

EAST PROVIDENCE SCHOOL DEPARTMENT

East Providence, City Hall

145 Taunton Avenue

East Providence, Rhode Island 02914

November 8, 2011

Open Session

Mr. Tsonos, Chairman, called the meeting to order at 6:30PM. School Committee members present: Luisa Abatecola, Stephen Furtado, Chrissy Rossi, Ryan Tellier, Charles Tsonos. Also present: Mr. Edward M. Daft, Interim Superintendent, Robert M. Silva, Esq. and Andrew Thomas, Esq.

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

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

Public Comment I

Joe Grace, a taxpayer, implored the School Committee to rethink their strategy of wait and see for the budget, digging in heels and playing the Caruolo card; the cost to the city is the brink of financial ruin with the state knocking at our door, downgrading of the bond rating, and countless hours spent to try to resolve the deficit. When the budget

increase was cut from \$10 to \$7 million, there was no feedback or complaints. Although Mrs. Rossi stated that the budget was cut to the bone, another \$1.2 million in cuts were made. He asked about the 2011-12 budget cuts in textbooks and technology for kids, while the teachers and administrators received a 5% pay raise and not many people in community got raises at all. He noted that the Francis School budget indicated 25% less for textbooks, while salaries were up

18 ½%. This was the theme throughout the schools with overall salary increases of 5% (\$2 million dollars). He requested that the School Committee come up to the plate and help the city balance the budget and not make the City go through an exercise where only the lawyers win.

Report: Interim Superintendent's Report

Approval of East Providence High School Mission Statement – Mr. Daft explained that he had hoped to present this tonight; however, the group met to review and revise the mission statement and once that is completed, he will bring it up again at another meeting.

Personnel Report on Retirements/Resignations/Leaves of Absence – Mary King presented the personnel items:

Retirement

Mariano Botelho Custodian-Riverside Middle School, Effective 12/30/11

Resignation

Lianne Bartlett Supervisory Assistant-Oldham Elementary, Effective 10/14/11

Sandra Lebert Supervisory Assistant-Francis Elementary, Effective 10/27/11

Marianne Walsh RTI Specialist-EPHS, Effective 10/23/11

Brad Wilson Boys Lacrosse Head Coach-EPHS, Effective 11/1/11

Personal Leave of Absence

Lawrence Izzi PBGR Coordinator-EPHS, 2011-12 School Year

Family Medical Leave Act

Patricia Garganta Special Education Teacher-MMS, Effective 12/2/11-13 weeks

Terminated

Elizabeth Balasco Girls Soccer Head Coach-EPHS

Joe Lonardo Asst. Girls Soccer Coach (JV Position) EPHS

Consent Agenda

Approval of Minutes – 10/11/11, 10/24/11, 10/27/11 – Tabled to next meeting

Action Items

FY12 Deficit Reduction Options – Mary King presented the following items:

#1 Suspend Middle School Sports – Motion by Mr. Furtado, seconded

by Mrs. Rossi for discussion: This was put on as something to consider; try to mitigate damage to the students' education; leave high school as is; cut middle school; not an injury to scholarships, Interscholastic League, etc. After conversation and more thought, Mrs. Rossi decided she could not support this idea; no second. Motion failed.

#2 Suspend Athletic Buses for Home Games to the High School

Mrs. Rossi asked why only some teams get transportation. Mr. Daft explained that football players are transported to games as a team; some other teams meet at the field; he deferred to attorneys regarding the liability if not busing the team. Discussion: It was decided that Mr. Daft would obtain more information from the Athletic Director and the School Committee would review this again next year.

Motion by Mrs. Rossi to wait for information first from the Superintendent and Mr. Amaral, rather than make a decision and have to reverse it, seconded by Mr. Tellier. Vote 5-0.

#3 Reduce Textbook and Instructional Supplies – Motion by Mrs. Rossi to approve, no second. Motion failed.

#4 Reduce IT Supplies - Estimated savings for FY12 at \$15K; full year savings estimated at \$15K; Motion by Mrs. Rossi, seconded by Mr. Furtado. Vote 5-0.

#5 Elimination of all athletics (less Middle School Sports) In response to a question from Mr. Furtado regarding what percentage of \$485K is designated for stipends, Mary King responded that stipends are about \$180,000; the remainder is salaries and operating budget; salary and stipends 80% of that total. Motion to approve by Mr. Furtado, no second. Motion failed.

#6 Reduction in Force –Mary King stated that the estimated number of positions to be reduced is which are 24 primarily special education positions and one regular education position; estimated savings FY 12 \$150K; full year savings estimated at \$1,226,000. Motion by Mrs. Rossi, seconded by Mr. Tellier for discussion: Mr. Tellier asked if possible to reduce this number by one or two positions. Legal counsel, Mr. Silva advised the School Committee to discuss positions only and not individuals. After discussion, Mr. Tsonos stated that a motion had been made and seconded to cut 24 positions; individual issues will be addressed at a later time. All voted aye.

