

# **EAST PROVIDENCE SCHOOL DEPARTMENT**

**East Providence School Committee**

**East Providence, City Hall**

**145 Taunton Avenue**

**East Providence, Rhode Island 02914**

**January 10, 2012**

## **Open Session**

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

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

**Recognition of M.J. Francis School - Hat & Mitten Drive - Mrs. Leddy, Principal of Francis School recognized a supervisory aide, Rita Fisher, for her outstanding participation and generous contributions of handmade crocheted and fleece hats, mittens and scarves to a recent school project; students collected hats, mittens and scarves to be donated to the RI Donation Exchange Program.**

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

**B & E Reporting of School Department Audit – Mr. Walter Edge, CPA**

and Mr. Tom Sweeney of B & E Consulting LLC, were present to provide information regarding their review and written report of the school district's Fiscal Year End (10/31/12 Budget) prepared for the City of East Providence at the request of the City Council.

Mr. Edge stated that the report involved two phases: to determine if the 2012 budget could be balanced and a review of programs and staffing to identify cost savings. Schedule A summarized his engagement; the deficit started at \$7 million and finished at \$275,473 with disagreement on only one item; most were basically budget adjustments which are listed on the Schedule A document.

In response to a question from Mrs. Rossi regarding any additional work, Mr. Edge stated that B & E also performed an overview of the city budget and made adjustments to reduce variances, however, they were asked to wrap up their work when the Budget Commission was put into place. Mr. Sweeney will be presenting information to the Budget Commission who will decide if additional services are required from B & E.

Mr. Edge reported that the complexity of the fiscal year-end and tightness of budget has posed problems; he believed \$250,000 (estimates not actual) was conservatively low and thought there might be more savings if special education numbers changed.

Discussion regarding the fact that we may not receive all of the projected state aid. Mr. Edge identified items that may indicate savings; the Budget Commission is now discussing an adjustment to the number provided to East Providence by the state; Budget Commission leans to a \$200,000 number, if so, there could be a

**\$668,000 variance which could be more difficult to achieve (five years under new funding formula).**

**Mary King stated that the \$592,594 is based on new information from the state for FY13 added to what we had; she used projected 2012 numbers; the funding formula was already projected in that number; Budget Commission is more conservative; the state does not know what the budget will be. Mr. Edge explained that his job is to identify all savings; in a normal situation, it is the discretion of the School Committee if any remain, but was not sure in this situation.**

**Mr. Sweeney reported on recommendations in the B & E report dated December 2011 as follows:**

**Policy manual revision – RI requires the School Committee to have a policy book and the current policies need to be updated; some finance policies are needed regarding transferring funds, expense monitoring, audit response, fiscal impact statement; current policies are hard to locate on line; policies and administrative procedures should be separated; this project will be budgeted for 2013.**

**Enrollment - Reviewed the efficiency of contracted class sizes of elementary and secondary schools; elementary reached enrollment efficiency; Middle and High Schools are different because of team teaching and individual courses. This is a goal of administration to review secondary classes and staffing for further efficiency.**

**Although there is no requirement in RI for full day Kindergarten, the School Committee made a decision to have full day Kindergarten for all students; the School Committee will need to sell this idea to the Budget Commission or lose it; if it is dropped, a school can be closed, but that could result in not having enough space. Indications are that City Council and Budget Commission are in favor of keeping it in place.**

**Interscholastic sports –B & E reported that maintaining middle school sports during hard financial times falls far short of the criteria of law, regulation and contract and eliminating it would save about \$90,000. Middle School sports duplicate community programs. The high school interscholastic program should go through the same yearly assessment process as the academic programs; the overall athletic budget should be reviewed with the goal of reducing it by at least 15% or \$90,000.**

**Organizational Structure - the department is currently understaffed and not sufficient or appropriate to operate the School Department; presently there is an Interim Superintendent, no Curriculum Director or Human Resources Director and the Director of Pupil Services in son an interim basis. B & E recommended review by a salary/benefit consultant of certain central administrative non-unionized staff members with respect to specific and appropriate approved job specifications. B & E recommended restructuring the Organizational Chart.**

**Mr. Daft agreed the department is understaffed; presently staff is pitching in to keep the system working. Discussion regarding further consolidation and how it might work out; Mr. Sweeney noted that schools particularly in finance areas, are different than municipal and could end up with more staff, not less.**

