

EAST PROVIDENCE SCHOOL DEPARTMENT

East Providence, City Hall

145 Taunton Avenue

East Providence, Rhode Island 02914

December 13, 2011

Open Session

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

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

Student Recognition – Mr. Bob Capello of the Rumford Lions Club announced the winners of the “Kids Know Peace” Poster Contest; students from Riverside and Martin Middle Schools were recognized and congratulated. Mr. Tsonos thanked the Lions Club for their support.

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

Public Comment I – Mr. Riley, 3620 Pawtucket Avenue, spoke regarding the news that the city’s bond rating lowered to junk bond

status today; that's not acceptable; have to get expenses in control; School Committee needs to pull out the level of adult entitlements which are not acceptable or sustainable; if not, East Providence will be the next Central Falls; more people need to come to these meetings to see that elected leaders not working for the taxpayers or we would not be in the spot we are in; 93% or 7cents on dollar goes to kids; everything else is salaries and benefits; this must stop; we need to get this under control.

**Motion by Mr. Furtado to move up item H7 – RI Association of School Committees Membership Dues,
Under Action Items; seconded by Mr. Tellier. Vote 5-0.**

Mr. Tim Duffy of RIASC attended to explain the services the association provides to school districts; i.e. advocacy at state and federal level for lobbying; professional development, legal assistance, model policies; group purchases for electric and natural gas purchases; other group purchases and involvement in funding formula discussions at state level. Discussion about negotiated prices on natural gas and electric for the school department with savings in excess of one million dollars; he will provide figures; last fiscal year East Providence saved \$131,000 on natural gas through more aggressive marketing and pricing; he believes the value of the School Department's membership far exceeds the membership fees. Discussion about membership vs. benefits actually received; handout to members of Key Work of School Board publication.

Mrs. Rossi asked if RIASC plays more of a lobbyist role. Mr. Duffy explained that professional development and other seminars are also available to School Committee members through the association. Several members stated they had attended sessions at RIASC. Mr. Duffy stated that webinars are being planned for future sessions. Mr. Daft explained that areas of potential budget cuts included all membership dues and that RIASC dues are about \$10,000 per year. Mrs. Rossi thought the group purchases for electric and gas could be done through the city.

City Manager, Mr. Graczykowski confirmed that he would like to table the item until he can confirm if savings on natural gas and electricity would be available for the city and how that might benefit future purchases for the School Department.

The City Manager spoke about the second downgrade of the city's bond rating since August which means it will be more expensive for the city to do business; the fiscal impact is being assessed; it will be more costly to borrow money which the city has to do because of the odd fiscal year; borrowing money for operating expenses is not a good practice and he hopes to change the odd fiscal year problem through a city charter amendment which would take effect in 2013. If approved, the fiscal year will then coincide with the city's tax receipts. He explained that another reason for the downgrade is the unfunded liability in the city's pension plan and the city will be

working with unions to restructure the plan so the pensions will not continue to be a burden; he has worked with the schools to reduce that gap from \$7.2 million to \$1.8 million. He believed that we will close the gap soon, but it was apparently not soon enough with Moody's recent downgrade. The city will have to work harder to cut expenses in the next 90 days to attain better fiscal stability in the hope that any further action by Moody's would be positive.

Mr. Furtado asked how this rating change will affect the second phase of the construction bonds.

The City Manager advised that the lower bond rating will make borrowing more expensive, but the city will continue to try to obtain the BANS and he is optimistic about meeting the schedule as previously discussed.

Mr. Tsonos asked when the city will be receiving the audit report. Mr. Graczykowki hoped to have the report by December 15th and will make copies available to the School Committee when he receives the report.

Reports: Interim Superintendent's Report

Construction Update – Farrar & Associates – Mr. Farrar and Mr. Tabor attended to present an update:

 Energy – Johnson Controls has been moving along on updates, work is going well and is on schedule for completion in June 2012.

