

EAST PROVIDENCE SCHOOL DEPARTMENT

East Providence, City Hall, 145 Taunton Avenue

East Providence, Rhode Island 02914

September 27 2011

Open Session

Mr. Tsonos called the meeting to order at 6:30PM. SC Members Present: Luisa Abatecola, Stephen Furtado, Chrissy Rossi, Ryan Tellier, Charles Tsonos. Also in attendance: Mr. Edward Daft, Interim Superintendent, Andrew Thomas, Esq. and Robert Silva, Esq.

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

Public Comment I

Rachel Gouveia spoke about her son, a student in the Silver Spring Bradley Program, and how the Partnership has brought children back to neighborhood schools and prevented them from being bussed to more expensive placements. She also stressed that this inclusion program allows kids to participate in school activities; she asked that the School Committee keep parents informed on an honest basis.

Another parent spoke about the Bradley Partnership program at Silver Spring; a regular classroom did not work out for her child and through the Bradley program, he is now learning and making friends.

She believes this program has saved money and would like to be informed about where these students would end up without the Bradley program; this should not be about the money, but about children. She has had no response from anyone about her child.

Mr. Tsonos explained that a plan is being devised to revise our debt; they have come up with a payment plan and will meet with Bradley, Meeting Street, and Groden; everyone will do what they can to keep this partnership going. Mr. Tsonos agreed to set up a meeting with Groden, Bradley and other vendors; he does not control the money, the city does; we need more facts and figures and once more clarification is received from the city a meeting will be arranged.

Rachel Gouveia said that when she spoke to Mr. Wall of Bradley, he said he had not received any calls or information about a payment plan and the only thing they can do is not provide services. Mr. Tsonos said he has spoken with Mr. Wall a couple times, but the schools do not create revenue; it is up to the City Council to create revenue.

Michelle, a parent, works with adults with disabilities who had no early intervention skills, resulting in problems later in life. The Bradley staff knows how to deal with children with disabilities and she does not want to see these children lose the early intervention Bradley provides and the chance to learn. This is hard enough for parents and she hoped they are not being looked at as statistics.

Motion by Mr. Furtado to move to Item E2, School Construction Work Update, seconded by Mrs. Abatecola. Vote 5-0.

Farrar & Associates, James Farrar and Mike Tabor attended. Mr. Farrar reported that everyone was pleased when all schools opened on time in spite of the anxiety about the bond situation and concerns about the timely opening of school. He stated that because the bond application had to wait for second passage by the City Council, the construction schedule was compromised. On the money needed to fund Phase I, (\$6 million out of the \$15 million bond): competitive bids were received; scope review with \$3.8 million; there was other work which needed to be completed and soft costs for architectural and engineering. There is an intensive effort taking place especially at the high school; changes implemented to save money for the district; Building, Fire, and Health Departments were involved; the Health Department work dates back numerous years and they want assurance the work will be done; expanded that to added scope of work from Phase II; DOH wanted to make sure their concerns were being addressed as well and they were concerned about a schedule; 100% effort, credit to contractors; subs, school administration and Facilities Department for the extensive cleaning process done at high school; commitments were made to Health Department on balance of work they want done; DOH did air testing at the High School just before Labor Day which passed; cleaning crews worked over weekend. He provided an outline of work at schools: Phase I intact,

all work will continue through November; only life safety work; balance of work now on hold; building and fire departments looking for the balance of work and have concerns about it; planning is of the utmost concern; the School Committee asked to release bonds, as this work is critical; RIDE review regarding state reimbursement underway with Mr. DaSilva.

Mr. Farrar requested 12 weeks lead time on materials; he wants to be able to do work not done in the summer and would like to avoid a similar delay for Phase II. When he met with Mr. DaSilva at RIDE, to discuss the balance of Phase II work, he was informed that if the work is not completed it could jeopardize funding; this will be confirmed by RIDE in writing.

Mr. Tsonos thanked the whole team for their hard work and for making sure schools opened on time; the School Committee wants to be sure they are doing their part with the city to see that the work is on track.

