

WACHUSETT REGIONAL SCHOOL DISTRICT

HOLDEN ♦ PAXTON ♦ PRINCETON ♦ RUTLAND ♦ STERLING

Minutes

Regular Meeting #1066, Monday, November 10, 2003  
7:30 PM

Modular Cafeteria  
Wachusett Regional High School

*Committee Members Present:*

Duncan Leith, Chair	John Nunnari (8:20 PM)
Natalie Mello, Vice-Chair	Norman Plourde
Donald Benson	René Rodriguez
Charles Capparelli	Julie Scott
Clifford Connell	Michael Sherman
David Dickman	Tammy Tod
Patricia Gates	Margaret Watson
Mark James	Patricia Young
Alice Livdahl	

*Committee Members Absent:*

Elizabeth Brennan	John Rokicki
-------------------	--------------

*Administration Present:*

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

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

Chairman Duncan Leith called the meeting to order at 7:04 PM.

Chairman Leith reported that, using the Chair's prerogative, he was taking items out of order and turned the meeting over to the Superintendent, who addressed Item VB1.

Approval of Amended FY04 Appropriation and Transfer from Excess & Deficiency Funds, pending certification from Department of Revenue

Motion: To approve the Amended FY04 Appropriation, as presented (attachment 2), including the transfer of \$645,042 from Excess & Deficiency, subject to certification from the Department of Revenue for the following:

\$126,000 for FY03 oil deferment  
\$400,000 for assessment reduction  
\$59,825 for assessment reduction for long-term high school  
\$59,217 for technology revolving account  
(N. Mello)  
(D. Dickman)

A friendly amendment was offered by Member Donald Benson to not transfer \$119,142 from E & D at this time, the amounts for long-term high school and technology revolving account. This was accepted by Members Natalie Mello and David Dickman. The Superintendent informed the Committee that the recommendations were made according to School Committee direction and that if the Committee reduced the amount, there would be more *Excess & Deficiency* funds to offset the proposed budget cuts.

The Superintendent explained that the reduction in salaries was due to attrition and that the reduction in benefits was due to negotiations with employee collective bargain agents to increase co-payments for doctor's visits, which resulted in lower health insurance premiums

Roll call vote, on main motion, which reads: To approve the Amended FY04 Appropriation, as presented, including the transfer of \$526,000 from *Excess & Deficiency*, subject to certification from the Department of Revenue for the following:

\$126,000 for FY03 oil deferment  
\$400,000 for assessment reduction

In favor:

Duncan Leith  
Natalie Mello  
Donald Benson  
Charles Capparelli  
Clifford Connell  
David Dickman  
Patricia Gates  
Mark James  
Alice Livdahl  
Norman Plourde  
René Rodriguez  
Julie Scott

Michael Sherman  
Tammy Tod  
Margaret Watson  
Patricia Young

Opposed;  
None

(Motion passed unanimously)

Chair Duncan Leith recognized Member Patricia Gates. Member Gates reported to the Committee that she had met with Member Clifford Connell and Princeton Selectboard representative Stanley Moss to try to come to agreement on an assessment figure that could be supported by both the Town of Princeton and the School Committee. Conversations and meetings occurred throughout the week and included Senator Harriette Chandler who reported that a local decision would be a better solution than having the Commissioner of Education set the District's budget.

Motion: To send to the Member Towns a proposed assessment reduction of \$1,141,148, which shall become an actual assessment reduction if and only if it is adopted by the Member Towns as required by the Regional Agreement.

(P. Gates)  
(C. Connell)

Member Patricia Gates reported that, as part of this proposal, the assessments above net school spending, debt service, and transportation are estimated to be \$200,000 for Princeton and \$890,000 for Holden.

The Superintendent informed the Committee that the reductions would be in *Instructional Support* and *Building & Grounds* and would include no staff reductions. The proposal would include the near depletion of the *Excess & Deficiency* ( E & D).

The Superintendent reported that there is still uncertainty in tuition costs. This proposal is preferable to the principals than continued distraction in schools.