 Meeting held at RIDE with Mr. DaSilva and Johnson

Controls engineering team which went well; RIDE granted approval after receiving information on the progress of the projects.

 \$15 million dollar project; advanced first part for life safety package to satisfy requirements of the Fire Department's critical items; addressing code deficiencies, and Department of Health issues; environmental consultants and hygienists were on board; DOH pointed out other issues within the schools dating back several years; most importantly, they asked for work at the high school be taken care of and as we move forward with the balance of work, to ensure their concerns were addressed; asked to fast track any work during vacation periods; Farrar responded they would do their best but are reliant on balance of funding to be approved which is only six million dollars of the bonds that were sold.

 As reported at two other meetings, work must be planned and approved which all takes time; incurred anxiety and hardships last summer because of delays and therefore, they wanted to stress the importance of continuing the planning of work; we will miss some vacation periods; the money not there; they know School Committee wants bonds to be released; planned work and critical items need to be addressed; a lot of balancing needs to be done and assurances with DOH that we have plans to address it; handed out letter from DOH looking for plan of action and letter from RIDE looking for what they approved to be done; RIDE basing their reimbursement on completion of whole project; schools could lose funding if work is not done; we are at the point of a sense of urgency.

 Good work has taken place, especially at the high school;

they went beyond and addressed old issues and at DOH's request very stringent random air testing done which results came back perfect. The high school opened in best shape than it has in a long time; all good improvements; now the quandary is the completion and the \$9 million work project which cannot be successful without completing the balance of the work; he thinks Department of Health will work with us if a plan is in place, but this relies on the funding. When we give approvals, planning is needed before anyone hits the job site.

Mr. Tsonos stated that the DOH and everyone in the city knows there is a plan in place; we need to move forward; the environment is as safe as possible as evidenced by the testing results.

In response to a question from Mrs. Abatecola regarding how much time to plan in order to get the next scope of work done, Mr. Farrar stated that he asked for that in September and it is now January so they are already crunched; they can continue to expedite the DOH piece; they wanted to quantify and put numbers on that work which can run independently; it is critical; the environmental piece can start tomorrow and will be in good shape in responding to DOH work and in good shape getting the work started in a reasonable time; then SMMA would start to plan out the bid package to capture the balance of work which needs to be done between January to March/April and to put contractors immediately on the ground when school ends; this is an extremely tight time but they can expedite the important

environmental piece.

Mr. Furtado encouraged Mr. Farrar to keep everyone involved and to continue reaching out to the City Manager and Finance Director in order to keep this matter expedited.

Approval of East Providence High School Mission Statement and Student Learning Expectations -

Janet Sheehan, Principal of the High School, presented the Revised Mission Statement and Revised Student Learning Expectations; a review was conducted as recommended by NEASC for accreditation purposes with group participation; the items were revisited and revised with guidance from NEASC protocol.

“The mission of EPHS is to promote integrity in a safe and respectful learning environment which includes students, families, faculty and administration. It is the goal of our school community to provide and support rigorous curricula, preparing our graduates for college or career readiness.”

Revised Student Learning Expectations:

- Academic Expectations- All East Providence High School graduates must achieve proficiency in each of the PBGR requirements**
- Social Expectations- All East Providence High School graduates must adhere to the school’s common core of respect, tolerance and responsibility by complying with school rules in demonstrating**

behavior that contributes to a positive learning community.

- **Civic Expectations- All East Providence High School graduates must complete 6 hours of community service each year they are in attendance at our school.**

Ms. Sheehan advised that the faculty approved both items at a meeting on December 7, 2011 and requested School Committee approval. This item will be placed on the next agenda for a vote by the School Committee.