Mr. Farrar explained there is a need to move quickly; the essential planning piece should be happening now; from plan to paper is months; The promises to Department of Health, and fire safety need to be kept and they want a plan of action that school work will continue; abatements will be done during school vacations; he cannot give them an answer until the bonds are sold, which should be done immediately.

Mr. Tsonos stated that a new City Manager will be in place within a week and he hoped all parties would work together to move in the direction we need to go.

Discussion: Mrs. Rossi asked for clarification that if all the work is not done, the city will not receive reimbursement funds. Mr. Farrar explained that RI Department of Education is the authority for fund transfers and he will have it in writing that housing aid will be jeopardized if the work is not completed. Mr. Furtado asked to present a resolution to the City Council regarding Phase II of the construction. Mr. Tellier asked that Mr. Daft get this rolling

Mr. Daft stated this was one project; we had support for all; and there could be consequences if not completed

Interim Superintendent's Report

Mr. Daft recommended that the 2011-12 school calendar be adjusted: schools will be closed on Monday, January 2, 2012, which is considered a federal holiday; one day will be added to the end of the school year to compensate; last day of school has been adjusted to June 20th 2012. Consensus received from the School Committee on the amended calendar.

Personnel Report on Retirements/Resignations/Leaves of Absence

Mary King, Finance Director, presented the following personnel items recommended by the Superintendent:

RESIGNATION

**Nomi Hague Librarian/Media Specialist ÿV Orlo/SS - Effective
09/16/2011**

**Deborah DiArezzo Head Teacher ÿV Silver Spring - Effective
09/06/11**

Mary Gallagher RTI Specialist-Oldham - Effective Immediately

**Kathleen Caffrey Part Time Master Mentor Evaluator - Effective
09/06/2011**

RETIREMENT

**Harry Fish Educational Specialist-Layoff-MMS Effective
09/20/2011**

FAMILY AND MEDICAL LEAVE ACT

**Michelle Chamberlin Resource Teacher ÿV Kent Heights -
Approximately 01/02/2012 - 13 weeks**

**Kelley Richardson English Teacher-MMS - Approximately 10/07/11 ÿV
13 weeks**

**Heather Coughlin English Teacher ÿV EPHS - Approximately 11/28/11
ÿV 13 weeks**

Consent Agenda

Approval of Minutes ¡V A motion was made by Mrs. Rossi to approve the minutes of the School Committee meeting held on August 30, 2011 and the minutes of the Advertising Sub-Committee meetings held on September 12th and September 19th 2011, seconded by Mr. Tellier. Vote 5-0.

In response to a question from Mr. Tsonos regarding the approval process for advertising requests, Mrs. Rossi explained that requests for advertising would be reviewed by Mary King, Finance Director, for compliance with policy guidelines and if appropriate, they would be forwarded to the School Committee for approval, similar to personnel items. Vote 5-0.

Action Items

Personnel Appointments/Recalls - Mary King, Finance Director, presented the following personnel items recommended by the Superintendent

APPOINTMENTS

Nichole Federowicz Math Teacher ¡V EPHS - Effective 09/19/2011

Kristin Carbone Math Teacher ¡V MMS - Effective 10/03/2011

Caitlin Ahrens Special Education Teacher-EPHS - Effective 09/19/2011

Suzanne Jordan Librarian-Francis Elementary - Effective 10/11/11

Ann Johnson 3/5 Occupational Therapist ¡V MEAD - Effective

10/03/2011

Amy Rudis

2/5 Art Teacher-EPHS - Effective 09/14/2011

Kerri Avjian & Math Coach(s) ¡V EPHS Effective 2011/2012 School Year

Elizabeth Pacheco

John Clancey Assistant Freshman Football Coach

Nicole Poirier

Fall and Winter Cheerleading Coach-RMS

Michael Forrest

Assistant Hockey Coach-EPHS

RECALLS

Leann Ayotte

Teacher Assistant ¡V Orlo Elementary-

Temporary Assignment

Effective 09/20/2011

Motion to approve by Mrs. Rossi, seconded by Mrs. Abatecola. Vote 5-0.

