

WACHUSETT REGIONAL SCHOOL DISTRICT COMMITTEE

HOLDEN ♦ PAXTON ♦ PRINCETON ♦ RUTLAND ♦ STERLING

Minutes

Regular Meeting #1080 Monday, September 13, 2004

7:00 PM

Community Room
Paxton Center School

Committee Members Present:

Duncan Leith, Chair	Alice Livdahl
Donald Benson, Vice-chair	Kelly Maxwell
Cynthia Bazinet	Natalie Mello
Elizabeth Brennan	John Nunnari
Charles Capparelli	Norman Plourde
Clifford Connell	Cheryl Rauh
Patricia Gates	René Rodriguez
David Gibbs	Michael Sherman
Mark James	Margaret Watson
John Kane	

Committee Members Absent:

Administration Present:

Alfred D. Tutela, Ph.D., Superintendent of Schools
Paul K. Soojian, Director of Operations
Steven Penka, Director of Administrative Services
Susan H. Sullivan, Executive Assistant to the Superintendent

Others present, who desired to be recorded as present (see attached Attendance Sheet – attachment 1)

Chair Duncan Leith called the meeting to order at 7:50 PM.

Chair Duncan Leith reported that the Employee Recognition Dinner, which had just concluded, was a great event that honored employees who have served the District and the students well. Chair Leith publicly thanked the builders who

contributed to the success of the evening, Blair Realty, Gengel C & S Builders, Inc., Patrick Z. Sarkisian Co., Inc., and B.A. Sundin & Son, Inc.

Chair Leith informed the Committee that agenda item V-B would be taken out of order. The Superintendent thanked those responsible for the Employee Recognition Dinner and thanked the School Committee in place when he came to the District for its commitment to student achievement. When the Superintendent first came to the District ten years ago there was no data, no curriculum, and no standards. There were no State curriculum frameworks. The Superintendent met with the principals as a Cabinet and determined that an assessment tool was needed in the District to measure student achievement in order to determine, over time, the value of education nationally, that students received.

Through the efforts of the Education Reform Act of 1993, K-12 regionalization, and the commitment of the community, the District began on a path of student achievement with the implementation of the Metropolitan Achievement Tests. This journey has produced high achieving students. The Superintendent introduced Jason Newton, Supervisor of Pupil Personnel Services, who shared with the Committee *A Decade of Accomplishment: 1994-2004*, via a PowerPoint presentation (attachment 2).

Chair Duncan Leith recessed the meeting for five minutes at 8:05 PM.

Chair Leith reconvened the meeting at 8:10 PM.

Member René Rodriguez left the meeting at 8:10 PM.

Following the presentation, the Superintendent again commended past School Committees and the community at large for its commitment to the education of the students of the District. He advised the Committee that the community should be reminded that there has been a benefit to the funding provided to the District for education both to the students and the community whose value has increased because of the value-added education provided by the staff of the District. The Superintendent reminded the Committee that many of the support staff who helped teachers in the classroom to implement new technology and enrichment are now eliminated. He advised the Committee that the educational staff erosion cannot continue and still maintain the high level of achievement that has been experienced for the past ten years. The Superintendent informed the Committee that the budget he will present to the committee for FY06 will be sufficient to maintain and restore much needed instructional support and the staff that is needed to continue the progressive achievement as evidenced by the ten years of advancement presented to the Committee through the presentation.

Chair Duncan Leith reported that he would be sending a letter to the editor of *The Landmark* to note the inaccuracies of the information contained in the *Worcester Magazine* article recently distributed. The District would have been twenty-third, not first in per pupil spending, had the correct per pupil financial information been used. The *Worcester Magazine* was to have printed some form of correction and Chair Leith asked Committee members to notify the Superintendent if any such correction appears in future editions of the *Worcester Magazine*.

The Superintendent and Supervisor of Pupil Personnel Services Jason Newton entertained questions from the Committee. When asked why some parents had not yet received their students' scores, the Superintendent reported that the tests were given later in the spring than in previous years so scores on the tests were not available until sometime in the late summer. Principals were distributing the scores to parents the first few weeks of the school year.

