

## **Redistricting/Consolidation Advisory Committee Minutes**

**Wednesday, February 27, 2008**

**Dr. Horoschak called the meeting to order. The committee discussed the possible closure of four elementary schools, Potowomut, Drum Rock, Greene and Rhodes. Due to the contractual constraints on the number of staff members that can be subject to layoff each year, a maximum of three of the four elementary schools analyzed (two large and one small) can be consolidated and redistricted for the 2008-2009 school year. Leonard Flood, Director of Business Affairs, presented the financial implications of the closures. David Small, Director of Building and Grounds, reported on air quality and environmental issues. The committee's charge is to recommend which three schools to close so the Superintendent can submit this recommendation to the school committee in March.**

**Prior to this meeting Mr. Bushell provided the committee a packet of materials to review for discussion. The packet contained: a street by street narrative of the boundaries of each elementary school attendance zone; reorganization questionnaire completed by elementary principals describing the impact of additional students assigned to receiving schools; the building capacity of the proposed receiving schools, the estimated number of students by grade that would be reassigned to the receiving schools from the proposed sending schools and a map describing the redistricted attendance**

**zones resulting from school consolidation. Mr. Bushell provided a complete overview of building capacity, estimated enrollment and boundary areas for the proposed receiving schools. Dr. Horoschak noted that reassigned students will remain within their same junior and senior high school feeder zones.**

**Dr. Horoschak told the audience that all information the committee was speaking to today will be accessible on the District website as soon as possible.**

**Questions by committee members:**

- How were the street maps determined? Answer: The street maps were determined by a street by street, student by student, grade by grade, analysis and by current bus routes.**
- Why these schools? Answer: There were many factors considered, some of which were: keeping neighborhood groups together; additional programs in schools to be relocated, e.g. five special education programs in Holliman vs. two at in Rhodes; size and capacity of the buildings; number of students impacted; and keeping students within their current junior and senior high school feeder zones.**
- Did all estimated enrollments of receiving schools incorporate new students? Answer: Yes**
- Do numbers on the Greenwood chart incorporate the Drum Rock students? Answer: Yes**
- Was the selection of schools proposed to close based on the cost of**

renovating and maintaining the buildings? Answer: It was a consideration after determining which schools could absorb reassigned students and programs.

Discussion followed on the impact airport expansion will have on the elementary schools. At the last redistricting meeting, Ann Clarke, Senior Vice-President of Engineering, Planning and Environmental Management Systems of the Rhode Island Airport Commission, told the committee that airport expansion will most likely impact the northern part of the City. Dr. Horoschak said that the redistricting and consolidation committee must base its recommendation on the neighborhoods currently in place. Committee member, Jeannie Petit, expressed her belief that Rhodes should not be considered for closure at this time because the future airport expansion will not impact homes in that attendance area. Dr. Areglado mentioned that he spoke with Mr. Carruolo, city planner, who informed him that the areas expected to be impacted with housing demolition would be Holden, Norwood and Holliman. Extending the runway length to either 8,700 ft. or 9,000 ft. will definitely impact properties and exacerbate declining enrollment.

Steve O'Haire, Supervisor of Transportation, depicted the proposed new attendance areas on a colored-coded map. He provided an overview proposed new attendance zones, the dividing lines for junior and senior high school zones, and explained how the areas were divided up.

**Committee member Sam Holtzman said he thought this process might be premature. He referred to the school closing plans as a “sledgehammer economic approach” because the actual savings from consolidation will not be close to 5.8 million dollars. He expressed that he was fearful of the impact of airport expansion and stated it might make sense to keep the Rhodes attendance zone intact. He also expressed the belief that the redistricting of the entire city should be completed before considering the consolidation of schools.**

