

EAST PROVIDENCE SCHOOL DEPARTMENT

East Providence City Hall

145 Taunton Avenue

East Providence, Rhode Island 02914

December 14, 2010

Open Session

Mr. Charles Tsonos Chairman, called the meeting to order at 7:30PM. School Committee members present: Luisa Abatecola, Stephen Furtado, Chrissy Rossi, Ryan Tellier, Charles Tsonos. Also present: Dr. Mario F. Cirillo, Superintendent of Schools.

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

Order of the agenda was changed to allow Student Liaison, Andrew Butler, to present his report on high school activities and events.

Student/Teacher Recognition – Students from M.J. Francis School provided holiday entertainment.

Public Comment I - None

Reports: Superintendent's Report

Parent Action Committee Recognition – Not presented at this time; parent not able to attend.

Operations Report – Dr. Cirillo advised that a presentation would be made by the following departments: Finance, Facilities, Human Resources, and Transportation to report on the ongoing work, accomplishments and goals of each department.

Personnel Report on Retirements/Resignations/Leaves of Absence

Retirement

Jacqueline Bourne Secretary-Special Services effective 4/4/2011

Resignations

Ellen Will Portfolio Instructional Teacher (Science) – High School

Anabela Olsen 2/5 Spanish Teacher – High School effective 11/24/10

Luke Walker English Teacher – Martin Middle School – Effective 11/29/10

Kelsey Quinones Basketball/Competition Cheerleading Coach – High School

Effective 4/19/10

Family Medical Leave Act

Kristin Branco Speech/Language Pathologist-Francis Elementary

School

Approx. 3/21/11-5/31/11

**Christina Salois French/Portuguese Teacher – High School –
Approx. 3/21/11**

Financial Report – Mary King, Finance Director, reviewed the Summary of Revenue and Expenditures reports for November 2010. She advised that not all of the expenses are in due to a timing delay, but that a report would be made at the January meeting regarding the end of FY 2009-2010.

Mr. Tsonos asked about co-pays for health insurance and transportation costs. Ms. King responded that co-pays would be reflected on the expense side of benefits; any money received or expended would be in the report; she can provide information on the dollar value of co-pays. As far as transportation, the November invoices are not in yet, but total is expected to be around \$100,000. Mr. Furtado met with Ms. King today to review the budget; he suggested that reports might be better placed on the agenda at the second monthly meeting. Dr. Cirillo agreed to make that change.

Consent Agenda

Approval of Minutes – A motion was made by Mrs. Rossi to approve the minutes of the meeting held on December 1, 2010, seconded by Mr. Furtado. Vote 5-0.

A motion was made by Mrs. Rossi to approve the minutes of the meeting held on December 6, 2010, seconded by Mrs. Abatecola. Vote 5-0.

The minutes of the November 29, 2010 meeting (prior committee) were not voted on.

Personnel Appointments

Erin Schwab Portfolio Instructional Teacher (Science) High School

Brad Wilson Boys' Lacrosse Coach – High School

Bridget Garrity Basketball/Competition Cheerleading Coach – High School

Joe Lonardo JV/Asst. Girls' Soccer Coach – High School

Motion: Chrissy Rossi/Second: Ryan Tellier. Vote 5-0.

Requisitions – Bill Lists

Warrant #1041 11/15/10 \$ 769.57

Warrant #1044 12/6/10 \$ \$ 75,220.34 \$11,563.13 Corrected Amount*

Warrant #1045 12/10/10 \$ 252,225.01

Warrant #1046 12/10/10 \$ 18,057.59

Warrant #1047 12/10/10 \$ 893,370.53

Warrant #1048 12/10/10 \$ 25,000.00

Motion to approve by Mr. Tellier, seconded by Mrs. Abatecola.

Discussion: Mrs. Rossi requested more information regarding the \$1500 charge for Verizon and asked to review copies of the legal bills.

Mr. Barham explained that one of the charges for legal services should not have been on the bill list as it was already approved and paid under the prior School Committee for two months of legal services; he asked that the charge be crossed off the list.

Discussion regarding legal cases and bills for legal services. Mrs. Abatecola requested that the amount of Warrant #1044 be adjusted accordingly. The Superintendent will provide a report on cell phones.

Vote: 5-0 to approve.