Career/Technical Center (CTC) Regulation Changes – Karen Mellen, Director of the CTC, provided a document and explained the changes made to the regulations by the Board of Regents and how that would affect our district; there is concern among other directors about the language changes; one major effect on East Providence would be changes to the transportation region maps; transportation costs would be placed on East Providence; our students could go to another Technical Center and we would have to pay for that student to attend. Transportation would also be charged to our district for students who wish to attend school here. This is important especially now with a tight financial situation. Ms. Mellen asked School Committee members to forward a resolution to the Board of Regents rejecting these changes to the regulations; Cranston, Warwick and Davies Vocational have asked for further study on the new regulations. Mr. Daft asked the School Committee to consider joining other regional Career/Technical Centers in sending a resolution, since these are additional costs to be absorbed by our district. The School Committee agreed to place the resolution on the next agenda

for a vote of approval.

Finance Report – Mary King, Finance Director, presented the finance report through the end of the fiscal year, 10/31/11; numbers are not final; indicated a \$973,000 deficit which is where we thought we would be; a decrease in the deficit could occur through an energy rebate and possible reimbursement from the federal government on EERP funds; estimates could be available within a week or two. The city is reviewing the EERP funds to find out if they can be accrued for this year; we are waiting for the audit response; this would help the deficit; revenues were a little high on the meals tax, and the Grove building sale.

Mr. Furtado questioned the line item for non-instructional supplies 57% expended. Mary King explained that purchases were slowed down last year and very little is being purchased for this fiscal year; number brought down to where we are for FY 12. Mr. Tellier asked when final numbers would be available; Ms. King noted that it could be months from now; our audit should be finalized in May, but she could provide updates.

Personnel Report on Retirements/Resignations/Leaves of Absence – Resignations

Lisa Flaherty Math Teacher – Martin Middle School, Effective 14, 2011

Tina Motta Supervisory Assistant – Kent Heights – Effective 16, 2011

Family Medical Leave Act

Delia Nelson Graphic Communications at Career/Technical Center

Effective approximately 2/16/12 to 5/2/2012

Consent Agenda

Approval of Minutes – Motion by Mrs. Rossi to approve the minutes of the meetings held on August 8, 2011 meeting and November 8, 2011, seconded by Mrs. Abatecola. Vote 5-0.

School Committee took a brief recess and then returned to open session.

Action Items

Personnel Appointments – Presented by the Finance Director, Mary King:

Augustino LaScola Wrestling Coach – Martin Middle School

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

Requisitions – Bill List

Warrant #1159	12/6/11	\$	1,200.00
Warrant #1161	12/8/11	\$	898,634.05
Warrant #1162	12/8/11	\$	9,085.00
Warrant #1164	12/8/11	\$	215,068.60
Warrant #1165	12/8/11	\$	2,305,822.09
Warrant #1167	12/8/11	\$	514,199.50

Motion to approve by Mrs. Rossi with an exception in Warrant 1165 to

hold RIASC invoice until further discussion with the City Manager regarding energy savings. Discussion: Mr. Tsonos stated the City Manager has no plans right now; why should schools give up what they have now; we need to move forward with RIASC to maintain savings stated at over \$100,000. Mrs. Rossi would like to explore the possibility of savings more money. Mrs. Rossi's motion seconded by Mr. Tellier.

Mr. Furtado pointed out that RIASC provides professional development required by state law and would not have access to it if not a RIASC member. Mr. Tellier suggested waiting until the next meeting to get the information from the City Manager to see if there are any savings on energy and could vote on paying the membership bill at that time.

Mr. Furtado asked to amend Mrs. Rossi's motion to remove another bill from the same warrant; \$40,000 to be paid to attorney Dan Kinder's office for a retainer for legal services. Mrs. Rossi was not willing to amend her motion.

School Legal Counsel, Mr. Robert Silva, provided an opinion on amending the motion; he understood that Mrs. Rossi's motion was to approve Warrant #1165 but to withhold \$10,153 and that motion was moved and seconded. The next motion by Mr. Furtado was to amend another item on that same warrant for payment to LMKBW for legal services which required a second; if that motion prevailed, a full

motion as amended would come before the School Committee; all warrants would be paid with the exception of those two items; Mr. Furtado had right to make the amendment. Mr. Tsonos asked if a second to Mr. Furtado's motion; there was none. Mr. Tsonos asked if any further discussion on motion by Mrs. Rossi; he noted that he did not agree with dropping the savings potential as a result of not paying the item for RIASC dues. Roll call vote: Mrs. Abatecola, aye; Mr. Furtado, nay; Mrs. Rossi, aye; Mr. Tellier, aye, Mr. Tsonos, nay. Motion carried 3-2.