When asked if the District had compared other Massachusetts communities who used the Metropolitan Achievement Tests, the Superintendent reported that this is a norm-referenced test and the results are compared to national averages, not State averages. The Superintendent did not see the value in comparing like communities in Massachusetts with a norm-referenced test, as that type of comparison is done with the results of the MCAS tests. Following inquiry from a member, the Superintendent informed the Committee that the District results of the MAT-8 tests are public record. The District will be sharing the PowerPoint presentation with principals and District staff and posting it on the District's website, along with all the District's achievement results.

I. Public Hearing

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

II. Secretary's Report

A. Approval of the 1079th Regular meeting Minutes of the WRSD Committee held on August 9, 2004 – approved by consensus with Members Elizabeth Brennan, Charles Capparelli, Clifford Connell, and Kelly Maxwell abstaining.

III. Treasurer's Report/Financial Statement

Chairman Duncan Leith reminded the Committee that if there were questions regarding the Comptroller's report that Members should

contact the Superintendent; if there were questions regarding the Treasurer's report, Members should contact Business/Finance Subcommittee Chair Natalie Mello.

Following inquiry from a member, the Superintendent reported that the Member Towns of Princeton and Sterling have opted to pay for courtesy bussing in their respective towns. The other three towns have offered courtesy bussing to parents, for a fee. Many parents have not opted to pay for bussing, but rather have decided to have their students walk or the parents are providing transportation. When the District implemented courtesy bussing last year, the District saved the cost of five busses, a considerable savings.

The Superintendent reported that the open enrollment period for health insurance ends on September 20th and that a comprehensive report will be made available to the Committee in early October. The Superintendent reminded the Committee that the District is currently \$100,000 short in the projected reimbursement for transportation, per the Cherry Sheet, and that projections on health insurance indicate that the District will be well over budget in that category as well.

Following inquiry regarding the process for numbering attachments in a Superintendent's Report, the Superintendent reported that he would review the staff impact of providing the date with the attachment number.

IV. Committee Reports

A. Student Advisory Committee

No election has taken place yet at the high school.

B. Management Subcommittee (D. Leith, Chair, D. Benson, C. Capparelli, P. Gates, D. Gibbs, M. James, N. Mello, J. Nunnari, M. Watson)

Chair Duncan Leith reported that the Management Subcommittee has not met but that he would poll the Members to determine a convenient time to meet.

C. Education Subcommittee (M. Watson, Chair, C. Bazinet, E. Brennan, A. Livdahl, J. Nunnari, N. Plourde, R. Rodriguez)

Management Subcommittee Chair Margaret Watson reported that she will schedule an Education Subcommittee meeting following a meeting with the Superintendent.

D. Business/Finance Subcommittee (N. Mello, Chair, C. Connell, D Gibbs, M. James, J. Kane, K. Maxwell, C. Rauh, M.. Sherman)

Business/Finance Subcommittee Chair Natalie Mello reported that the minutes of the prior meeting will be included in the next Superintendent's Report. The Subcommittee met recently to discuss the process of hiring Treasurer. Chair Mello shared with the Subcommittee an opinion issued by District Counsel Leo McCabe regarding the process.

The Business/Finance Subcommittee is scheduled to meet on September 14, 2004 in the Curriculum Center at 6:00 PM to review the resumes of prospective candidates. Because one candidate asked that the review of resumes not be done in public session, the review of the applications will be done in executive session. A final slate of candidates will be interviewed by the Business/Finance Subcommittee; all School Committee members are invited to observe. The Business/Finance Subcommittee will make a recommendation to the School Committee for the appointment of the Treasurer at the October School Committee meeting.

E. Community Outreach Subcommittee

Chair Duncan Leith reported that he will complete the appointment process for this Subcommittee and members will be notified. Any Members interested in being appointed to this subcommittee should notify Chair Leith.

