

WACHUSETT REGIONAL SCHOOL DISTRICT

HOLDEN ♦ PAXTON ♦ PRINCETON ♦ RUTLAND ♦ STERLING

Minutes

Regular Meeting #1035, Monday, February 25, 2002
7:00 p.m.

Media Center
Wachusett Regional High School

Committee Members Present:

John Rokicki, Chairman	Duncan Leith
Sherry Horeanopoulos, Vice-chairman	Alice Livdahl
Donald Benson	David Lowenthal
Carol Esperti	Peter MacDonald (7:22 PM)
Kimberly Ferguson	Natalie Mello
Michael Gennert	John Nunnari
Jeffrey Gibbs	Elizabeth Pape
Jane James	Julie Scott
Sarah Jordan	Kathleen Singh

Committee Members Absent:

Kelly Maxwell

Administration Present:

Alfred D. Tutela, Ph.D., Superintendent of Schools
Paul K. Soojian, Director of Operations
Philip Campbell, Director of Student/Information Services
Susan Sullivan, Executive Assistant to the Superintendent

Others present:

Linda Lehans, *The Landmark*
Stacey M. Grossi, *Worcester Telegram & Gazette*
Christine Nelson, *Sterling Meetinghouse News*
Timothy Ethier, Chair Holden Selectboard
Douglas Briggs, Rutland Selectboard
Melinda Johnson, Paxton
Maureen Floryan, Holden
Larry Floryan, Holden
David Gibbs, Sterling
Jeffrey Wentzell, Paxton

Rosemary Warren, Paxton
Norman Plourde, Sterling
Edith Morgan, Princeton
Sandra Lowenthal, Princeton
John Schneeweis, Sterling
Debbie Croucher, Sterling
Donna Dominguez, Sterling
Dave Clark, Sterling
Lisa Hugo, Holden
Hilary Anderson, Princeton
Edward P. Twarog, Princeton
Ann Quill, Sterling
Anne Gillespie, Holden
Lee Merlin, Holden

Chairman Rokicki called the meeting to order at 7: 07 PM.

I. Public Hearing

Melinda Johnson, Paxton, read a prepared statement (attachment 1).

John Schneeweis, Sterling, read a prepared statement (attachment 2).

Maureen Floryan, Holden, read a prepared statement (attachment 3).

Anne Gillespie, Holden, read a prepared statement (attachment 4).

Hilary Anderson, Princeton, read a prepared statement (attachment 5)

David Gibbs, Sterling, informed the Committee that the letters sent to members were requests for public records, per MGL. He then read a recent letter to Attorney Leo McCabe regarding this request (attachment 6).

Edith Morgan, Princeton, read a prepared statement (attachment 7).

Ed Twarog, Princeton, indicated disgust for the actions of the Committee. He spoke in favor of the modular project, however, expressed concern for the lack of filing for the project.

Member Kimberly Ferguson circulated a prepared statement from Lucy Banks, Holden (attachment 8). Member Carol Esperti informed the Committee that Lucy Banks wanted to clarify that she had not sent the

email ~~directly~~ to the Chair. Member Esperti distributed a copy of the original email ~~from~~ TO Lucy Banks (attachment 9).

The Superintendent clarified that big schools do not cost more but rather multiple schools costs more. He also clarified that all filings have taken place and that it was the responsibility of the contractor.

II. Secretary's Report

No report.

III. Communications

The Superintendent informed the Committee that the DOE posted preliminary budget numbers, however, noted that there would be cuts. He also indicated that he received today a copy of the communication from Attorney McCabe, regarding the request for public documents. It will be included in the next Superintendent's Report.

IV. Education Presentation

The Committee had previously agreed to discuss goals.

V. Committee Reports

A. Student Advisory Committee (L. McNally, C. Smith)

No report.

B. Education Subcommittee (J. Nunnari – Chair, K. Ferguson, M. Gennert, S. Jordan, A. Livdahl, D. Lowenthal, E. Pape)

Education Chair John Nunnari reported that the Subcommittee met on January 30, 2002. The After School Music Program was discussed. The Subcommittee heard a presentation on the implementation of the new special education laws going from “maximum feasible benefit” to “free and appropriate”. The Committee was updated on the Education Pathways Program.

The next meeting of the Subcommittee will be Wednesday, February 27, 2002 where the After School Music Program discussion will continue, as well as a presentation of the Versatiles program and a review of policies related to education.

The Superintendent reminded the Committee that there has continuously been a problem with getting staff for the After School Music Program and that next year the budget will be tight. He indicated that the rates would not be increased due to the domino effect. There is also a concern for equal access with a program of shared resources.