Requisitions ¡V Bill List

Warrant #1140 9/21/11 \$ 801,840.30

Warrant #1141 9/21/11 \$ 3,070.62

Motion to approve by Mrs. Rossi, seconded by Mr. Tellier. Vote 5-0.

Request(s) for Home Schooling ¡V None

AYSO Fees ¶V Mr. Daft requested direction from the School Committee and a vote to either impose or waive fees regarding the AYSO Soccer organization; he is receiving calls from other organizations to waive fees and due to budgetary issues, he recommended that the fees be imposed according to policy. A motion was made by Mrs. Rossi to waive fees for AYSO for the remainder of the season while they are looking for a permanent location to play, seconded by Mr. Tellier (with stipulation that fees will be imposed next year if AYSO requests to use our facilities/fields). Vote 5-0.

Revised Policy II D.5 Use of School Building/School Grounds - A motion was made by Mr. Tellier to approve second passage, seconded by Mrs. Rossi. Discussion: Mr. Tellier asked about the 30-day timeline to use buildings and if teams need to reapply each month. Mary King explained that if space is available, they do not have to apply over again. Vote 5-0.

FY12 Budget ¶V A motion was made by Mrs. Rossi to approve the budget as presented by the Finance Director, Mary King, seconded by Mr. Tellier. Discussion: Mr. Silva, school legal counsel, requested that the vote be deferred, since he had not had an opportunity to review it; he requested that the School Committee not act on the budget now in its present form, since he would like to research issues as to whether we are in full compliance with RI general laws;

he requested an opportunity to further review the budget from a legal perspective.

Discussion: Mrs. Rossi asked about the timeline and how changes would make it any better. Mr. Silva stated that he knows time is of the essence but would like to review for compliance with RI General Laws and according to City Charter, the last date for the City Council approval is October 25th. There are questions regarding the budget increase which cannot exceed 4.25% above last year and we have gone beyond that; he wants to make sure this form of the budget does not violate state laws; we will still have ample time for passage. Mr. Tsonos asked to defer to legal for a week or two; we will still have ample opportunity to send it to the city and the School Committee could have a special meeting if necessary.

Mr. Silva again requested that the School Committee defer passage of the budget until he has the opportunity to research some issues. Mrs. Rossi stated that she would stand by her motion to approve the budget and that the School Committee has a responsibility to put forward a balanced budget, which they cannot do. Mr. Silva advised that the School Committee has to operate with a balanced budget; \$6.3 million has been kicked down the road along with other shortfalls of about \$1.2 million for the next budget; he does not know how to respond, but he does have concerns about this.

Mrs. Rossi requested that the Committee pass the budget tonight

while Mr. Silva looks into his concerns; adjustments can be made if necessary and second passage can be voted on in two weeks. Roll call vote on the budget: Mr. Furtado, aye; Mrs. Abatecola, aye; Mr. Tellier, aye; Mrs. Rossi, aye; Mr. Tsonos, aye.

Mayor Bruce Rogers spoke about Financial Status and Payment of Bills - Mayor Rogers has been questioned about what the School Committee is doing to pay vendors; the City Council unanimously passed a motion to help pay off the deficit of the past School Committee in a proposed deficit reduction plan to the Auditor General. In November, \$1 million will be available to the School Department each year for five years to pay down the deficit; this plan has not been accepted by the Auditor General yet. In reference to Bradley expenses, the City Council cannot change line items in the school budget, but can make suggestions on how the money is spent and what taxpayers can afford without hurting kids. As Mayor, he will propose ways the School Committee can make cuts as proposed. The Mayor stated that he will negotiate on the city side; he will respond to Bradley; the School Committee will have to examine their budget in order not to have further deficits; the city has done the best it could; what can schools do to cut to get a real partnership; no one on the City Council plans to hurt the schools; he will help to cut the budget; the School Committee cannot present a budget with a \$7 million increase to taxpayers, they cannot afford it; he is here to work with the schools; vendors will be paid over five years, but we cannot create a deficit again; he pledged to work to balance the budget.