**Preschool Program at Meadowcrest is running well; all districts are required to provide early intervention for qualified 3-5 year olds. The district is reviewing the possibility of expanding the present program to an integrated one where the parents of non-IEP students pay tuition. B & E felt the tuition for this program should be competitive and become part of the revenue of the school budget.**

**Use of Facilities Fees by various groups should result in fees paid to the school department for the total cost of keeping the building open. The School Committee should revisit its policy, making changes to ensure the all costs are covered and at year end the facilities use revenues exceed the schools' costs of providing the usage; special arrangements should be terminated.**

**RTI and Special Education – the goal of Response to Intervention is to keep students out of Special Education; this national program required under IDEA should be run by regular education staff and administered with clout in the school buildings; a qualified Central Office Administrator is needed to oversee the program. B & E believes that the special education budget could be reduced 15% over five years; efforts in this area should be reported each year. Mr.**

**Sweeney pointed out that the Special Education department was in disarray two years ago; the present administrators who took over in May of 2010 have reduced the special education census by 6% and reduced the number of outplacements thereby reducing costs. The School Committee has recently approved a staff reduction plan which will realize further savings. Staff should be recognized for reducing costs of outplacements; a full time Director is necessary to continue this process and the goal of reducing the number of Individualized Education Plans required.**

**Facilities - Discussion regarding closing the administration building and using space at Martin Middle School; Mr. Sweeney stated this may not be possible since the costs of remodeling could outweigh the benefit; could take this option off the table as it may not be feasible. Mr. Sweeney mentioned there are major problems with school facilities and he hoped the Budget Commission would take that into consideration; there are safety issues that must be corrected.**

**Report on City of East Providence Budget Commission – The City Manager, Mr. Peter Graczykowski, explained that he and the Mayor serve on the Commission along with three state-appointed members; meetings are held during the day in order to have access to staff; the Commission is not subject to Open Meetings Laws, but will be transparent and open to the media except during Collective Bargaining issue discussions in executive session meetings. Meetings will be held on Tuesdays and Thursdays next week; then once a week; they are in discovery mode; plan of action being**

formulated; longer meetings will be required for budget work. The Budget Commission is listed on the website and meetings are posted; if all School Committee or City Council members attend, they will have to post if a quorum; the Commission will be gathering information and will then move on to try to approve this year's budget and then work on a five-year budget plan; there is no set schedule of how long the Commission will be here; they will use benchmarks for success, financial stability of the city, and upgrading the bond rating. Mrs. Rossi asked if the School Committee needed to Vote on Schedule A in order for the city to go forward with the five year plan. The City Manager advised that the Budget Commission will consider the vote; City Council voted and he asked the School Committee to do the same.

Public Comment I - Mr. Riley commented that he was thankful for the Budget Commission; there may still be time to put an end to School Committee health benefits and operate for benefit of the kids; actions in Central Falls are something to think about; this did not have to happen; it was avoidable if the School Committee was on the ball the first few months; unfortunately it is too late now.

Mrs. Leddy, Principal of Francis School, spoke in favor of full day Kindergarten; times have changed and past expectations of first graders are now expected in Kindergarten; RTI and full day K would help early intervention, provide a sound foundation, and is in the best interest of students. Mrs. Leddy asked that the long term benefits be considered.

## **Report: Interim Superintendent's Report**

**Finance Report – Mary King, Finance Director, reported there had been no dramatic changes since the last update on the FY 2011 budget; the deficit is still in the one million dollar range with additional bills still coming in. FY2012 Budget – The month of November is for salaries and benefits only; it was communicated to school principals that no purchases could be made unless absolute necessities. Ms. King stated there was very little information to report out at this time, since final budget numbers are still not complete and December invoices are not ready yet.**

## **Personnel Report on Retirements/Resignations/Leaves of Absence**

### **Retirement**

**Katherine Reed (19 Yrs.) English Teacher – High School – Effective end of 2011/12 School Year**

**Patricia Vinhateiro (26 Yrs.) – Secretary – Riverside Middle School – Effective 2/24/12**

**John Wolf (24 Yrs.) Social Studies Teacher – High School – Effective 3/2/2012**

### **Resignation**

**Patricia McChrystal – Library Media Specialist – Whiteknact/Oldham – Effective 1/6/12**

### **Personal Leave of Absence**

**Kevin Monagle - Math Dept. Head/Teacher – High School –**

## **Remainder of 2011/12 School Year**

### **Consent Agenda**

**Approval of Minutes –Motion by Mrs. Rossi to approve the minutes of the meeting held on November 22, 2011, seconded by Mr. Tellier.**

