

**UNAPPROVED**

**CUMBERLAND SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES**

**The Cumberland School Committee Special Programs Sub-Committee held a meeting Wednesday, December 8, 2010 at the Cumberland High School Library, 2600 Mendon Road, Cumberland, Rhode Island.**

**Members Present: Jeff Mutter, Lisa Beaulieu, John Gibbons, Earl Wood, Erika Sanzi**

**Staff Present: Donna A. Morelle, Ed., Superintendent, Joseph A. Rotella, Esq., Director of Administration, Dr. Susan Carney, Assistant Superintendent, Alex Prignano, Business Manager**

**Agenda Item #1: Call to Order**

**The meeting was called to order by Chairman Mutter at 6:08 p.m.**

**Agenda Item #2: Approval of Agenda**

**Agenda Item #3: Presentation/Discussion on Draft of Final Report of the NESDEC “Elementary and Middle Schools Best Educational Use of Facilities Study:” – two representatives from NESDEC, John Kennedy and Don Kennedy, presented their draft and answered questions. Don Kennedy explained that some of the information that**

he will be going over tonight is already on the website, he also said that our final copy of results/info will be in a book and will have articles, research data, etc. in it and the information will also be sent in PDF form and we can put that on our website if we would like to. He noted that there will also be an executive summary so that someone could read just that and be pretty much up to speed on what was done and what the results are. John Kennedy stated that he had attended an economic conference in Boston recently and has a handout for the SC to review – it basically shows that Rhode Island's economic future is bleak. Don Kennedy reviewed some ideas, reaction and suggestions – he noted that district children are learning the most in early child programs – these children seem to be the ones that perform the best at later dates. He also noted that longer days/school year is better for children, also that children that are in classrooms (i.e. kindergarten) that have bathrooms and bubblers do better than children that are in classrooms that do not have the facilities – because of the distraction it causes when children are constantly leaving the room – no distraction, more time on task. Class size is very important in the early grades – he suggested not to increase classroom size – save money in other areas. He suggested that special education teachers and regular teachers communicate on a regular basis – because children learn better when there are visuals, so the teachers could share techniques.

Next, Don and John spoke about capacity at the high school. There was a study done back in 2002 by another company (Torado) and

when they did their study they used a capacity calculation that was based on square footage (typically an architect would use this) and they included space in the auditorium, band room, cafeteria, video room, etc. as teaching space – but that was not the way NESDEC did their study. Torado counted 145 spaces in small rooms such as resource rooms, reading rooms, etc. – again NESDEC did not count that space. NESDEC counted these areas as pull out spaces and not actual classroom space. This recent study by NESDEC was included to see if the possibility of putting grade 8 in the high school could be entertained. Some districts in Rhode Island already do this and like the way it has worked out – others have tried and did not like it. John Kennedy noted that this question was only asked of NESDEC about 2-3 weeks ago – they have gathered a lot of information, but have much more to do. So on November 16th they made arrangements with Mrs. Gould (principal of the high school) to get a tour of the high school so that they could determine what the capacity should be – they wanted to be sure that the district should even be looking at this possibility. Some of the following information was determined: Grades 9-12 reside on 26.5 acres of land, the town athletic complex – Tucker Field is 100+ acres across the street from the high school, the high school was built in 1961, the transitional building was built in 1969, the pool was added in 1973, the science wing in 2005, the wellness center in 2006 and numerous other renovations along the way. The approximate square footage is 309,000 sq. ft., there are 55 interchangeable classrooms – meaning you could use the classroom for English, Math, Social Studies, but not Science, gym, etc. The

enrollment as of 10/1/2010 is 1,591 students. The NESDEC current operating capacity – building as is – allocating 26 students per classroom, would be 1,430 students for regular classroom instruction. Then adding on other areas that could be used – such as the woodworking area, auto shop area, special needs classrooms, robotics area, the current operating capacity would go up to 1,907 students. This calculation is based on .80 use of classroom space, because you do not use 100% of the building/classrooms all of the time. What NESDEC did find was that the conference space at the high school was inadequate – this would be for IEP meetings, parent meetings with the principal, etc., so NESDEC took one classroom out of their calculation and made it a conference room – planned operating capacity would then become 1,886 students.

Mr. Mutter then asked the question – how did the school operate back in 1978 with 2,400 students – they had less buildings/space back then. Don and John agreed and said they contacted Mr. Lynch (CHS principal from 1974 – 1989) and asked him how he did it. His response was open campus for seniors (although this proved to be not such a good idea), scheduling classes was an issue-very difficult, they could not have classes where only 15 or 16 students were in the class – there classes were always at or over the capacity, halls were jammed, cafeteria and auditorium were always over capacity and they had two classes in the foyer of the main entrance – one to the right side and one to the left side, they also had double sessions, but only for one year. Mr. Lynch's perspective was that he had to make it work – there was not a choice. Going back to the 2002 study by Torado,