Approval of Advertising Request – A motion was made by Mrs. Rossi to approve a request from George Family Orthodontics, seconded by Mrs. Abatecola. Vote 5-0.

Audit Committee - Mr. Tsonos stated that the City Council recently recommended the establishment of a Finance Committee on the city side as an independent eye; he wanted to discuss this as it could also help the School Committee with oversight of the schools financial situation; other school departments have included concerned citizens, accountants and community volunteers. Discussion: would this just be a duplication of the Finance Sub-committee? Mrs. Rossi answered that she would not support an additional committee and felt this would be redundant, since an open door policy allows any questions to be answered, reports are made to the public, and nothing is ever withheld from anyone; the School Committee was elected to do that job. Mr. Tsonos wanted to bring this idea to the

School Committee for a check and balance in-house; he would like to see what the city does. Mr. Tellier asked if this would be an ongoing audit. Mr. Tsonos stated that he had no problem tabling this item; this would be an ongoing look at finances; if we are staying up with the bills. Mrs. Rossi commented that this is the responsibility of the Finance Director.

Deficit - Mrs. Rossi requested that the Superintendent, Mr. Daft, review two items for cost savings: transportation stops and moving the administration offices.

Discussion regarding options such as depot stops. Mr. Daft stated that depot stops would not save the cost of the buses and would create large groups of students congregating without supervision; problem for elementary school students; tentative discussions with B & E said these steps may not be worth it.

Constant review of bills regarding state-wide bussing costs which are mandated. Transportation Director, Mr. Linneman, outlined some of the areas under ongoing consideration for reductions in the transportation budget. Discussion regarding moving the administration offices; Mr. Daft advised that this idea was considered before and costs were in the \$200,000 range; everything is being looked at, but he needs to know the exact location of where the offices could be relocated.

B & E Reporting of Audit - Mr. Daft advised that School Committee

would have to request that B & E representatives come to a School Committee meeting to present their report. Motion by Mr. Furtado to request that B & E officials report at the next School Committee meeting, seconded by Mrs. Abatecola. Vote 5-0.

Superintendent Search Sub-Committee Committee – Mrs. Abatecola and Mr. Tellier reported that a first meeting was held on December 12, 2011; individuals are now doing research and future meetings will be held on January 4th and 18th. The Chair is Sandra Barone and the Secretary, Andrea Vastis.

Mr. Tsonos attended and noted that the meeting was very well attended and represents a good cross section of the city; the process is off to a good start.

Unfunded Mandates – Mrs. Rossi felt that not everyone has the information they need on this topic; she noted that a document of 115 pages on the RI Department of Education website lists mandates worth \$20 million to our district; we provide out-of-district services for about a 3% population (187 out of 5600 students) from a budget of approximately \$78 million; \$20 million is mandated and not funded; reimbursement is about \$2 million.

Ms. Cheryl Ursillo, Interim Director of Pupil Personnel explained that the district receives grant money through the Consolidated Resource Plan and some Medicare reimbursement, but the vast majority is funded from the district's budget. Mrs. Rossi pointed out that 25-50%

is salaries and benefits for specialized care for children which is expensive; she thought it was important to point out that this is something we have to do.

Discussion about IDEA funds. Mr. Furtado pointed out that reimbursements were higher in the past. Ms. Ursillo explained that the state chose to deviate in some areas in excess of federal law; East Bay publishes a guide regarding these mandates; she commended staff; through guidance to staff members, we have reduced the special education census, which drives everything, from 27% to 21%. Too many students were being identified and through focused professional development for staff, numbers at 21% are more real in the district than what was prior.