**Vote 5-0.**

**School Committee Meeting Recessed.**

**Return to Open Session**

### **Action Items**

**Personnel Appointments – Mary King, Finance Director, presented the items; the School Committee will vote to recommend and the information will then be forwarded to the Budget Commission for approval:**

### **Appointments**

**Robert Duarte – Boy’s Cross Country Coach – High School**

**Leslie Eastwood – Girl’s Cross Country Coach – High School**

**Angelo Pizzi – Girl’s Head Soccer Coach – High School**

**Jose Aguiar – 180 Day Custodian**

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

### **Requisitions – Bill List**

**Warrant #1174 1/3/12 \$ 392,198.96**

**Warrant #1168 12/13/11 \$ 60.00**

**Warrant #1169 12/14/11 \$ 799.00**

**Warrant #1175 1/6/12 \$ 425,044.50**

**Warrant #1176 1/6/12 \$ 54,314.55**

**Warrant #1177 1/6/12 \$ 86,260.00**

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

**(To be forwarded to Budget Commission)**

**Approval of Advertising Request by Columbus Credit Union - Motion to approve by Mrs. Rossi, seconded by Mr. Tellier. Vote 5-0.**

**Home School Request - Motion to approve by Mrs. Rossi, seconded by Mr. Tellier. Vote 5-0.**

**Approval of East Providence High School Mission Statement and Student Learning Expectations Motion to approve by Mrs. Rossi, seconded by Mr. Furtado. Vote 5-0.**

**Resolution regarding Career/Technical School Regulation Changes – Motion by Mrs. Rossi to approve, seconded by Mr. Furtado. Vote 5-0.**

**Audit Committee - Mr. Duffy of RI Association of School Committees attended to advise the School Committee about the use of audit committees in school districts mandated to monitor and track**

finances to report back to city officials. He reported that this probably will be mandated in RI this year; Middletown already has an audit committee in place. Members of the subcommittee would include an individual with accounting experience to monitor and weigh in on finances.

Mrs. Abatecola thought these duties would be the responsibility of the Finance Director, so she was not sure what this subcommittee would do. Mr. Tsonos added that with the issues East Providence is facing, he thought it worthwhile to have Mr. Duffy explain this. Mrs. Rossi commented that the School Department has been underfunded and had no Finance Director for quite a while; this has nothing to do with additional people looking at the budget; there is now an open, transparent dialogue with the City Council and the City Manager and documents are produced for the City Council; staff is stressed enough now and it is not the time to add one more layer; she cannot support Mr. Duffy's recommendation from the Auditor General because it is just one more mandate we don't need. Mr. Tsonos stated this is not a short term consideration, since the State Budget Commission is looking at five years; this is an ongoing problem; we are in this position for a reason; he thought this was a good idea long- term to oversee school finances.

RI Association of School Committees Membership Dues – Discussion regarding energy savings possibilities as a result of membership in the Association. Mr. Duffy reported natural gas savings in excess of

**\$100,000; electricity purchased from constellation Energy; another possible participation is group purchasing opportunities (Texas) for cities and town; he is working with City Manager to possibly offer this to the city.**

**Mr. Furtado referred to the recommendation in the B & E report to update the policy manual and pointed out that RIASC has model policies available. Mr. Duffy stated that an electronic policy manual is available and can be accessed on line.**

**Mr. Tellier questioned the energy savings figure of \$100,000/year. Mr. Duffy stated that it depended on the fixed price; some are day-to-day; most through league of cities and towns; prices can fluctuate.**

**Mrs. Rossi requested that the City Manager review possible energy savings to date. The City Manager stated he will support this only if numbers and savings can be confirmed on natural gas services and if the city would benefit from the program. Mr. Duffy stated that he can work out the payments, but East Providence must be a member of RIASC in good standing. Mr. Duffy stated that the energy contract with Constellation runs through 2012 and he will look at the city's profile. Mr. Furtado is open to paying the RIASC dues. Mr. Duffy stated that since the dues now date back to 2011, his board would have to make the decision if East Providence could participate.**

**Motion by Mrs. Abatecola to approve payment of RIASC dues,**

**seconded by Mr. Furtado. Mr. Duffy will provide additional information at next meeting. Vote 5-0.**

**Affirmative Action Policy – A motion was made by Mr. Tellier that the policy be reviewed for updates by the City’s Affirmative Action Officer, Mr. Elmer Pina; seconded by Mrs. Rossi. Vote 5-0.**

