

EAST PROVIDENCE SCHOOL DEPARTMENT

East Providence City Hall

145 Taunton Avenue

East Providence, Rhode Island 02914

January 11, 2011

Open Session

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

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

Student Liaison Report – Andrew Butler presented a report on high school activities and events.

Student/Teacher Recognition

Parent Action Committee Recognition – Patti Streit was recognized and received a commendation for her work to help promote passage of the School Construction Bond Referendum on the ballot in November 2010.

Public Comment I – Motion by Mrs. Rossi to allow, seconded by Mr.

Furtado. Vote 5-0. (None)

Reports: Superintendent's Report

Superintendent's Opening Remarks – Dr. Cirillo responded to the closing statement made by Mr. Tsonos at the December 14th meeting, by stating that he and his staff have been very open and transparent regarding the district's deficit, its deficit elimination plan and its current and future cash flow problems and that the School Committee has been briefed every month since July 2010. In addition, the City's audit firm has briefed the School Committee and the public every year on the deficit; the financial statements are published on the city's website. The deficit dates back to 1999; in FY 2003 the deficit stood at \$2.4 million; in FY 2007, \$1.2 million; in FY2008, it increased to \$5.2 million due to arbitrary cuts by a prior School Committee without offsetting revenues to pay for the cuts. The FY 2009 budget included a request for \$5.2 million to pay off the deficit which was ultimately rejected by the City Council after the School Committee voted to put it in the budget; that deficit was inherited by this administration. The School Committee has been well informed; this is debt we cannot afford and we responded by cutting costs approximately \$12 million for fiscal years 2009-11 along with a \$6 million cost avoidance. An additional \$1.5 million was cut from last year's expenses. All of these cuts and savings were briefed frequently to the School Committee, City Council and the public and that his administration took dramatic actions to contain and cut costs. Further, the Superintendent said he

believed that the contracts issued to central administrators were necessary to keep in place the team that has saved the district money and has introduced so many enhancements to the education of students. He felt that he and his staff have always sought ways to reduce the district's debt and will continue to do so within constraints of required educational and operational costs, reduced state aid, and contractual/collective bargaining agreements.

Mr. Tsonos responded that the School Committee's purpose is to represent children, provide the best education possible, and to protect taxpayer dollars and this School Committee will make sure the district is diligent about control of every penny spent; bills from 2010 are being paid with 2011 money and the district is facing deficit again. The School Committee needs to ask questions and obtain answers.

Recess Update – Dr. Cirillo advised that changes are being made to recess duty at elementary schools with implementation completed by February 1, 2011; he presented a draft document developed through working with the principals for an accounting of the time teachers will have free due to the change in recess duty. Discussion: Mrs. Rossi asked if this practice was in place before; Mr. Furtado asked if it had been presented to Ms. Lawson and the bargaining unit. Dr. Cirillo said it had been discussed; but the draft document has not yet been presented.

Under Public Comment, Mary Teixeira, teacher at Silver Spring, was concerned about the time her class has lost already, about 1000 minutes, for teaching and learning. She will fill out the form but will submit all of her time on task in her job. The School Committee will see an accounting of her time working for children. She felt insulted to be asked for that; most principals move around in their building and know what teachers are doing.

Roberta Brady, teacher at Waddington, insulted to be asked to account for fifteen minutes of recess time which she uses to work with children, call parents, or even to go to the ladies room; no one has ever questioned this before; she mentioned that five minutes every week planning time has been lost since the beginning of school. Teachers are doing work before and after school and they have administrators who are former teachers and they know they are always accountable. This takes away from other things; many teachers are taxpayers doing recess duty rather than working with kids.

Valarie Lawson, 122 Hoyt Ave, at a meeting with Mr. Barham it was mentioned that through a discussion with administrators, asking teachers to log time was being discussed and mulled over; she informed him that it was not necessary and was never an issue before. She hoped that Dr. Cirillo received that communication that she had expressed reservations about it. Dr. Cirillo said he was made aware of her comments, but he has the responsibility for organizing

the school day and to set the schedule for running the district and this action was not arbitrary or dictatorial. He said this is a draft document and he would look at any changes from the principals.

