been penalized with the roll back, and never received written notification. She calculated about a \$500 discrepancy over 26 pays in her salary.

Mr. Lonnie Barham answered her questions regarding the issue of 20 pays versus 26 pays; the implementation of the rollback and the impact of the special education budget (59.5% of deficit).

Mrs. Texeira pointed out a pattern of unfairness; she believes that the

School Department tried to recoup money from 20 pays and healthcare. She will have to reconsider all future voluntary work.

Special Education Policy - Taren Shorten, a teacher at Riverside Middle School asked if special education teachers were involved in developing the new policy. Mr. Daft responded that the policy will be placed on the website and has been shared with principals. Policy formulation is a public process and all are welcome to comment. Mr. Faria requested that the Special Education Advisory Committee have input in the process.

Public Comment Policy - Valerie Lawson 15 Wood Hollow Lane, President of the East Providence Education Association, had a concern with the timeliness of the policy; there should have been an opportunity to address the policy before voting took place on May 9, but one has to be placed on the agenda in advance. With the implementation of salary cutbacks, treating teachers this way is not the way to improve education..

Mr. Carcieri said the policy was implemented to have order and fairness. Ms. Lawson questioned actions of the School Committee; teachers have rights and should debate issues, rather than a policy. If there are valid concerns; why stifle public comment. Two School Committee members voted nay on the policy and a new policy should be crafted to deal with these issues before the six months is up. The School Committee should reconsider public comment and all other

actions. Mr. Faria commented that after that vote regarding the public comment policy, more people have commented to him that they like the change.

Mr. Carcieri said the purpose was to provide citizens with an opportunity to speak on the topic of their choice; the School Department can be prepared for questions and all are accommodated with no exclusions. The items are placed on the agenda; with no restrictions on the topic the person selected, but cannot venture into other topics.

Petition – Right to Speak - Paul Moura thanked the teachers and support staff. He respects the School Committee’s position regarding the policy , but he presented signatures of people in East Providence who disagree. He felt that communication should not break down now when people need to get together to resolve issues. He thanked Mr. Faria and Mrs. Abatecola for voting against the policy change. He is a taxpayer and has 1100 signatures on a petition. He believed that this style of leadership has taken the community to this level and he is speaking as a parent, taxpayer and elected official; he works in organized labor and there is tremendous concern about the policy. He suggested that the School Committee should rescind the new public comment policy.

Mr. Santos made the observation that this would be a change of heart for Mr. Moura regarding the rights of citizens to petition elected

officials. He recalled that Operation Clean Government attempted to deliver 21,000 signatures from Rhode Islanders requesting that voter initiative be placed on the ballot, but the Deputy Leader at the time, Mr. Moura, denied the right for the petition to be delivered; Mr. Santos found that ironic.

Sandy Barone, 12 Weeden Avenue, circulated a petition indicating that 1100 people were concerned about the change in rules and the elapse of time between questions and answers. She did not think the lack of spontaneity helps East Providence. At the state level, listening to debate on the floor taught her a lot and changed her mind on some issues after hearing someone else's point of view. By changing those rules, that opportunity is gone when people come to a meeting and cannot comment or have to wait a month to comment. She hears frustration of people not being heard. She is concerned that participation will be stifled and if no talking, people will become less involved.

Mr. Carcieri explained that School Committee meetings are held in public for the public to observe, but that the School Committee is not obligated to allow the public to speak. There are issues in the School Department going back 15 years which the School Committee is trying to sort out and there are people who use the speaking privilege negatively in an attempt to intimidate and get applause for it. The new policy provides an orderly way to vet out questions. Most of the discussion has been about the public comment policy, even though