Chair Duncan Leith recognized Princeton Selectboard representative Stanley Moss, who confirmed that the goal of the discussions centered around the development of a framework acceptable to both Princeton and Holden. Mr. Moss also reported that he did not want to see this process repeated again next year. The Princeton Selectboard will act this week to set a Special Town Meeting, which

would not be scheduled until early December. He reported that he would stand up and support this proposal.

Chair Duncan Leith reported that once notified by Members Gates and Connell of discussions with Princeton Selectboard representative Stanley Moss, the Superintendent notified he and Vice-Chair Natalie Mello and kept them continuously informed. He reported to them that a proposal would be coming forward to the Committee, as agreed to by Princeton representatives. On behalf of the Committee and himself, he thanked Members Gates and Connell.

The Superintendent informed the Committee that *Instructional Support* includes books, materials, supplies, maintenance contracts, and book orders for next year

The Superintendent reported that he thought that the Commissioner would be liberal if there is a solution ahead, to be decided at an early December Special Town Meetings.

The Superintendent reminded the Committee that the assessment would be reduced if and only if one or more of the towns approve the proposal at Town Meetings.

The issue was raised of the necessity for an override. Members Patricia Gates and Clifford Connell reported that the commitment from Princeton Selectboard representative Stanley Moss was to support this proposal without an override, but that the funding of the District's budget is a selectboard decision, not a School Committee decision.

Following inquiry, the Superintendent reported that the District is in more jeopardy for bond rating than the towns because of the borrowing for the high school. The Superintendent also reported that the Department of Revenue will not set the tax rates until the budget issue is resolved for Member Towns which have not accepted the School Committee assessment.

Roll call vote:

In favor:

Duncan Leith  
Natalie Mello  
Donald Benson  
Charles Capparelli  
Clifford Connell  
David Dickman  
Patricia Gates  
Mark James

Alice Livdahl  
John Nunnari  
Norman Plourde  
René Rodriguez  
Julie Scott  
Michael Sherman  
Tammy Tod  
Margaret Watson  
Patricia Young

Opposed;  
None

(Motion passed unanimous)

Chair Duncan Leith returned to the original agenda.

I. Public Hearing

A. Representative Lewis Evangelidis

Representative Lewis Evangelidis was not in attendance.

B. Others

Denise Chasse, Holden, read a prepared statement (attachment 3).

Brian O'Donnell, Holden, applauded the Committee for its action regarding the budget. He commented on the Superintendent's presentation to the Holden Selectboard last week, which included the possible closing of a Holden school. He suggested that perhaps the Rutland project should be halted, until firmer budgetary information is available.

II. Secretary's Report

A. Approval of 1065<sup>th</sup> Regular Meeting Minutes of the WRSD Committee held on October 27, 2003 – approved by consensus

A question was raised about discussions with the WREA. The Superintendent reported that he had contacted the WREA and

that there was no change in the leadership's position but that they are always willing to sit down and discuss District concerns.

### III. Treasurer's Report/Financial Statements

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.

### IV. Committee Reports

#### A. Student Advisory Committee (C. Brennan, R. Hinson, A. Vaillancourt)

There were no representatives from the Student Advisory Committee in attendance. Chair Duncan Leith reported that both the Boys and Girls Cross Country teams won in Gardner and that the football team remains undefeated.

#### B. Management Subcommittee (D. Leith, Chair, N. Mello, D. Benson, C. Capparelli, P. Gates, A. Livdahl, J. Rokicki, J. Scott)

Chair Duncan Leith will schedule a meeting following the finalization of the budget.

#### C. Education Subcommittee (J. Scott, Chair, E. Brennan, M. James, J. Nunnari, N. Plourde, R. Rodriguez, M. Watson)

Education Subcommittee Chair Julie Scott reported that the subcommittee met November 3, 2003. A draft policy on class size was discussed. It was decided that more research was needed and the revised policy would be brought forward at the next meeting. The next Education Subcommittee meeting is scheduled for Monday, November 17, 2003, at 6:00 PM at the Curriculum Center.