**Oldham School and Redistricting - Mrs. Rossi was concerned with the option to close Oldham School (if the School Committee chooses to eliminate full day Kindergarten), as there may be some problems such as transportation issues; she believes all schools should be considered; the state is discussing closing school buildings before the issue is studied. Motion by Mrs. Rossi to conduct a fiscal impact study before any schools are closed, seconded by Mr. Tellier. Vote 5-0.**

**Neighborhood Schools - Mrs. Abatecola commented that presently we have schools with children transferred from other schools for various reasons and as a School Committee member, she would like a report on what schools the students really belong in; some students are at other schools and the numbers are not a reality; she would like a reset just to see where everyone belongs. A motion was made by Mrs. Abatecola to further investigate school enrollment numbers and where the students are enrolled, seconded by Mr. Tellier. Mr. Furtado noted this would be irrespective of special education self-contained rooms at other schools. Mrs. Abatecola**

noted there is a domino effect whereby accommodations for one student affect another. Mr. Tsonos asked to consider the effects of bussing issues in the study. Mr. Tsonos restated the motion to direct the Superintendent to provide a report for School Committee consideration and vote. Vote 5-0.

**Vote on B & E Report Recommendations: Motion by Mrs. Abatecola to accept the report with more investigation on some items, seconded by Mr. Furtado. Mrs. Rossi accepts the B & E report; School Committee gave input to the Budget Commission; she accepted Schedule A but would amend to reflect Mary King's numbers \$392,000 less on Schedule A; worse-case scenario would be little extra at the end of the year. She would amend \$200,000 on line 11 of Schedule A; Mr. Tsonos asked to add after first motion; all voted aye to accept the B & E Report.**

**Motion by Mrs. Rossi to accept Schedule A in its entirety except to change from \$592,000 to \$200,000, seconded by Mrs. Abatecola. In response to a request from Mr. Tellier, Mary King advised that the actual number will be known by June 30th. Vote 5-0.**

## **Old Business**

**Superintendent Search Sub-Committee Report – Mr. Tellier advised there was discussion about potential salary range and Committee is waiting for approval of the salary range from the Budget Commission.**

## **New Business**

**Amended Policy II.D.5. Use of School Buildings/School Grounds  
–Motion for First Passage of amended policy, seconded by Mrs. Rossi. Vote 5-0.**

**Mr. Furtado spoke about his Reflections on a challenging First Year.**

## **Public Comment II**

**June Cohen, 34 Sunset; coaches girls' soccer disagreed with the claim that Middle School sports are a duplicate of community sports, since there is a different level of competition. Community sports focus on everyone being able to play, while school teams are competitive; some kids play and others have to work on skills to become better players. Also cutting teams with less numbers could be a violation of Title 9 Laws. Teams could fundraise, but it is difficult and taxing on the coach; could consider scaling back stipends; she agreed on oversight of funds such as gate receipts; Middle School gets used uniforms and both old and new equipment; fields at Middle School are not good and need improvements; she was not in favor of cutting Middle School sports which in some instances actually helps kids become better students.**

**Valarie Lawson, 122 Hoyt Avenue, encouraged the School Committee to consider the value of full time Kindergarten, since this intervention**

at an early age is cost effective; and to address the entire package such as excess contracts which were approved, which could have savings of over \$100,000; also, she noted that the report omits the fact that since 2009, East Providence teachers are the lowest paid in the state and the 20% copay from the district was not recognized; she felt that all facts should be listed and acknowledged.

Fred Ripka spoke about the idea of closing Old ham School; he did not understand how that could happen based on the number of Kindergarten and first grade students/classes; he asked for the number of students outplaced and what about the vote on the B & E Report.

Mr. Daft explained that we may not have two Kindergarten classes and that closing the school would not happen unless half-day Kindergarten was in place; it is not just Oldham but the whole district; teachers contract at 25 students per class; we are opening up a class in each school.

Mr. Riley, Pawtucket Avenue; asked the Chairman why copies of the Schedule A were not available to the public; he opined that all the overworked people in the School Department should continue to do that but with a 10% pay cut; he agrees that an audit committee would create another layer and he does not want to shuffle the blame to anyone else except the School Committee.

**Announcements - None**

**Motion 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.**

**School Committee returned to Public Session; motion by Mr. Furtado to seal the minutes, seconded by Mr. Tellier.**

**Report Executive Session Votes - None**

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

**Respectfully submitted,**

**Patricia A. Iannelli, Administrative Assistant**

**Stephen Furtado, Clerk of the Committee**