**Dr. Horoschak said that the projected revenue deficit indicates consolidation will be required by the 2008-2009 school year and that the cost savings from that must be determined before other measures for closing the \$5.8 million dollar gap are considered. Once it is known which houses will be taken by airport expansion and which new housing development will go forward, we may have to redistrict the entire city. The issue before the committee is to make a recommendation to deal with this problem and achieve the best financial results with the minimum displacement of students. A total redistricting process will be lengthy, will require careful consideration of the impact on all schools and extensive communication with the public. This committee is charged to settle on a recommendation to be made to the school committee in March. Strong sentiment that parents wanted their children to stay in the same junior and senior high school feeder areas was conveyed to the committee.**

**A committee member said she feels that Mr. Bushell, Dr. Mercurio and Dr. Horoschak decided on the schools to consolidate without input from other committee members. Dr. Horoschak said if a majority of the committee wants to investigate other consolidation possibilities, it could be done, but would require an extension of time to complete the report. Ultimately, it is the school committee which would decide the schools to be consolidated.**

**Len Flood, Director of Business Affairs, prepared an analysis of estimated savings from each of the schools being considered for consolidation. That analysis involved consideration of operating costs as well as the long term expenditures for upgrade and renovation of the school facilities. He distributed a school closings savings estimate, with breakdowns of salaries, benefits and building maintenance. Mr. Flood also distributed a cost savings matrix for each combination of three out of four schools considered for consolidation.**

**David Small , Director of Building and Maintenance, Paul Janssen, Construction Coordinator, and Phil Ricchiuti, Environmental Coordinator have reviewed information available to them to determine whether any elementary school is subject to unacceptable levels of pollutants or toxins. David Small indicated he is confident that the inside air quality and outside air quality is the same throughout the city schools and pose no specific health concerns.**

**Mr. Janssen said that in 2007 DEM tested air quality North, South and West of the airport. Comparing Warwick with other geographical areas tested, Warwick's air quality was similar to or slightly higher than in East Providence, considerably better than in Providence or Pawtucket and considerably lower than at the Alton Jones conference site. Mr. Janssen talked about levels of black carbon and how they vary depending on wind direction. Barbara Morin, Supervising Environmental Scientist, stated in a telephone conversation with Mr. Small that she would not base a decision to close schools based on these test results. A written report was distributed to the Advisory Committee.**

**Dr. Areglado said the lead administrators have had an enormous task, crunching numbers and gathering data to bring before the whole committee for review. "What can this committee do in the best interest of the children of Warwick?" We must look, he stated, at the City as an entity. Dr. Areglado further stated that we will go under financially if we don't do something. We need to make a collective decision, whether it be unanimous or by partial consensus to do what's in the best interest of 11,000 children and their families who will be impacted by the recommendations we make.**

**A committee member asked about the special education population. Dr. Horoschak said that Dr. D'Agostino will report on the options to accommodate the special education population. One money savings**

option is to return special education students placed out of the district to programs in our schools.

Dr. D'Agostino said that he analyzed how to provide services to the special education students moving into the receiving schools. Special education staff may be reallocated into other buildings to provide the services needed. The recently completed State Monitoring Report found that Warwick Public Schools should provide more inclusion opportunities. The previous report was completed five years ago when Warwick had eleven inclusion schools, and five years later there still are only eleven. As a result of consolidation Warwick can move ahead with inclusion programs in the receiving schools. For example Drum Rock has two self-contained classrooms, one each for serving at the primary and intermediate grade levels. Looking at the composition of those classrooms, one finds that four students in the primary unit are Drum Rock students and six students come from other schools in the district. It's actually a city-wide self-contained program which should be kept intact by moving it to another school in the Winman feeder area. Each year we look at the shifting populations in the schools and see where we have to put more staff.

Before adjourning, Dr. Horoschak told the committee that it is his objective is to arrive at a redistricting and consolidation proposal to recommend to the school committee as soon as possible. He stated that if a committee member thinks of something that needs to be

**clarified or believes some other piece of information is missing, he or she should contact the Superintendent's office before the next Redistricting/Consolidation Advisory Committee meeting.**

**The committee agreed to meet on Tuesday, March 4, 2008 at Winman Junior High School, 3-5 pm, to work out a recommendation to place before the school committee will be determined.**

**The meeting adjourned at 5:10 pm.**