F. Ad-Hoc Subcommittees

1. Review the Process for the Selection of a Superintendent (N. Plourde, Chair, C. Connell, M. James, A. Livdahl, J. Nunnari)

Ad-Hoc Subcommittee Chair Norman Plourde reported that the subcommittee met on August 16, 2004. Ad-Hoc

Subcommittee Chair Plourde distributed copies of the minutes of the August 16th meeting and the agenda for the September 20th meeting (attachments 4 and 5). Ad-Hoc Subcommittee Chair Plourde recommended that Members keep a separate file for the information regarding this process. The subcommittee is one meeting away from a recommendation to the School Committee.

The Superintendent reported that there are Special Town Meetings in Holden and Sterling on September 20th and, therefore, pursuant to the School Committee By-Laws, the subcommittee cannot meet on that day. The meeting will be re-posted for September 21, 2004 at Central Tree Middle School at 6:30 PM.

G. Building Committees

1. High School

Chair Duncan Leith reported that contrary to the media coverage, much progress has been made. Chair Leith reported that three different groups have jurisdiction in part at the high school: Department of Environmental Protection, Department of Recreation and the Holden Conservation Commission. Measures should have been taken prior to any rain but that measures have now been taken. The Holden Conservation Commission met on September 9, 2004 and lifted the Cease and Desist order and will return to check the progress on September 16, 2004.

Retention ponds have been dug and the construction of the gymnasium will begin.

The Superintendent reported that there has been a problem with unsuitable fill on the site. The fill must be removed and the cost in the contract is by the truckload. To date the evaluation of unsuitable fill has cost the project an additional \$180,000, and much more will be needed. The Superintendent also reported that the General Contractor is responsible for the stabilization of the site.

The Superintendent reported that the general contractor has been in contact with high school abutters who reported damage following the recent heavy rain. The resolution will be agreed to between the general contractor and the homeowners. The District is addressing, through the project management firm, the erosion issues of Mrs. Wilson.

When asked about the process for approval of changeorders, the Superintendent reported that the general contractor brings a changeorder to the architect who reviews the proposal; the architect brings the changeorder to the Building Committee who will approve or disapprove the request, following a recommendation by the project management firm. The Superintendent would then review the changeorder and approve payment or return the changeorder to the Building Committee with a recommendation to not approve it.

The Superintendent reported that any specialist that must be hired due to not securing the site erosion will be the responsibility of the general contractor.

2. Rutland – Naquag/Central Tree
3. Rutland – Elementary School – John Nunnari

Member John Nunnari deferred to Member Elizabeth Brennan who reported that the Rutland Building Committee met recently to discuss proposed reductions, as well as concerns expressed by the Superintendent in correspondence to the Rutland Building Committee. Member Brennan also reported that changes in construction laws have presented additional challenges to the project. Rutland's legal counsel will be request a waiver of the requirements of the new legislation, as the project was already underway when the legislature was enacted.

Member Brennan reported that the Building Committee did not vote to make any of the suggested changes presented by the Superintendent. The Superintendent

reminded the Committee that the School Committee will absorb the cost and the responsibility of not providing adequate resources for the diversion of water on the site.

The Superintendent advised the School Committee that if the Town of Rutland decides to increase the cost of the project, the increase must be approved by the School Committee. The School Committee could approve with conditions and insist that the project include specific items that have been deleted from the design and yet the Superintendent has deemed critical to the future maintenance and upkeep of the building.

4. Sterling

The Superintendent reported that the parking lot addition is scheduled for the middle of September.