Mrs. Abatecola stated that she sent emails asking for help from the Mayor and had not heard back; Bradley is not willing to wait.

Mayor Rogers said he does not have \$4 million to give; the city agreed to take over the deficit; taxpayers do not have it; Mayor Rogers did not believe Bradley will pull out; these are hard times and nothing more can be done; all we can do is promise them a five year plan; he does not have the money and will have to negotiate with them.

Mrs. Rossi pointed out that by FY 2014, the School Department will be in deficit of \$24 million.

Mayor asked for those projections; he reiterated that the City agreed to pay over five years, but the City Council will look at expenses and necessary cuts in order to avoid creating a deficit for 2012, 2013 and 2014.

Mr. Tellier stated that cash flow is the issue; he does not want Bradley to close and we need to do whatever we can; most of the budget is mandated; we have no control over pensions and must go to the city for more funding.

Mayor Rogers said that would be a 10-12% tax increase; he asked how the deficit happened. Mrs. Rossi explained going back to the 90's before Superintendent Forbes, there was a \$5 million deficit we

cannot get out from under; there is no catching up; it will never go away.

Mayor stated that he can't raise taxes; there are ways to cut 12-15% and we need to negotiate other situations. The Mayor was not opposed to TANS as a last resort, but that would have to be approved by the Auditor General and the rate would be higher now with the city's bond rating downgraded.

Mr. Furtado was not sure Bradley would accept a five year plan and asked if any other options; could we do \$7 million to bring us current. The Mayor believes that Bradley will accept a payment plan.

Mrs. Rossi explained that last year \$1.2 million from the education jobs funds were taken from city and towns, then the City Council cut \$1.2; that added to the \$7 million problem; this year pensions increased by \$1.5 million; health care increased 10%; there are contract obligations; the city raised salaries when the School Department cut; there is nowhere else to cut; there are no more layoffs; we cannot accommodate 40 students to a room and it is not conducive to good education.

The Mayor stated that there are assumptions that the City Council wants to do this; the School Committee and City Council cannot hurt education, but have to find ways to cut and not deficit spend; he will do all he can to solve problems but will not support a tax increase.

Mrs. Rossi stated that she appreciates the help but has been unable to accomplish this since taking office and has not been able to compile anything solid; she does not know where else to take from for this fiscal year.

Mr. Tsonos also has real concerns; attorney's fees paid out of \$1.2 million could have gone to bills; we have pending litigation for millions of dollars and could be facing problems down the road; he hopes for a fix and not a band aid.

Mayor Rogers stated that the only fix is to raise taxes and he will not go forward with TANS without a plan; they also have legal issues on the city side with outrageous bills to deal with.

Mr. Tellier believed TANS was the original idea months ago and is the direction we need to go in to take care of the kids. Mayor Rogers stated that the city bond rating is low and the Auditor General would have to approve it; the city needs to be able to pay back the TANS; he would like to meet soon at a workshop to discuss places to cut and get proposals.

Parents wanted to know when the Mayor would speak to Bradley; the Bradley letter asked for a concrete plan in 30 days; we cannot expect anyone to provide services for free.

Mayor stated it is up to the School Committee to negotiate \$1 million to be given to schools in November; Bradley and vendors will be paid off in five years; the question for schools is on how they will pay that million out. Mr. Tsonos will meet with them.

Parent complained that Bradley does not have a response or a plan from the city and asked that someone return their calls; as a mother, she was concerned about taking a chance.

Mr. Tsonos hoped that this will come to a resolution; the School Committee is doing everything they can to keep the program.

The Mayor stated that the City Council is dedicated to the program; if \$1.4 is not enough for Bradley, they will have to go back and negotiate with them.