Buildings & Grounds – Mrs. Rossi stated that a School Facilities Master Plan from 2010 indicated work to be done in our school buildings, including new construction, at \$110 million; all can see this work is not going to get done, so the plan is fundraising, expertise from East Providence talent; work with union labor and people in the community to spruce up the buildings cosmetically as a community, similar to the Winterfest project. Even though things are pretty bad, we do not have to lose our way as a community; she enlisted the help of Mr. Ed Catelli to help get this started; liability questions need to be answered. Finance Director, Mary King, and Robert Silva to review this request.

Career/Technical Center - Mrs. Rossi commended the Career Technical Center custodian, Mr. Russell Sackett, for taking pride in his building; she would like that to be the mantra in all schools' she asked for Ed Catelli to rally the troops. Mrs. Rossi presented slides of the Career Technical Center building and programs assisted by Mrs. Karen Mellen, the Director. .

Teaching and Learning – Mrs. Rossi pointed out what can happen whether we are taking care of buildings or not, teachers still teach and students continue to learn; we have no failing schools, even though teachers do not have the supplies they need and sometimes rooms do not have heat; thanks to everyone for keeping everything humming along in the middle of a disaster.

Schedule of School Committee Meetings 2012 - Mr. Daft presented; unanimous consent to post.

Public Comment II

Mr. Ripka spoke asked about the make-up of the Superintendent Search Committee and what their duties are. Mr. Ripka asked about the amount of salaries and benefits at 73% when schools are falling apart and we have stacks of bills; why are Bradley and others not getting paid.

Mr. Furtado explained that this is a cash flow issue rather than not paying bills; because of past deficits, this has been an ongoing

problem.

In response to Ripka's questions about last year, Mary King explained that we are at about same level; it takes a certain level of staff to teach students; ours is low; she was not sure what adult entitlements are; she can provide figures/answers to his questions.

Mr. Riley stated that problems with maintenance of buildings are a result of a budget with 93% salaries and benefits; buildings are falling apart; he did a study of the city budget process ; in 1970, 25% went to buildings and supplies; this has steadily increased over the years from 75/\$1.00 to 87/\$1.00 in salary and benefits; some is special education. Mr. Riley impressed with the condition of the CTC; all staff should have same attitude.

Mr. Furtado noted that includes special education, transportation, mandates.

Anthony Ferrera – thanked CTC Principal and staff for help with the Winter Festival; very professional staff and we should learn to involve them more ; he spoke about CTC training; hopes he can afford to stay in the city; can't lose the aspect of the CTC; we need to bring this mentality to other schools.

Mr. Rossi commented that the city should not lose morale; don't bring this to the kids; at end of day, tough to come up with taxes;

people have to step up and work together as a community. She hoped to work on the playground on April 15th; all should work together and try to remove the red tape to get projects done.

Announcements

Citizens Scholarship Breakfast

Ryan Tellier announced the National Soccer Coaches Banquet – Coach of Year – Mr. Vieria, EPHS

Mrs. Rossi congratulated EP JR Townies midgets played in Florida this year; had a phenomenal season

Mr. Zanghi librarian at Martin Middle School – Donors Choose – raised money for nine memory cards for students; recognized for being part of the solution.

Mr. Daft noted that the work of our Technology Director, Kelly Ahrens, was published in a national magazine. Congratulations to Kelly!

Motion by Mr. Furtado to 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 Mr. Tellier. Vote 5-0.

The School Committee returned to open session. Motion by Mr. Furtado to return to open session, seconded by Mrs. Abatecola. Vote 5-0. Motion by Mrs. Abatecola to seal the minutes of the executive session, seconded by Mr. Tellier. Vote 5-0.

Attorney Andrew Thomas reported that the School Committee authorized the Superintendent to sign an agreement on a personnel matter discussed in executive session. Vote was unanimous 5-0.

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

Respectfully Submitted,

Patricia A. Iannelli, Administrative Assistant

Stephen Furtado, Clerk of the Committee