there are bigger issues such as school policies, educational issues, and financial issues, etc. Debate with other legislators at the statehouse is not the same, since we cannot debate School Committee issues. If he were at the state house, he would not be able to yell; to testify before a committee, one has to sign in and wait for an opportunity to speak. School Committee members discuss, listen, make notes and do school business; this should not be compared to what goes on at the State House. Mr. Carcieri went on to say that the whole public comment section has been about the public comment procedure when there are so many other things to talk about. The School Committee voted on the policy and even Mr. Faria agreed with the policy now, although he initially voted against it. The policy was instituted to not have people screaming and disrupting the meetings. He said the City Council uses the exact same procedure at City Council meetings. The School Committee did not reinvent the wheel; there are more than 1100 people in East Providence who say the School Committee is doing a good job, although he does not get signatures. Ms. Barone said that citizens are concerned about being stifled. Mr. Carcieri said not at all; he is frustrated as a School Committee member; the city is broke; School Department is \$ 4 ½ to 5 Million dollars in debt rolled over from previous Committees and by law, there should not be a deficit. This School Committee is working hard to follow the law; there is a lot of frustration; people do not want taxes raised too much now. The School Committee is doing a great job; people cannot pay their taxes; School Committee is frustrated and a lot of people are frustrated. Most people in East Providence

want the School Committee to run the School Department as it should be run according to law by selecting the best personnel, good technology, etc. in order to provide a good education and would drown out the 1100 people on the petition. There is no money to do a lot of good things; he would like to see people come up to talk about these things. Shannon Barbosa thought the policy was being misrepresented.

Ms. Barone said the petition wants public comment to go back to the way it was. Mr. Carcieri read from the petition: “to allow public comment and questions at School Committee meetings and that pending actions to restrict residents from making comments and asking questions at School Committee meetings to be a violation of first amendment rights.” Mr. Carcieri answered that the School Committee is not restricting anyone from coming up. The petition further reads “we support an honest and open School Committee...” Mr. Carcieri countered “who does not support honest government” and that he would like to go back in time instead of being in deficit. The School Committee is trying to work its way out of this, provide a good education, fix broken buildings and there is no money to do anything. Mr. Carcieri argued that anyone can sign up to speak at meetings and that the purpose of School Committee meetings is to conduct business.

Deborah Brun, 33 Vista Drive, researched the Superintendent’s restructuring plan; she requested figures on the nine positions which

were eliminated and the 13 positions added. Although there were recent postings for a Benefits Director, Director of the CTC, Chief Operating Officer, Assistant Superintendent, High School Principal, Finance Director, Network Administrator, she could not find contracts on the website.

Dr. Cirillo explained that individual contracts contain personally identifiable information and are not public information. Mr. Carcieri answered that Dr. Cirillo made a presentation at a prior meeting regarding the restructuring.

A motion was made by Mr. Faria to change the order of the agenda in order to allow a presentation by the East Providence Local Advisory Committee for Special Education (EPLAC), seconded by Mr. Santos. Roll call vote: Mrs. Abatecola, aye; Mrs. Barbosa, aye; Mr. Faria, aye; Mr. Santos, aye; Mr. Carcieri, aye.

East Providence Local Advisory Committee presented their Annual Report, list of members and by-laws. A motion was made by Mr. Faria, seconded by Mr. Santos to accept the report. Roll call vote: Mrs. Abatecola, aye; Mrs. Barbosa, aye; Mr. Faria, aye; Mr. Santos, aye; Mr. Carcieri, aye. Mr. Carcieri commended the special education teachers in East Providence.

A motion was made by Mrs. Barbosa to recess the meeting, seconded by Mr. Santos, vote 5-0.

The School Committee returned to open session.

The Auditor's Report was moved to the next meeting, as the auditors were unable to attend.

Sub-Committee Reports

Mr. Faria commented on various activities in the district and appreciated all support from the community. He commented on activities which support the transition of students from middle school to high school, but felt there was a need to spend more time also on the transition from elementary to middle school. He commented on the collaboration with the Newman YMCA, the Post Prom party held at the school, a picnic held at Meadowcrest School, and a protest at the high school held on May 29th. Mr. Santos also attended the Meadowcrest event and commented on the work which has been completed to improve both the facility and the grounds.