**NESDEC noted that Torado came up with 1,707 total capacity for the high school without the additions (and they counted spaces that NESDEC did not count), NESDEC came up with 1,886 current operating capacity – which provides a cushion in the existing arrangement because our current enrollment is 1,591 students. Don noted that very few high schools operate at full capacity. Don went on to say that currently CHS has 50 sections of core curriculum with 15 or fewer students in the class and 130 sections of core curriculum with 26 or more students in the class.**

**Mr. Mutter noted that back in 1967-68 there were 1,591 students at CHS – same as we have currently – and back in 1967 they did not have the transitional building yet – again he wondered how they did it. Don answered by saying that back then there were no computer rooms, special education programs were not introduced until the 1970's and since then expectations for services have expanded, there were not any rooms specifically for technology use, no rooms for speech therapy, etc. Don said that he would try to have more specific answers for Mr. Mutter by next week's presentation – he will talk with Mr. Lynch again. Dr. Morelle made the comment that even though back in the 60's they had the same enrollment number as we currently do, the renovation project was conceived, so why did that project come about – obviously they saw the problems. Mrs. Beaulieu said that they must have had much larger class sizes and Don confirmed that based on a conversation with Mr. Lynch they did have much larger classes. He said it would have been rare to see a classroom with fewer than 15 students in it. Don went on to say that**

the final report will have a very detailed description of every school building in the district, it will have an appendix about pre-school and early childhood education, guidelines for neighborhood schools and redistricting, enrollment projections (grouped grades 8-12 not 9-12). His projection would be that by the fall of 2012, there would be room at the high school for 8th graders. By moving the 8th grade to the high school and the 5th to the middle school, the projection would be to eventually close one elementary school and eliminate some teacher layoffs. The 8th grade students could be placed in the transitional building only or possibly by re-configuring the woodshop/auto area – which is underused – they could be in that area as well. There is also the possibility of putting the central offices over in the woodshop/auto area and thus gaining all that space in the transitional building for the 8th graders. The numbers would not match up until 2012 because it takes between 12-18 months to work out all of the details. If the 5th graders went to the middle school certification issues would have to be reviewed – you would be reassigning some teachers from elementary to middle. Student activities would have to be reviewed, along with attendance boundaries, bus schedules – lots of reviewing and planning. If the choice was made to close one of the elementary schools, Don suggested getting the public input and teachers, etc., to give input as to which one should in fact be closed. By closing one of the elementary schools you would have to reassign teachers, redistrict students, redo bus schedules, redo neighborhood boundaries – if you look at other districts that have done this, it is the ones that took their

time and planned appropriately that had the happy outcomes. Mrs. Beaulieu asked that if the 8th grade did get moved to the high school, will there be a change from half day kindergarten to full day. Don said that at the end of their reports you will come out with full day kindergarten, but there would be a need for 7 additional classrooms to do it and at present their current scenario does not show a full day kindergarten.

Don went on to talk about the budget for our district – he said that based on the economic conference that John had recently attended in Boston, it looks like the governor will face a budget gap of \$290m(state) – they will recommend to reduce educational finances – he thought we would be looking at a \$2.75m(Cumberland) gap for next year (does not take into consideration funding formulas) and \$5.3m gap for the year after that – clearly something needs to be done and if one of the elementary schools were to be closed he believed you could avoid several hundred thousand dollars of expenses. He said the high school is in excellent condition and the recent renovations/additions could certainly accommodate the additional students. The question was asked about the additional dollars that would be given to Cumberland, but those dollars will be given over numerous years and already the government is talking about reducing the original figures. Another question was asked about enrollment now and enrollment being less in 2014 – yet the cost would be greater than it is now – the answer was it is because of healthcare costs rising, utilities rising, bus transportation rising, special education costs/services that are mandated, contracts – all

going up but the revenue is going up very slowly because the state is giving us the dollars a little at a time. Don went on to say that budget deficits are going on throughout New England and Cumberland should be commended for looking at this scenario now and taking their time to make up their minds and do the correct studies so that the correct decisions can be made – they will have to be made – it is inevitable.

**Agenda Item #4: Public Comment - will the decision be held off for next year? Don said that he will have lots more answers at next weeks meeting, but there is a budget gap for next year and if the School Committee cannot figure out ways to make it work, then there will be more teacher layoff's and bigger classroom sizes – if the SC uses the NESDEC study, maybe the fall of 2012 the SC may select to start something new – with our data they will at least have choices and information to hopefully help them make good decisions. They can potentially make decisions soon that can be implemented in 2012 – it will take the 12-18 month time period to get all of the work accomplished.**

Another question was asked about whether or not the elementary schools could still be grouped together even if the 8th grade does not move to the high school – Don said there was another individual working on the 8th grade study that will have many more answers next week.

Mr. Mutter said that the SC needs to balance the budget each year – for right now they are gathering information so that informed

**decisions can be made for the future.**

**Agenda Item #5: Adjournment - motion was made by Mrs. Beaulieu to adjourn the meeting, it was approved 2-0(Mrs. Beaulieu and Mr. Mutter), meeting adjourned at 7:56 p.m.**

**Meeting minutes respectfully submitted by Linda A. Jackvony**