Awarding of Bid(s)

HP Computer Lease – Mary King explained that the School Department is currently in year two of a three-year lease with Hewlett Packard for computer equipment and is now seeking approval on a second

three-year lease for equipment to replace old equipment for computer laboratories at Riverside Middle

School, Martin Middle School and the High School in the amount of \$337,223.40 (\$112,407.80/yr). The

School Department has been very pleased with the quality of the equipment as well as the service

provided by HP and recommended that the lease be accepted in order to furnish schools with current

technology to further the advancement of students. Discussion regarding placement of the equipment. Dr. Cirillo explained the reinforcement of the computer labs at the middle and high schools and how the \$99,000 Champlain Grant received by the School Department dovetails nicely with this technology upgrade and will allow students to work with updated equipment.

Kelly Ahrens, Director of Technology explained students will get new computers about every four years subject to funding. Mr. Tellier had questions regarding the three year lease and an item listed in the agreement for \$23,756.70 for a switch and the end of the lease agreement to return or purchase equipment at fair market value. Kelly Ahrens explained that it is necessary to replace switches to keep equipment operating efficiently and up to speed; she will look into his question and respond. Mary King advised that the buy-out is at the end of the lease and that the switches are included in the three year cost.

A motion was made by Mr. Furtado to approve, seconded by Mrs. Rossi. Vote 5-0.

Action Items

Recess Arbitration – Mr. Furtado read the following resolution:

Be it resolved that the East Providence School Committee hereby direct the Superintendent to revert to the previous policy regarding elementary teachers supervising their students during recess and to work with the EPEA/NEARI to cancel the pending arbitration request on this issue. The School Committee realizes that due to the complexities of scheduling issues that this change will necessitate at the various elementary schools, a reasonable transition period will be allowed to finalize the policy change.

Motion to approve by Mrs. Rossi, seconded by Mr. Tellier.

Discussion: Mr. Tellier asked if principals will require extra teacher aides during recess to minimize the amount of the change.

Discussion regarding the issue of hiring more teacher aides.

Dr. Cirillo explained that changing the schedule now would cause chaos and that time is needed to make sure it is done correctly because each school is different; he needs to collaborate with principals who will work with their teachers to determine if additional aides are needed. He requested a reasonable transition to the end of the year at which time he would report back to the School Committee on the change.

Mr. Tsonos asked how many weeks it takes to create a schedule over summer and what would change if there were no additional aides provided.

Dr. Cirillo felt it would be difficult to change the schedule mid-year but that given a directive by the School Committee, he would be willing and able to make the change but needs time to implement it. He preferred making the change next school year in order to minimize the disruption to education.

Mr. Tsonos commented that every school is different, but the Committee is looking at this as eliminating a legal problem. Mr. Furtado asked how it would affect the pending arbitration.

Discussion: Dr. Cirillo would like to see how this plays out and if it is positive for kids; he could provide a date, but may want this to be subject to negotiations.

Ms. Rossi pointed out that the only time some students have for extra help is at recess; students were moved around at middle school level and have a long walk home if they miss the bus; they have no other options for help; some of this problem was created by moving kids out of their neighborhood; why not allow teachers to have that time to make calls and work with kids.

Dr. Cirillo will sit with administrators who will collaborate with their teachers and look at options on a building basis as to how the time can be best used.

Dr. Cirillo advised that the arbitration is over; he recommends

keeping the policy as is and to let it play out ; there have been no complaints received; this was portrayed as taking away from kids while trying to make it better for kids; recess has been less disruptive and less injuries reported.

Mrs. Rossi is not willing to go the litigation route or to breach the contract. Dr. Cirillo suggested playing this out for the rest of school year.

Mrs. Avila, Principal of Kent Heights, spoke regarding her building schedule and what the effects of changing the schedule might have on her school.

After discussion, Mr. Tsonos reported that this would not be limited to an eight week schedule to make the changes; the School Committee will not dictate a time and the Superintendent will work out the details. Mr. Tellier requested that the Superintendent keep the School Committee informed. Dr. Cirillo believes there are two different issues here. He felt that the arbitration issue would be going away and he preferred not to disrupt schools at this point.

Mr. Tsonos asked if anyone in the audience wished to comment on the topic before the vote.

Mary Teixeira, a teacher at Silver Spring thought her school could make the changes tomorrow because they have a fantastic principal

and she thought it would not impact the school. She commented that this change was done with incorrect information; she uses her time to work with kids and always has plenty of things to fill any extra time.