#7 Cut All day Kindergarten – No motion

#8 Close Elementary School – Not possible without vote on Item #7.

Personnel Appointments/Recalls:

Alexandra Robot and Laura Blasko-Freshman Advisor-EPHS

Michael Kirkutis - Head Teacher-Silver Spring Effective 2011/2012 School Year

Marianne Walsh - Special Ed Coordinator- MMS (1yr) Effective 10/17/2011

Maria Mansella - Part Time Master Mentor Evaluator Effective 10/14/2011

Melissa O'Neil - RTI Specialist-Oldham

Jennifer Preiss RTI Specialist-RMS

Diana Lee Gay/Straight Alliance Advisor-EPHS

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

Requisitions – Bill List

Warrant #1147 11/4/11 \$ 79,531.29

Warrant #1151 11/4/11 \$ 2,870,618.06

Motion: Mr. Tellier, seconded by Mrs. Abatecola. Vote 5-0.

Mr. Tsonos asked the Finance Director to clarify how it is determined which vendors receive payments as funds are released to the School Department from the city.

Mary King explained that when she receives information from the city regarding a release of funds to pay bills, she prioritizes the vendor list by necessity: utilities, special education vendors and others; this does not include salaries and benefits or an agreement with one special education provider. Ms. King explained that in November and December new money is paying old bills and this will continue until something is worked out with the city. Mr. Tsonos stated that even

with additional budget cuts, the School Committee is doing everything possible in this situation.

Mr. Gracykowski, City Manager said he appreciated all School Committee efforts to reduce the budget but there were less cuts made by School Committee than hoped for; even though some cuts will be larger next year, without having the budget gap closed, the deficit plan will probably not be accepted by the Auditor General and he encouraged the School Committee to look one more time for additional cuts. The City will provide funds to the schools to cover agreements with vendors; however, the state is taking an active role in the deficit reduction and before the School Committee signs any agreements, they want to review them first.

Request(s) for Home Schooling – Motion by Mrs. Rossi to approve the recommendation of the Superintendent, seconded by Mrs. Abatecola. Vote 5-0.

Approval of Field Trips - Motion to approve by Mrs. Rossi, seconded by Mrs. Abatecola. Vote 5-0.

Superintendent Search Committee

Mr. Tsonos suggested that the process start by writing a job description and advertisement to be sent out; it is required that schools have a Superintendent with a reasonable salary range that

will not over extend us; although the state will be involved, they will not interfere if the expense is reasonable.

Mr. Furtado noted that on a former 18-member screening committee, union presidents were included; there was an option for each School Committee member to recruit three people.

Mr. Tsonos clarified that each School Committee member would choose three individuals to include a bargaining unit member; the group should also include principals and a representative from administration.

Mr. Daft advised that New England School Development Council was used in the past and provided a timeline for the search. Mrs. Rossi believed that an inside search would be the best option since we cannot afford to pay an outside source. Mrs. Rossi recommended that Mr. Pina of the City's Affirmative Action Office, be included on the Search Committee. Mr. Tsonos agreed that Mr. Pina should be included and that each School Committee member should provide the names of three individuals to serve.

Mr. Daft stated that he recommended an outside group for the search, since the School Department is short-staffed and he does not think it can be done as well by inside staff. Mr. Tsonos reiterated that he believes it can be done in-house and asked that the Interim Superintendent, Mr. Daft, be designated as the contact person for

administrators, principals, and bargaining units to move this forward. Mr. Furtado noted there are five bargaining units and the last time, the Search Committee went through the resumes; he thinks the city can perform the search and save the consulting fees. A motion was made by Mrs. Rossi to begin the search and that each School Committee would present the names of three individuals for the Screening Committee at the next meeting, seconded by Mrs. Abatecola. Vote 5-0.

New Business

EP United Coalition – Sports and Recreation Organizations – Mrs. Rossi reported that she and Mr. Tellier met with youth and recreation groups to discuss how to charge for building and field use; most are East Providence children in the program; when the policy was written, it did not take into consideration that these 503C organizations cannot afford to pay the fees indicated in the policy. Mr. Tellier offered to organize the information on a spreadsheet and present it to the School Committee in a few weeks to discuss revisiting the fees.

Public Comment II – Mr. Anthony Ferrera asked if the School Committee had approved any new contracts for the next few years and if the teachers' contract had been approved. Mr. Furtado responded that the teachers' contract is coming up in 2012. Mrs. Rossi explained that the City and the State must agree with the terms of the contract before it can be approved.

Sheila Wildenhein, the President of the Teacher Assistant Union asked for clarification on the categories of the 24 positions discussed earlier for layoffs. Mr. Tsonos requested that she discuss these positions with Mr. Daft.