Parent explained that the average cost is \$51,500 per year to outplace a student and the city is saving money by not sending students out. A question was asked about the special needs program vendors being singled out to a great degree. Mary King, Finance Director, explained that she approves the bills to be paid and chooses bills based on available cash she spreads it around; these are large bills, but there is no preferential treatment; at the beginning of the fiscal year (November and December), we pay vendors several million dollars and every year we run out of cash sooner; she only has so much cash; based on who needs to be paid; it seems magnified because special education is larger with 90 days payments at best.

Mr. Tsonos noted that the bill list is public every month and they have been paid in this budget year; this School Committee has been at this since arriving.

School Committee recessed.

Fiscal Status and Outstanding Payables (Mrs. Rossi 1V pass on it; questions to Mayor covered this

Deficit Elimination Options FY 13 1V A motion was made by Mrs. Rossi not to close any schools and to look at Human Resources and Finance Departments in order to reduce the deficit forward, seconded by Mr. Tellier. Discussion: Mrs. Rossi stated that there have been suggestions on the city side to close schools and to eliminate band and other items, which was already researched and would save only about \$500,000, while placing stress on families and school; classrooms cannot accommodate additional students. Last week the City Council asked to consolidate H/R and Finances; she asked that legal counsel review an agreement.

Mr. Furtado noted that there is no market to sell school buildings and any savings would be minimal. Mr. Tellier asked for clarification on the vote; Mrs. Rossi stated the vote is to move forward for feasibility of consolidation of those departments. Mr. Tsonos stated that he developed items for a deficit reduction plan, but did not include closing schools on his list. School Committee voted 5-0 not to close

any schools.

Old Business

Advertising Committee - Kelly Ahrens, Technology Director, presented a demonstration regarding school website advertising; ads can be purchased on the home page; it is estimated that there will be 25 ads per site per month when up and running. A flyer with all the information can be downloaded from the website. Discussion regarding prior approval of ads by the School Committee.

New Business

Nicole Estrella spoke regarding a playground project at Orlo Ave School and asked for letter of support for a grant. The School Committee and Superintendent agreed to support the grant application. Mr. Edward Catelli, Facilities Manager will look into a parking situation at the school which needs to be addressed.

Public Comment II

Fred Ripka stated that even if taxes go up 4% the problem will continue and we will keep falling in a hole; the budget would need a 12% increase which is not the answer. He was concerned about the Bradley Program students being shipped all over and stripped of their education in East Providence; if continual obligations in East Providence, we cannot keep putting it off; he does not want anything to happen to schools, but spending is out of control with no end in

sight; this is happening all over the country.

Anthony Ferrera believed the whole city is at fault; the deficit reduction meetings were a waste of time and nothing was accomplished in five months; he will continue to speak at meetings; a \$250,000 house means a \$700-800 tax increase; city needs to run on the money we have; taxpayers will make it happen. We need to get back on track; all get on an honest page; he stated that all meetings on these issues should be held in public.

Announcements - Mrs. Rossi provided information regarding:

„X First Annual Winter Fest at the Senior Center in December and to contact Alba Curti at Parks and Recreation for more information on sponsoring a tree.

„X New date of October 16th has been set for the 5K Race for Brandon Motta at Colt State Park; details at www.helpbrandon.com or call Mrs. Rossi.

A motion was made by Mr. Furtado that the Committee convene in Executive Session for purposes of discussing: Personnel - R.I. Gen. Laws $\text{§}42-46-5(a)$ (1) ; Collective Bargaining R.I. Gen. Laws $\text{§}42-46-5(a)$ (2); Litigation/Pending Litigation -R.I. Gen. Laws $\text{§}42-46-5(a)(2)$, seconded by Mr. Tellier. Vote 5-0.

School Committee returned to Public Session ;V No votes taken in Executive Session

Motion by Mr. Furtado to return seal the minutes of the Executive Session; seconded by Mr. Tellier. Vote 5-0.

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

Respectfully submitted,

Patricia A. Iannelli, Administrative Assistant

Stephen Furtado, Clerk of the Committee