Debbie Brun found it interesting that in the contract it states a minimum for planning time, not a maximum; she has been a teacher for 22 years; this is 15 minutes of time for remedial work with kids; she is insulted to have to document the time spent working with kids and the fact that it is more work to complete the form.

Mrs. Abatecola asked how the forms will be used after they are completed.

Dr. Cirillo explained that it would provide information on what teachers are engaged in and it is not a lot of reporting but provides teachers' feedback to administrators; administrators have a responsibility to set the schedule; this is a form to report data back; it is not for evaluation purposes.

Lisa Gomes had a concern about elementary teachers going out to recess and considers it a violation of the contract; she also had a concern about the forms and where they would go when completed. She read from contract section 9.7.2. Dr. Cirillo considered it an issue of interpretation of the contract.

Mr. Tsonos said the school department is full of professionals and

these issues should be resolved within the schools with staff members.

Curriculum/Instruction/Technology Update – Dr. Caroline Caswell, Assistant Superintendent, presented a PowerPoint presentation detailing the work of the Curriculum Office which oversees Curriculum, Instruction, Assessment, Professional Development and Technology.

Mrs. Rossi requested a meeting with the Superintendent to discuss the Master Mentor Positions, consolidation, and time clocks.

Personnel Report on Retirements/Resignations/Leaves of Absence – Ms. Patricia Whalen, H/R Benefits Manager presented the personnel items:

PERSONAL LEAVE OF ABSENCE

Joanne Hall Grade 2 Teacher – Kent Heights Elementary School – 2011- 2012 School Year

RESIGNATIONS

**Melissa Rieck (9 yrs) Teacher Assistant - Riverside Middle School
Effective January 4, 2011**

Irene Miranda (18 yrs) Supervisory Assistant – Martin Middle School – Effective January 10, 2011

FAMILY MEDICAL LEAVE ACT

Melissa O’Neil Reading Specialist – Oldham Elementary School – Effective Approximately 3/1/11

Financial Update/TANs – Mr. Barham reported that although the School Department does not expect to have a deficit this year, the department has been using current operating funds to pay old bills. This year expenditures will not exceed revenues; however, at the end of the year, there will be a cash flow problem with only enough funds only to pay salaries and benefits. The School Department has also been experiencing problems with payments to special education providers. Mr. Tsonos commented that we have to watch every penny that is spent; who do we blame without taking substantive action.

Mr. Barham explained that information presented at a recent City Council meeting was misleading; the School Department sent a note to the City Manager to seek information and cooperation on ways for the School Department to eliminate its \$6.2 million deficit and improve its cash flow; it was not sent as a proposal of any kind. The School Department requested the assistance of the City’s bond counsel, City Finance Director and the City Manager to explore the idea of asking the City to sell Tax Anticipation Notes (TANS). It was also requested that the current City Solicitor review the Purchase and

Sales Agreement for Grove Avenue School, which sale is essential to the School Department's revenue stream for this fiscal year. Mr. Barham implored the School Committee to request assistance from the City regarding these requests.

Mrs. Rossi asked what the School Department would have in place to reduce operating costs, even if we are successful in obtaining the TANS and are able to pay off the \$6 million deficit.

Mr. Barham explained that the department has cut costs as much as possible over the last three years but that the School Committee could certainly advise the Superintendent of any additional cuts they may have. Mrs. Rossi asked if level funded again, where the money would come from for new positions; she would like to have a greater look at the budget. Mr. Tsonos asked to place this item on the agenda for discussion.

Consolidation Report – Mr. Barham explained that within the last two to three years, the School Department and the city researched the feasibility of consolidating their departments such as Human Resources and the Finance Departments with the City's departments. After review, it was determined that there were major differences in the functions, tasks, and organization of the City's Finance Department and that of the School Department; there were also significant differences in the Human Resource departments' organization and functions and it was determined that such

consolidation would not result in any significant cost savings.