Mr. Fred Ripka, 9 Cousins Avenue, requested information on the cost of educating one child. Ms. King advised the per pupil cost is approximately \$14,500. Mr. Ripka complained that trash at the elementary schools was not being collected. Mr. Catelli, Facilities Director, was not aware of when that took place, but explained that the issue might have been due to additional expenses involved with trash pick-up and state reimbursement; at that time, collection might have been a couple of days overdue because the recycling coordinator did not want to incur additional expenses.

Discussion: Mr. Furtado explained that the city charges the School Department for trash pick.

Further discussion on the total salary increase of \$637,000 for all employees which includes pensions, etc.

Mary King explained that due to the loss of education job funds, salaries are up because of that \$1.2 million; salaries are only up by step increases.

Mr. Furtado noted that 73% of the budget is salaries and benefits and 13% for special education; he compared the Senior Center budget at

\$385,000 of which \$365,000 is salary and benefits and pointed out that money does not go directly to seniors; the Library budget of \$1.992 of which \$1.760 is salaries and benefits, is not for books at 85%. He thought the School Department was doing a good job at 73%.

Mr. Riley, 3620 Pawtucket Avenue, asked about the components of special education; he said the discussion is all about salary and benefits, but only seven cents on every dollar goes to pencils, paper and maintenance. He commented that he does not remember including bargaining units on the City Manager search committee and asked why they would be involved in hiring a Superintendent. Mr. Furtado explained that these are the individuals who will be working with the Superintendent and they bring something to the table. In response to Mr. Riley's comment to just keep Mr. Daft in place, Mr. Tellier stated that Mr. Daft stepped up when help was needed and he appreciated that.

Mary Teixeira commented that salaries paid are resources which are teachers; books are important but do not work without teachers; if you call someone to your house for service, you pay their salary; she pays the doctor for his expertise; this is a service industry; teachers educate. She asked to compare the costs to how much people pay for their children to attend day care and summer care while they work and that teachers took a 3 ½% pay cut which was never returned; there were pay raises for fire and police departments, but not for teachers. Everyone should be part of a shared sacrifice; the money

goes to the kids through her expertise. Teachers are not looking to get rich; a recent newspaper article indicated that most with degrees in the public sector would make 20% more working in the private sector; she is proud of what teachers do; these are the people who keep the school district going and the only ones who took pay cuts.

Mr. Tsonos advised that a letter was received on Friday afternoon indicating a negative response from the state on the deficit reduction plan; a meeting was held with state official, Ms. Gallogly, Mayor Rogers, and others and the state wants to be a partner on any contract obligations and all contracts will be under their purview, whether for Bradley, the Superintendent, teachers contracts or others, they will be looked at by the state as part of the process. The City Manager talks every day with the state officials in order to avoid bankruptcy. Mr. Tsonos explained that since December 2010 he has asked for a deficit elimination plan, but it had to get to this point before it was honored. The School Committee has made significant cuts and restructuring in the schools, has worked with the City Council on consolidation, and will continue to work with the city. The Schools have more affordable legal services than in the past, special education numbers have been reduced from 27% to 21% and he applauds everyone in administration for that. It rankles him when he hears any City Council member say that the School Committee has not done anything; City Council members may not understand that we have no choice on special education laws; federal mandates do not provide enough money to accomplish those goals; we have

written to the state and federal legislators regarding funding; he expects the city will work to revamp the situation we are in to be able to service kids in the best way which is affordable to our city, but we cannot continue to get mandates without financial support, while we must provide services to kids.

Mrs. Rossi agreed that City Council members have never met with administrators or visited schools to find out what we do; at a tour last year, only two showed up to view building conditions. The School Department is not the place where money gets lost, but is responsible for educating 5500 students on a shoestring. People do not want to pay more taxes, but the only funding schools receive is from the city; there was some reimbursement from state aid to the deficit or it would be even a much bigger hole. The School Committee and staff have worked very hard on this.

Announcements - Mrs. Rossi congratulated Nick Karalekas, a student from Riverside, who participated on the Under Armor National Junior Baseball Team and was the only RI student to be invited to Arizona for the Junior Fall Classic in October.

Mr. Furtado stated that although the City Council has given some support, if they would ask questions instead of making accusations, everyone would be better off.

A motion was made by Mr. Furtado that the Committee convene in

Executive Session for purposes of discussing: Personnel - R.I. Gen. Laws §42-46-5(a) (1)], Collective Bargaining R.I. Gen. Laws §42-46-5(a) (2), Litigation/Pending Litigation -R.I. Gen. Laws §42-46-5(a)(2), seconded by Mrs. Rossi.

Vote 5-0.

Return to Public Session - Report Executive Session Votes – None. A motion was made by Mr. Furtado to adjourn, seconded by Mrs. Rossi.

Vote 5-0.

Respectfully submitted,

Patricia A. Iannelli, Administrative Assistant

Stephen Furtado, Clerk of the Committee