There was continued discussion surrounding the After School Music Program, particularly regarding the rates. The Superintendent informed the Committee, although absent any policy on music or after school music, that the entrepreneurial policy enables the PTA to support an after school music program. He reminded the Committee that it was important for the Committee to address the policy issues. Currently the program is being run at the cost of a teacher. The Superintendent also indicated that consideration is being given for a violin teacher for middle schools, shared by schools.

MEMBER KIMBERLY FERGUSON REPORTED THAT SHE WAS NOT AVAILABLE ON WEDNESDAY NIGHTS AND THAT SHE POSSIBLY SHOULD BE ELIMINATED AS A MEMBER OF THE EDUCATION SUBCOMMITTEE.

C. Education-related Ad-Hoc Subcommittees requiring the action of the School Committee

1. Ad-Hoc Subcommittee to Review District Goals (E. Pape, D. Benson, M. Gennert, S. Jordan, P. MacDonald)

a. Discussion of School Committee Goals

Before discussion regarding the goals began, the Superintendent informed the Committee that the Town of Rutland has scheduled a Town Meeting on Monday, March 25, 2002. In the past the School Committee meeting was scheduled for the following day.

Discussion occurred and changes were made to the Mission Statement (attachment 10). The focus of the second March meeting, when scheduled, will be only the goals. The objectives or guidelines will be discussed once the goals are agreed upon. Once the

School Committee has completed its review the Committee will solicit public input. The Superintendent indicated that the document would be distributed in the schools, within the District News and parent communications and posted on the website. In addition, it was suggested that copies be distributed to the town libraries and that School Committee members hold forums for input.

- D. School Council Reports: Central Tree Middle School – J. Nunnari, Chocksett – P. MacDonald; Davis Hill; Dawson – J. Scott; Houghton – S. Jordan; Mayo – C. Esperti; Mountview – J. James; Naquag – J. Rokicki; Paxton – A. Livdahl; Thomas Prince – S. Horeanopoulos; Wachusett Regional High School – E. Pape

Discussion occurred on the District practice of overnight field trips. The Superintendent informed the Committee that the decision is school-based.

VI. Superintendent's Report

A. Discussion of Report

Discussion occurred on the emails included in the Superintendent's Report. Chairman Rokicki informed the Committee that if emails are sent to him regarding School Committee business, they will be shared with the Committee. If an issue is personal, particularly regarding children, the issue will be referred to the administration. The emails were shared because a member and the Chair considered that the subject of the emails were School Committee business.

The Chair reminded the Committee that the Open Meeting law specifically addresses the prohibition of a quorum of Subcommittee members discussing business related to the Subcommittee. Three members of the Management Subcommittee were included in at least one of the emails.

Discussion continued with some members defending their use of email as personal and others as considering it School Committee business. Following an accusation by a member that the Chair was being untruthful, Chairman Rokicki reminded the

Committee that he had spoken to several members of the Committee and at least one member of the public who were aware of the emails.

The Committee was informed that there is a diminished expectation of privacy when elected to public office.

Member Scott read into the record, from an email from Member Esperti, "interesting message i just got from Julie on my machine...I had shared al's response with her, not telling her the rest of us have been discussing it. I said, "what do you think? Is this how you recall we left the ifp process? I just wanted to see whose side she was on. Anyway – she stammered a ton, long pauses basically said "after Friday's article, how can al trust any of us? I don't know what I think anymore. If some of you want to call a meeting, fine, call a meeting. we'll discuss it then." Member Scott expressed concern that there was clearly a breach of trust between Member Esperti and herself. Member Scott wondered where the concern for trust was.

Member Esperti responded that there was nothing wrong with collaborating on an issue; this was merely a part of the political process.

B. Recommendations requiring action by the School Committee

1. The Superintendent distributed copies of the Amended 2002-2003 School Calendar (attachment 11).

The Superintendent informed the Committee that the calendar approved on February 11, 2002 had the April recess beginning on April 14 when it should have been on April 21.

Motion: To approve the Amended 2002-2003 School Calendar

(S. Jordan)
(J. Scott)

Vote:

In favor:

John Rokicki
Sherry Horeanopoulos

Donald Benson
Carol Esperti
Kimberly Ferguson
Michael Gennert
Jeffrey Gibbs
Jane James
Sarah Jordan
Duncan Leith
Alice Livdahl
David Lowenthal
Peter MacDonald
Natalie Mello
John Nunnari
Elizabeth Pape
Julie Scott
Kathleen Singh

Opposed:
None

(Motion passed unanimously)

1. Motion: To ratify the Wachusett Administrators Association Contract
(S. Jordan)
(D. Leith)

Roll call vote:

In favor:

John Rokicki
Sherry Horeanopoulos
Donald Benson
Carol Esperti
Kimberly Ferguson
Michael Gennert
Jeffrey Gibbs
Jane James
Sarah Jordan
Duncan Leith
Alice Livdahl
David Lowenthal
Peter MacDonald
Natalie Mello

John Nunnari
Elizabeth Pape
Julie Scott
Kathleen Singh

Opposed:
None

(Motion passed unanimously)

Motion: To extend the meeting by thirty minutes.