#### D. Business/Finance Subcommittee (N. Mello, Chair, C. Connell, D. Dickman, D. Leith, M. Sherman, P. Young)

Business/Finance Subcommittee Chair Natalie Mello reported that the subcommittee met November 3, 2003. The first item on the agenda was the high school borrowing.

1. Recommendation to Use Option 6A for High School Borrowing

Motion: To direct the Treasurer to use Option 6A, as presented, for the High School Borrowing (attachment 4).

(N. Mello)

(R. Rodriguez)

Roll call vote:

In favor:

Duncan Leith  
Natalie Mello  
Donald Benson  
Charles Capparelli  
Clifford Connell  
David Dickman  
Patricia Gates  
Mark James  
Alice Livdahl  
Norman Plourde  
René Rodriguez  
Julie Scott  
Michael Sherman  
Tammy Tod  
Margaret Watson  
Patricia Young

Opposed:

None

Abstained:

John Nunnari

(Motion passed 16-0-1)

The subcommittee also continued discussions about the budget. The Superintendent reported via a PowerPoint presentation the impact of the State shortfall of \$866,000 and the impact of Holden's Proposal A.

Another meeting has not been scheduled.

E. Ad-Hoc Subcommittees

1. Community Outreach (M. Sherman, Chair, E. Brennan, C. Capparelli, C. Connell, A. Livdahl)

Ad-Hoc Subcommittee Chair Michael Sherman reported that the subcommittee had met and discussed ways to get out into the community. Chair Sherman requested correction of the minutes of the meeting of October 29, 2003 to reflect that Mayo's PTA meeting on November 18, 2003 was initiated by the Mayo PTA. Holden representatives were invited to Mayo to have a question and answer session with parents. A similar request will be coming from Dawson and Davis Hill.

Considerable discussion occurred at the subcommittee meeting regarding about long-term efforts to improve communication with the community. The subcommittee is looking at possibly doing a survey of the community, recognizing that there are no funds to support this effort. The idea of a college student participating was suggested and contacts with area colleges are taking place. The subcommittee is suggesting that a concerted effort be made by School Committee members to have discussion articles and letters to the editor in *The Landmark*. Next meeting of the subcommittee is scheduled for Wednesday, November 12, 2003, at 6:30 PM in the Curriculum Center.

F. Building Committees

1. High School – John Rokicki

Chair Duncan Leith reported that there was a meeting with Holden Town Planner Pamela Harding and Holden Director of Growth Management Dennis Lipka regarding the upcoming Planning Board meeting. Chair Leith also reported that models of the project are available and will be shared with the Committee at the November 24, 2003 School Committee meeting.



Superintendent reported that correspondence from the Department of Education indicates that the modular classrooms will not be included as part of the project and, therefore, would not be eligible for reimbursement. The correspondence did indicate that the final determination on this will be made at the time of the audit. The Superintendent will be corresponding with the Department of Education for clarity on this issue.

2. Holden – Julie Scott

Member Julie Scott reported that the Holden Building Committee met on November 4, 2003 and voted 4-1 to dissolve the Holden Building Committee. Member Scott expressed concern that the Committee NOT be dissolved as there continue to be outstanding issues, especially at Dawson.

3. Rutland – Naquag/Central Tree – John Rokicki

Correspondence from the Department of Education indicated that the documentation for the final audit is due at the Department of Education in March. The Superintendent has sent a letter to the town informing the town of the deadline.

4. Rutland – Elementary School – John Nunnari

The Rutland Building Committee is scheduled to meet November 13, 2003; the last meeting was cancelled due to the Rutland Special Town Meeting.

Following inquiry, Member John Nunnari explained why the Committee decided not to have a construction management firm. He indicated that there could be problems with different points of view between the Committee, the architect, the Clerk of the Works, and the construction management firm. The Committee felt that the cost should be used in the building rather than in people's salary.

The Superintendent explained that a project manager replaces the Clerk of the Works and looks out for the best of the project.

5. Sterling

Member Norman Plourde reported that what was initially additional parking has become a new driveway. This will help the flow of traffic.