- H. School Council Reports: Central Tree Middle School (C. Rauh), Chocksett Middle School (D Gibbs), Davis Hill Elementary School (C. Bazinet), Dawson Elementary School (M.. James), Houghton Elementary School (N. Plourde), Mayo Elementary School (M. Watson), Mountview Middle School (M. Sherman), Naquag Elementary school (E. Brennan), Paxton Center School (A. Livdahl), Thomas Prince School (C. Connell), and Wachusett Regional High School (K. Maxwell)

V. Superintendent's Report

A. Discussion of Report

In response to inquiry, the Superintendent clarified the information included with the Superintendent's Report on the cost for late busses, per town, per bus was an annual cost. Some interest was expressed on whether the District had funds to reinstate the late busses. The Superintendent reminded the Committee that the District already has a pending shortfall due to the unanticipated amount of the health benefit line item and that there is only \$25,000 in the Excess & Deficiency fund. The cost for late busses was proposed to parents and to the Member Towns and there was no interest in picking up the cost. The

Superintendent suggested that perhaps this could be an agenda item for the Community Outreach Subcommittee.

Chair Duncan Leith referred the issue to the Business/Finance Subcommittee, as it is a financial issue.

Motion: To extend the meeting by fifteen minutes
(D. Gibbs)
(D. Benson)

Vote:

In favor:

Duncan Leith
Donald Benson
Cynthia Bazinet
Elizabeth Brennan
Charles Capparelli
Clifford Connell
Patricia Gates
David Gibbs
Mark James
Alice Livdahl
Kelly Maxwell
Norman Plourde
Michael Sherman
Margaret Watson

Opposed:

John Kane
Natalie Mello
John Nunnari
Cheryl Rauh

(Motion passed 14-4)

Motion: That the Chair refer the following motion to the Community Outreach Subcommittee for discussion and to provide a recommendation to the School Committee at the next School Committee meeting. Motion: That all food and beverages sold on school premises meet the same USDA dietary guidelines as cafeteria lunches.

(C. Connell)

(K. Maxwell)

Chair Leith reported that a motion was not necessary and referred the issue to the Community Outreach Subcommittee. Since the Subcommittee has yet to be appointed, the recommendation may not be forthcoming at the next School Committee meeting in October.

Member Norman Plourde reported that he has gathered information on this subject and will forward the information to the Superintendent for inclusion in the next Superintendent's Report.

When asked about the Essential Schools Grant, the Superintendent explained that the District will not appoint staff supported by this grant until the funds are in hand. The funds were reduced in prior years and the District had to absorb the remaining cost of staff salaries. No critical services are impacted by waiting until the receipt of funds to appoint staff.

Chair Duncan Leith reported that he had received correspondence from Kimberly Ferguson, Chair, Holden Selectboard, regarding the District applying for a waiver from the Department of Revenue because the District utilized one-time funds (Excess & Deficiency) to reduce assessments (attachment 6). The Superintendent distributed copies of information regarding the use over time of Excess & Deficiency funds (attachment 7). The Superintendent advised the Committee that over \$900,000 has been used to reduce Member Towns' assessments. Chair Duncan Leith will respond to Chair Ferguson and will include the information regarding the Excess & Deficiency fund.

Move: To adjourn

(J. Nunnari)
(J. Kane)

Vote:

In favor:

Donald Benson
Cynthia Bazinet
David Gibbs

John Kane
Alice Livdahl
Kelly Maxwell
Natalie Mello
John Nunnari

Opposed:

Duncan Leith
Elizabeth Brennan
Charles Capparelli
Clifford Connell
Patricia Gates
Mark James
Norman Plourde
Cheryl Rauh
Michael Sherman
Margaret Watson

(Motion failed 8 - 10)

IX. Adjournment

Motion: To adjourn

(M. Sherman)
(N. Mello)

Vote:

In favor:

Duncan Leith
Donald Benson
Cynthia Bazinet
Elizabeth Brennan
Charles Capparelli
Clifford Connell
Patricia Gates
David Gibbs
Mark James
John Kane
Alice Livdahl
Kelly Maxwell
Natalie Mello
John Nunnari

Norman Plourde
Cheryl Rauh
Michael Sherman
Margaret Watson

Opposed:
None

(Motion passed unanimously)

Respectfully submitted,

Alfred D. Tutela, Superintendent of Schools

ADT:ss/School Committee/Minutes