(S. Jordan)

(S. Horeanopoulos)

Roll call vote:

In favor:

John Rokicki
Sherry Horeanopoulos
Donald Benson
Michael Gennert
Jeffrey Gibbs
Jane James
Sarah Jordan
Duncan Leith
Alice Livdahl
David Lowenthal
Peter MacDonald
Natalie Mello
Elizabeth Pape
Julie Scott
Kathleen Singh

Opposed:

Carol Esperti
Kimberly Ferguson
John Nunnari

(Motion passed 15-3)

VII. Public Hearing

John Schneeweiss, Sterling, restated his concern that the Committee is not following its own policies. Issues like the email issue serve only as

distractions. The Committee should focus on the the long-term high school facility issue.

Donna Dominguez, Sterling, informed the Committee that the emails that were made public were not sent to a few School Committee members and friends but solely to School Committee members. She stated that this was definitely a public issue and that the content was divisive, not the distribution.

John Kilcoyne, Sterling, stated that the release of the emails was an invasion of privacy and a serious offense. He called for the Chair to step down from his position as Chair. He requested from the Committee an opportunity for the communities to vote on a two-school proposal. He also thanked his Sterling representatives for doing a great job.

Norm Plourde, Sterling, informed the Committee that the Massachusetts Association of School Committees (MASC) has provided guidance for School Committees on the use of email:

1. Don't use email.
2. Be careful if you do choose to use email.
3. Be extraordinarily careful not to create a quorum.

Maureen Floryan, Holden, provided clarification on the request for public documents in response to a previous speaker, that no "Floryan" signed those letters.

David Gibbs, Sterling, read again his first letter for a request for public documents sent to several members. He also expressed concern that the emails breached at least three different subcommittees. He quoted Attorney General Riley, that a problem occurs if a quorum of members are included in an email and business for that committee or subcommittee is discussed. He further stated that Attorney General Riley indicated that the use of emails represented a high risk of violating the Open Meeting Law. He indicated that he would be petitioning the Supervisor of Records and the Attorney General to look into this situation.

Melinda Johnson, Paxton, corrected a member of the public who had indicated that the communities have not had the opportunity to vote on two schools. There indeed was a vote in December 1998, which was overwhelmingly defeated.

John Kilcoyne, Sterling, said that the December 1998 vote was a bad attempt at a vote.

Several members of the Committee commented on items brought up during the public session.

Member Carol Esperti left the meeting at 10:02 PM.

Member Kimberly Ferguson left the meeting at 10:05 PM.

VIII. Unfinished Business

- A. Approval of the Executive Session Minutes of the WRSD Committee held on January 28, 2002
- B. Tabled Motion: To retain the services of counsel for matters referred by the School Committee and to begin this process by directing the Chair to establish an ad-hoc search subcommittee comprised of school committee members.

IX. New Business

A member indicated that he had come to the meeting with the intent of asking for Chairman Rokicki's resignation as Chair but instead suggested that a small governing body be formed, to meet privately with members representing both the one-school and two-school camps. He indicated that this group could make recommendations, without the input from the Superintendent.

In response to a Committee member's request to the Chair that the Superintendent not have input on the high school project, the Superintendent informed the Committee that he has the responsibility to advise the Committee and will continue to do so.

Member John Nunnari left the meeting at 10:25 PM.

Motion: That the Chair contact our District Counsel and through him any other germane boards or people, including the District Attorney, the Attorney General and MASC to obtain a decision on the emails.

(D. Leith)

(J. Scott)

Roll call vote:

In favor:

John Rokicki
Sherry Horeanopoulos
Donald Benson
Michael Gennert
Jeffrey Gibbs
Jane James
Sarah Jordan
Duncan Leith
Alice Livdahl
David Lowenthal
Peter MacDonald
Natalie Mello
Elizabeth Pape
Julie Scott
Kathleen Singh

Opposed:

(Motion

X. Motion: To Adjourn

(N. Mello)
(A. Livdahl)

Roll call vote:

In favor:

John Rokicki
Sherry Horeanopoulos
Donald Benson
Michael Gennert
Jeffrey Gibbs
Jane James
Sarah Jordan
Duncan Leith
Alice Livdahl
David Lowenthal
Peter MacDonald
Natalie Mello
Elizabeth Pape
Julie Scott
Kathleen Singh

Opposed:
None

(Motion passed unanimously)

The meeting adjourned at 10:35 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Alfred D. Tutela, Ph.D.
Superintendent of Schools

ADT:ss/School Committee/Minutes