G. School Council Reports:

Central Tree Middle School (J. Nunnari)

No report.

Chocksett Middle School (C. Capparelli)

No report.

Davis Hill Elementary School (R. Rodriguez)

Member René Rodriguez reported that the Davis Hill School Council met recently. Members expressed concerns about the ongoing budget issues. Communication with community is a high priority.

Dawson Elementary School (M. James)

Member Mark James reported that the Dawson School Council met recently. Discussion took place on the budget. The council has established subcommittees to work in two curriculum areas: diversity in curriculum and ways to present a more challenging curriculum.

Houghton Elementary School (N. Plourde)

No report.

Mayo Elementary School (M. Watson)

Member Margaret Watson reported that the Mayo School Council met on October 7, 2003 and WILL MEET ON

November 25, 2003. Last year the council developed a questionnaire on communication, with the results to follow. The council is considering a new survey for this year, but the topic has not been decided.

Mountview Middle School (D. Benson)

No report.

Naquag Elementary School (E. Brennan)

No report.

Paxton Center School (A. Livdahl)

Member Alice Livdahl reported that IN ANTICIPATION OF the Paxton School Council MEETING ~~met recently and~~ one of the issues TO BE discussed ~~was~~ WILL BE the process for finding a replacement principal. The Superintendent reported that the process is ongoing and is the same process used to appoint any principal. Member Livdahl reported that on Saturday, November 8, 2003, the new playground was built. The cement is to be poured this week and then the playground should be inspected before the students use the facility.

Thomas Prince School (C. Connell)

Member Clifford Connell reported that the Thomas Prince School Council met recent and the members of the council are energized by the challenge facing the community due to the exodus of students to other District schools.

Wachusett Regional High School (N. Mello, T. Tod)

Member Natalie Mello reported that the Wachusett School Council met on November 5, 2003 and discussed three items: student discipline, facilities update, and budget issues and concerns. The council is scheduled to meet the first Wednesday of every month.

The Superintendent reported that Principal Thomas Pandiscio is exploring alternative sites for the 2004 graduation due to the probable condition of the site in June due to construction.

V. Superintendent's Report

A. Discussion of Report

Following inquiry, the Superintendent explained that number of limited English language learners has not increased due to school choice.

The Superintendent reported that the shortfall payment from the Town of Holden should be resolved once the budget is resolved.

B. Recommendations requiring action by the School Committee

VI. Public Hearing

Kim Paquette, Holden, thanked the Committee for working together to reach a compromise. She expressed hope that an impact report would be made available following tonight's proposed reduction in assessments. She commented that the budget process and compromise comes at a cost and is slowly eroding the District. She wondered why town leaders would allow let this happen, that this is not about education, but rather about power. Education Reform removed the power from municipal side but made for better schools and better curriculum.

VII. Unfinished Business

VIII. New Business

A. Member Tammy Tod Issue

Member Tammy Tod reported that School Committee members had received correspondence from former school secretary Deann Seeley and expressed concerns regarding her ability to be considered as a substitute employee or volunteer.

Motion: to direct the Chair to send a letter of apology  
(T. Tod)

The motion died due to lack of a second.

Chair Duncan Leith reported that this is a personnel issue and whether directed or not, would not interfere in a personnel issue.

The Superintendent agreed to initiate a meeting with Ms. Seeley so that she might talk about her concerns.

IX. Adjournment

Motion: To adjourn

(J. Scott)  
(N. Mello)

Vote:

In favor:

Duncan Leith  
Natalie Mello  
Donald Benson  
Charles Capparelli  
Clifford Connell  
David Dickman  
Patricia Gates  
Mark James  
Alice Livdahl  
John Nunnari  
Norman Plourde  
René Rodriguez  
Julie Scott  
Michael Sherman  
Tammy Tod  
Margaret Watson  
Patricia Young

Opposed:

(Motion passed unanimously)

The meeting adjourned at 9:15 PM

Respectfully submitted,

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

ADT:ss/School Committee/Minutes