Mr. Tsonos asked about the TANS request. Dr. Cirillo related that the financial situation needed to be remedied and while researching a deficit plan, the idea was raised regarding Tax Anticipation Notes; he requested that the School Committee request a meeting with city officials to have a conversation about the possibility of moving forward with such a plan. After the discussion, Mr. Tsonos agreed on the need to arrange a meeting; Mrs. Rossi agreed to reach out to the City Council; Mrs. Abatecola, Mr. Tellier, and Mr. Furtado were also in agreement.

Mr. Barham explained that about two years ago, the School Department and the city agreed on some consolidation of grounds-keeping duties some of which never reached fruition. Two years ago, the School Department had one technology employee who was shared with the city (3/5 time to the city and only 2/5 time to the School Department). After the Superintendent recognized a weakness and recommended a plan to the School Committee to address the department's inadequacies, they agreed to implement a technology department capable of supporting a district of our size with a plan to install close to 2,000 technology devices. Since then, the department has moved from a few hundred old computers to one with over 1300 modern computers which effectively support the successful education of almost 6,000 students in our district. The School Department cannot support its technology programs without

the assistance of the current four -person team of technology experts. It was also noted that the past lackadaisical approach to technology had cost the department over \$50,000 in outside computer services, destroyed over 200 computers, and took the department offline for close to a month due to a computer virus in the system.

Discussion took place regarding cost saving measures and looking for ways to save money. Mr. Barham pointed out that many cost cutting measures had been put in place already such as savings of approximately one million dollars in transportation costs and the implementation of the Bradley Program within the schools. He does not believe that consolidation will save money but can be in touch with the City Manager to revisit the issue. After discussion, Mr. Tsonos does not anticipate any problems going forward as far as working with City officials.

Bond/Construction Update – Mr. Barham explained that while Johnson Controls will oversee the work in all of our schools and has completed its repair/renovation schedule, Symmes, Maini and McKee Associates, the company with the lead for the \$15M in school repair bond work, will begin the schematic design phase of the project (anticipated to last 4-6 weeks), as soon as the two companies schedules are combined. A Request for Qualifications has been issued for the positions of Clerk of the Works, Commissioning Agent, and Owner’s Representation which will close on January 20th and a

Building Committee meeting has been scheduled that same day to assist in selecting the successful company. Beginning at the February School Committee meeting, the Clerk of the Works will brief the School Committee every month on the status of both bond projects.

Financial Report – Mary King, Director of Finance reported the Summary of Revenues on target at 16.10% received two months into FY 2011; timing issue with expenditures running ahead at 19.74%; there will be variances shown every month, but she was hopeful to end the year without a deficit. Discussion took place regarding medical co-pays and the department’s self-insured plan. Mrs. Rossi asked for information about sharing a policy with the city and requested information regarding the cost per plan to the School Department.

Consent Agenda

Approval of Minutes – A motion was made by Mrs. Rossi to approve the minutes of the meeting held on December 14, 2010, seconded by Mrs. Abatecola. Vote 5-0.

Personnel Appointments – Presented by Ms. Whalen:

Lian Furtado Detention Supervisor - Martin Middle School

Effective 01/04/2011(Stipend Position)

**Susan Reavey Detention Supervisor - Riverside Middle School
Effective 01/04/2011(Stipend Position)**

**Crandall Dimock 2/5 Science Teacher – East Providence High
School Effective 12/21/2010 (changed from 1/5 due to
scheduling)**

**Keith Anderson Teenage Republican Club Advisor – East
Providence High School**

**Alexandra Salisbury Art Teacher – East Providence High School
(changed from 3/5 to 5/5 to fill in for S. Digati out on leave
1/3/11-1/31/11)**

**Mark Maguire 4/5 Band Instructor – East Providence High School
Effective 1/12/11(due to M. Gaudette resigning)**

**Allison Battis 2/5 Science Teacher – East Providence High
School (due to scheduling) - Effective 10/18/2010**

**Katherine Dempsey Speech Language Pathologist – Meadowcrest
Replacing E. Morrissey (resigned) - Effective 2/7/11**

**Lori Rush Speech Language Pathologist – Meadowcrest
Change from 5/5 - 3/5 Effective 1/26/11**

Addition to Docket:

Joseph Barroso Automotive Technician – CTC – Effective 1/18/11

(due to Ray Pinson resigning 3/24/10)

Motion to approve by Mr. Tellier, seconded by Mrs. Abatecola. Vote 5-0 (Mr. Furtado noted that the person being appointed with the same last name was not related to him)

Five Minute recess; School Committee meeting reconvened.

Requisitions – Bill Lists

Warrant #1049 12/14/10 \$ 6,680.00

Warrant #1050 12/20/10 \$ 37.00

Warrant #1052 12/20/10 \$ 1,594.80

Warrant #1053 1/7/11 \$ 1,136,293.55

Warrant #1054 1/7/11 \$ 1,433.54

Warrant #1055 1/7/11 \$ 1,895,162.24

Warrant #1056 1/7/11 \$ 23,595.13

Motion: Mrs. Rossi/Second: Mrs. Abatecola. Mrs. Rossi noted that after scanning the Verizon bill , she questioned a charge for Thompson School and asked Mary King to check on all of the phone lines we are being billed for. Mary King stated that some lines are designated to call in emergency HVAC problems; she asked that the School Committee pay the bill now and Ms. Ahrens, the Technology Director, would audit the account. Mrs. Rossi agreed to approve the bill for payment but asked for a report at a later date.

Vote 5-0.

Awarding of Bid(s)

Computer Lab Tables Furniture Bid – School Specialty Inc. \$3,213.95

x 7 Computer Labs

Total - \$22,497.95 Motion by Mr. Furtado to approve, seconded by Mr. Tellier. Vote 5-0.

Smart Board Technology for Middle Schools – Valley Communications Systems, Inc.

Total - \$100,215.00 Motion to approve by Mrs. Rossi, seconded by Mr. Tellier. Vote 5-0.

Legal Request for Proposals (RFP) – Dr. Cirillo explained the process used for reviewing the proposals received from four law firms in response to our advertisement; Mr. Tsonos, Mrs. Abatecola, Lonnie Barham, Dr. Cirillo and Mary King reviewed each proposal, ranking the services of each firm. Mrs. Abatecola would feel more comfortable interviewing the firms; Mrs. Rossi noted that the School Committee had been without legal representation since December and should have representation before the next meeting; Mr. Tellier agreed. Motion to interview firms, no second. Mrs. Rossi thought it important to make a decision now and to choose the low bidder in order to save a little money with the lower rates. Mr. Tellier agreed that an appointment should be made. Mr. Furtado nominated Mr. Robert Silva, who he felt had served the city well in the past, seconded by Mr. Tellier. Roll call vote: Mrs. Abatecola, aye; Mr. Furtado, aye; Mrs. Rossi, aye; Mr. Tellier, aye; Mr. Tsonos, aye. Mr. Tsonos asked the Superintendent to set up a brief executive session with the attorney to discuss pending legal issues.

Action Items

Mr. Tellier resigned from his appointment as School Committee Liaison to the City Council due to a conflict with his work schedule; he nominated Mrs. Rossi for the position, seconded by Mr. Furtado. Vote 5-0.

Public Comment II – None

Announcements

Kindergarten Registration – Mr. Daft announced that registration will be held beginning February 1st for East Providence residents with children who will be five years old by September 1, 2011.

Dr. Cirillo announced details of a conference on January 21st sponsored by RIASC and announced that school had been canceled for the next day (January 12, 2011) due to the forecast of inclement weather.

Mrs. Rossi would requested that more work be done on the budget in order to reduce expenses and head off a deficit. Mr. Tsonos stated that in order to get consideration from the City, the School Committee needs to look at every penny.

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

Respectfully submitted,

Patricia A. Iannelli, Administrative Assistant

Stephen Furtado, Clerk of the Committee