Superintendent's Report

Personnel Report on Retirements/Resignations/Leaves of Absence –

Mr. Barham reported the following personnel items:

Retirements

George Babcock Guidance Counselor – CTC

Maria McAvoy ESL Teacher – Kent Heights

Manuel Braga Maintenance/Garage

Resignation

Brenda Thibault Safety Patrol Coordinator – Silver Spring

Parental Leave

Mary Snow Resource Teacher – Martin M/S

Leave of Absence

Elizabeth Salzillo Grade 2 Teacher – Waddington

2009-10 School Year

Gloria Pasquini Special Education Teacher – High School

2009-10 School Year

Financial Report – Mr. Barham reported that expenditures are on track at 54.6% at seven months; benefits are over but will adjust before school ends. He reported that overall, 59.8% is just about where we should be at this time. Revenues were also on target for seven months into the fiscal year at 56.78%.

Consent Agenda

Approval of Minutes – Motion by Mrs. Barbosa to approve the minutes of the March 10, 2009 meeting and the May 12, 2009 meeting,

seconded by Mr. Santos. Roll call vote: Mrs. Abatecola, aye; Mrs. Barbosa, aye; Mr. Faria, aye; Mr. Santos, aye; Mr. Carcieri, aye.

Personnel Appointments – Presented by Mr. Barham:

Appointments

Karen Mellen Director – CTC

Robert Perry Supervisor – Instructional Technology & Data

Eric Laffey Network Administrator

Heidi Matczak Special Education Teacher – High School

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

Layoffs

Kelly Costa Education Specialist - Martin M/S

Kendra Kopecky-Bowden Education Specialist – High School

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

Dr. Cirillo referred to the criticism of restructuring and will stick to his numbers of saving \$80,000 the first year by eliminating some positions and restructuring others. Ms. Mellen is on leave from East Providence as the curriculum director in Newport; she will now serve as Director of the East Providence Career & Technical school. Mr. Robert Perry, who has provided technology assistance in the district as a teacher, has now been appointed Supervisor – Instructional Technology and Data. Mr. Perry will dedicate his efforts to integrating

technology as a tool for educational success Congratulations were extended to Ms. Karen Mellen and Mr. Robert Perry.

Recalls of Personnel - Mr. Barham requested the recall from layoff of 52 teachers. A motion was made by Mr. Faria, seconded by Mrs. Abatecola. Roll call vote: Mrs. Abatecola, aye; Mrs. Barbosa, aye; Mr. Faria, aye; Mr. Santos, aye; Mr. Carcieri, aye.

Bill Lists

Warrant #900 6/5/09 \$2,218,036.79

Warrant #898 5/21/09 \$ 4,608.00

Warrant #899 6/4/09 \$ 945,359.56

Motion: Mr. Faria, seconded by Mrs. Barbosa. Roll call vote: Mrs. Abatecola, aye; Mrs. Barbosa, aye; Mr. Faria, aye; Mr. Santos, aye; Mr. Carcieri, aye.

Contracts – Mr. Barham explained that bids were opened in order to compare custodial services and will a review will be ongoing regarding the pros and cons of both contingent with talks with the custodial union.

Action Items – Dr. Cirillo reviewed a letter he wrote in support of pending legislation regarding the advertising of School Committee

meetings . A motion was made by Mr. Santos, seconded by Mr. Faria.
Roll call vote: Mrs. Abatecola, aye; Mrs. Barbosa, aye; Mr. Faria, aye;
Mr. Santos, aye; Mr. Carcieri, aye.

Special Education Staffing Policy – Dr. Cirillo noted this was brought up during the public comment; Mr. Daft explained that a committee was responsible for drafting a policy, and the process is ongoing. Mr. Daft explained that it is a draft policy and will be placed on the website for any comments.

Mr. Faria commented that the state is overdue for a funding formula and encouraged everyone to get in touch with their representatives as we need more equitable plans to fund education. Mr. Santos agreed this comes up every year and an equitable formula is needed. He believes the budget is based on numbers that are fair and equitable across the board and represent the true needs of the community; RI is the only state out of 50 without a funding formula.

A motion was made by Mrs. Barbosa to adjourn at 10:45PM, seconded by Mr. Santos.

Respectfully submitted,

Patricia A. Iannelli, Administrative Assistant

Shannon Barbosa, Clerk of the Committee