Colleen Holland, teacher at Whiteknact, has the same number of aides; she can decide about recess; they have 3 grades (six classes) at once and every teacher has an aide. She said that with Smart Boards, RTI, etc., the needs are greater than ever; she has 25 kids and many need extra time; that time would be well used if given back. She felt that her time as a professional could be better spent inside and she would be comfortable with aides outside with kids.

Rosemary Stein, teacher at Silver Spring, said she could better spend her time on fast math and making calls which she has little time to do now; time would be spent working with others in the building. She said that elementary teachers know their kids; her time would be better spent in the building than with recess games.

Dena Tsonos said that teachers are flexible by nature and that principals work with them on what works best for students; all moving parts every day and they make it all work out.

Maggie Saunders, teacher at Hennessey, said they have four to five classes out at once, no aides; they can work together on what is best for the kids.

Laura Laviano asked about the research for teachers to be outside at recess rather than giving extra help to their students; teachers need to be working inside with other specialists rather than being at recess.

Valerie Lawson 122 Hoyt Avenue - The practice needs to change in a reasonable amount of time; the resolution alone does not resolve the issue; the School Committee heard from numerous people from different buildings; this needs to be addressed at the building level and can be resolved by sitting down to determine what is reasonable; she believes that a month would be reasonable and a report made at that time. The arbitration goes forward if the practice continues.

Mr. Tsonos said that the School Committee does not want to micromanage but that each administrator will interact to get the job done and get everyone on the same page; the issue will be reviewed next month and should be placed on that agenda. The School Committee voted unanimously to approve the resolution.

Schedule of Meetings for 2011 – Motion by Mr. Furtado, seconded by Mrs. Abatecola. Discussion: Superintendent advised regarding a date in January for a breakfast or lunch meeting being planned at the Career and Technical School and the High School; date will be forthcoming. Mr. Tsonos stated that if there were three meetings in January there would be only one held in February.

List of 2011 School Committee meetings to be posted: January 11, 20, 25; February 8; March 8,22; April 12, 26; May 10, 25 (Commissioner's visit); June 14, 28; August 9, 23; September 13, 27; October 11, 25; November 8, 22; December 13, 2011.

Requests for Home Schooling – Motion by Mrs. Abatecola to approve the recommendations of the Superintendent, seconded by Mr. Furtado. Vote 5-0.

Public Comment II - None

Announcements

Mr. Tsonos issued a statement:

“The new School Committee is grateful to have been elected by the citizens of East Providence. We have been charged with overseeing the school department. I must say that as we begin this journey, I am embarrassed and shocked by the condition of the school department's finances. We were told in October 2010 that there would be a significant shortfall of money. We paid 2010 bills with funds designated for 2011. We are now being that told this shortfall will be worse and money will run out even sooner in this fiscal year. We were told by our predecessors who occupied these chairs that they were the financial watchdogs. It appears that just the opposite is true. They have encumbered this city, you and I, with a debt that we cannot afford. They have extended contracts and locked us into

unaffordable commitments. I now call upon the Superintendent and his staff to come up with a plan in 30 days to significantly decrease our debt. We have a larger administrative staff than the city of Cranston, a much larger district. We now charge the Superintendent and his staff to take immediate action to reduce the costs of running our school system. The first quarter of this year is over in January; we can no longer delay facing our financial responsibilities.”

Mrs. Rossi announced that one of our former students, Campbell Johnson, was chosen to be the new co-host for the Rhode Show and she encouraged everyone to take a look at the new Patch website to view sports accomplishments of our students.

Dr. Cirillo advised that professional development activities for teachers will be conducted on January 13, 2011; students will be released from school at 12:00 Noon, 12:30PM and 1:30PM; parents will also be reminded through ConnectEd announcements.

Mrs. Abatecola wished everyone a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.

Mr. Tellier commented that although it was mentioned there might be issues at Francis School related to the Pond View Project, he visited Francis School and after speaking to the DEM, there were no issues consistent with state readings.

Motion to adjourn by Mr. Furtado, seconded by Mr. Tellier. Vote 5-0.

Respectfully submitted,

Patricia A. Iannelli, Administrative Assistant

Stephen Furtado, Clerk of the Committee