

WACHUSETT REGIONAL SCHOOL DISTRICT

HOLDEN ♦ PAXTON ♦ PRINCETON ♦ RUTLAND ♦ STERLING

Minutes

Regular Meeting #1067, Monday, November 24, 2003
7:00 PM

Modular Cafeteria
Wachusett Regional High School

Committee Members Present:

Duncan Leith, Chair	Alice Livdahl
Natalie Mello, Vice-Chair	John Nunnari (8:04 PM)
Elizabeth Brennan	Norman Plourde
Donald Benson	John Rokicki
Charles Capparelli	Julie Scott
Clifford Connell	Michael Sherman
David Dickman	Margaret Watson
Patricia Gates	Patricia Young
Mark James	

Committee Members Absent:

René Rodriguez	Tammy Tod
----------------	-----------

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 7:05 PM.

Chairman Leith introduced Roger Hoit of Strekalovsky Hoit Raymond, architects for the high school project who presented the models of the high school project and explained that the design is 95% complete. Mr. Hoit reviewed the phasing of the project. The project is still scheduled to be complete by the summer of 2006.

Roger Hoit explained that the circulation in the new building would be expanded, utilizing four hallways north/south and four hallways east/west. He also reported

that the Wachusett project is one of only three projects accepted as a green school, which will provide additional grant funds. Being a green school project is defined as meeting minimum standards for cost and energy efficiency for the future. Every classroom in the building will have operable natural light.

Following inquiry, Roger Hoit reported that the school is designed for a maximum capacity of 2,075 students but that there is room for more students, depending on the educational program in place at the school and the number of students in each class. He reported that the models would be on display at the high school during the project.

Chairman Duncan Leith recognized the Superintendent who presented, via a PowerPoint presentation, *Value-Added Educational Opportunities* (attachment 2). Following the presentation the Superintendent distributed information regarding predicted vs. actual scores on MCAS tests for the District as a whole and by school (attachments 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, and 14).

Following the presentation the Superintendent re-stated that Naquag is an example of a true success story. The scores at Naquag were lower than others in the District; the Superintendent changed the leadership at Naquag, bringing in a veteran principal, Jack Benoit, who focused on achievement, utilizing proven interventions, including student individual learning systems. Committee members were reminded that this type of intervention does not come free. The funding for the Model Teachers was cut this year; other cuts in instructional support will continue to erode the District's instructional program. The Superintendent reported that, although the focus appears to have only been on the budget, the Superintendent and staff have not lost sight of the function of a school district, the education of its children.

The Superintendent explained, following inquiry, that the process for the development and implementation of State and District curriculum begins with the State Frameworks. Teachers and administrators then develop the District Curriculum for School Committee approval. Following that, the Task Forces develop Curriculum Guides. Training programs are then implemented. The District Curriculum and Curriculum Guides are reviewed every five years. Curriculum support is constantly being made available to teachers, including Curriculum Group icons and curriculum aids, all posted on the website for easy access.

The Superintendent explained that the tracking of student achievement will continue and will show trends, not causality. The impact of budget cuts will definitely be felt by the District; there will be lesser education.

I. Public Hearing

Kate White, Holden, thanked Holden Representatives for attending Mayo PTA meeting and appreciate the help of administration.

Maureen Floryan, Holden, read a prepared statement (attachment 15).

David Gibbs, Sterling, read a prepared statement (attachment 16).

Tony Seeley, Holden, read a prepared statement (attachment 17).

Melinda Johnson, Paxton, read a prepared statement (attachment 18).

David White, Vice-chair Holden Selectboard, complimented the architects for the presentation on the high school project. He also extended his appreciation to staff regarding the educational presentation. Selectman White reported that the Holden Selectboard voted 3-1 to make a counter-offer to the School Committee for Holden's portion of the RASA of \$650,000 rather than the \$892,000 proposed by the School Committee. The Holden Selectboard objected to the School Committee proposal because the board was not involved in the process. He requested that the Business/Finance Subcommittee reconvene and continue negotiations. He reported that the Holden Selectboard is not looking for the District to be at Foundation level but at a level below what the School Committee has proposed.

The Superintendent reminded the Holden Selectboard representatives and the Committee that the official assessment is \$1.3 million above what was approved but that the Committee voted that the Committee would be willing to reduce Holden's assessment to \$892,000, subject to a fourth Member Town approval of the number negotiated with Princeton.

Chairman Duncan Leith allowed Committee members to question Selectman David White. Chair Leith clarified to the Committee that this is not \$650,00 vs. \$890,00 but rather it is \$1.14 million vs. \$1.3 million, because the School Committee must look at the entire impact of the proposal on the District budget. A comment was made that special education costs are mandatory and are not necessarily reimbursed by the State.

As a point of information, Member Patricia Gates reported that at 6:00 PM the Princeton Selectboard held an emergency meeting and requested that the Princeton representatives bring to the School Committee the board's recommendation to accept the new Holden proposal.

II. Secretary's Report

- A. Approval of 1066th Regular Meeting Minutes of the WRSD Committee held on November 10, 2003 – approved by consensus with the following changes:

On page 11, under Paxton Center School, the first sentence should read, "Member Alice Livdahl reported that in anticipation of the Paxton School Council meeting one of the issues to be discussed will be the process for finding a replacement principal."

On page 9 under Holden Building Committee report, the word "not" should be inserted between "Committee" and "be".

On page 10 at the bottom of page to add "will meet" before "on November 25, 2003".

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.

Following inquiry, the Superintendent reported to the Committee that the banks used by the District are used for different reasons, some convenience for such accounts as activity accounts for the schools, and some because of rates. The bulk of the District funds is deposited in Boston Safe and only is transferred to Fleet for payroll purposes. The Superintendent informed the Committee that there are very few choices available to the Treasurer for investing District funds.

IV. Committee Reports

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

No members of the Student Advisory Committee were present. Chair Duncan Leith reported that the undefeated football team will be playing Holy Name on Thanksgiving Day and that the Super Bowl is scheduled for December 6th at Worcester State College. The Superintendent will be inviting the football team, coach, and principal to the December meeting to be recognized, whether or not the team is successful at the Super Bowl.

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

Chair Duncan Leith reported that the Management Subcommittee has not met. The Superintendent consulted with District Counsel on information requested regarding possible changes to the Regional Agreement. The information will be forthcoming.

- 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 Education Subcommittee met on November 17, 2003. The subcommittee reviewed class size issues. A draft policy came out of the meeting but concern was expressed as to the ramifications of such a policy. The impact of such a policy will be done by the District. A draft policy will be included in the Superintendent's report prior to the December 15, 2003 meeting.

The next meeting of the Education Subcommittee is scheduled for December 15, 2003 at 6:00 PM in the Modular Cafeteria.

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

Business/Finance Subcommittee Chair Natalie Mello has scheduled the next Business/Finance Subcommittee meeting for Thursday, December 11, 2003 at 6:30 PM in the Curriculum Center to evaluate the Treasurer. The evaluation must be completed in order that the Treasurer be re-appointed in December. The Treasurer's appointment is on a calendar basis, rather than a fiscal year basis because of audit report timetable. A temporary extension could be made, but must be done at the December School Committee meeting. Chair Mello reported that she would be sending out information to Subcommittee members and asked them to review the information regarding the Treasurer's evaluation prior to meeting.

Following inquiry, the Superintendent reported that if there is not an approved budget by December 1st, the Commissioner of Education would assume operation of the District and would have access to Cherry Sheet aid and any other aid available to Member Towns including SBA payments. As of this date, there are four Districts in the Commonwealth in this situation: Berlin-Boylston, Ashburnham-Westminster, Goshen-Chesterfield and Wachusett.

The Superintendent reported that he will be adding 2.5 ABA program assistants and/or special education aides due to services required in IEP's of new students entering the District. In addition there are four additional children entering ECC in need of extraordinary services. The alternative would be costly out-of-District tuition. The District will make further reductions to absorb these costs.

Following inquiry, the Superintendent reported that Massachusetts Association of School Superintendents (MASS) did an analysis in 2001 on special education. The Superintendent will share the report again with the Committee. The Superintendent reminded the Committee that the FY05 budget assessments start with a \$2 million shortfall, due to negotiated salary increases and FY04 *Excess & Deficiency* reductions, which does not include health benefits increases or tuition increases. There will be approximately \$100,000 available in Choice tuition revenue to offset a small portion of the increase.

The Superintendent reported that District staff has just compiled information for the NESDEC enrollment projections. The information will be included in the next Superintendent's Report. The NESDEC report will be available in January.

Chair Duncan Leith distributed a copy of Holden's warrant for Special Town Meeting on December 8 2003 at Mountview Middle School (attachment 19). Chair Leith reported that citizens have requested information regarding the impact of Holden's counter-offer. This information has already been made available to the public and is included in the information on the impact of Holden's \$250,000 proposal. The impact will be staff.

The Superintendent reported that the \$1.14 million was not found money, as was suggested by some during public comment. The \$1.14 million includes all remaining *Excess & Deficiency* funds, although not yet certified. It also includes a \$100,000 reduction in *Buildings & Grounds*, in deferred maintenance. The remaining funds would be from *Instructional Support*.

Following inquiry the Superintendent reported that should the Commissioner assume operation of the District, the School Committee will no longer have authority to make any FY04 appropriation decisions but will have policy and Superintendent and

Treasurer oversight authority. The Superintendent restated that this situation has never happened in the Commonwealth before and the exact procedure is not available from the Commissioner's office. Once the final appropriation assessment is determined by the Commissioner, the shortfall payment from Holden will be addressed by the State. The Commissioner has indicated that the Commissioner will immediately extend the 1/12th budget for the month of December. The DOE has also expressed a willingness to wait until after the Princeton Special town Meeting before intervening. An analysis of the budget will then take place, with the establishment of a final budget following.

Motion: That the Committee reject the \$650,000 RASA offer made by the Town of Holden in its correspondence dated November 19, 2003

(D. Benson)
(C. Capparelli)

Following inquiry, the Superintendent reminded the Committee that the impact on the District budget would be approximately \$600,000, not \$242,000. The School Committee has gone to the marrow of the District of the District's budget and that any further reductions would be tantamount to removing bone from the body.

Motion: To move the question

(M. James)
(J. Scott)

Roll call vote:

In favor:

Mark James
John Nunnari
Alice Livdahl
Norman Plourde
John Rokicki
Patricia Young

Opposed:

Duncan Leith
Natalie Mello
Donald Benson
Elizabeth Brennan
Charles Capparelli
Clifford Connell

David Dickman
Patricia Gates
Julie Scott
Michael Sherman
Margaret Watson

(Motion failed 6-11)

Chair Duncan Leith reported again to the Committee that he had been kept informed by the Superintendent while negotiations with Princeton were taking place. In addition, on Sunday night, following a week's worth of negotiations, it was reported by Princeton Selectboard representative Stanley Moss that he met with Holden Town Manager Brian Bullock and Holden Finance Chair Joseph Giotta to discuss the Princeton compromise.

Roll call vote:

In favor:

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

Opposed:

None

(Motion passed unanimously)

The Superintendent informed the Committee that he would like to establish a working committee comprised of the Chairs of the Subcommittees, including the Ad-hoc Subcommittee on Community

Outreach to help establish an agenda for a retreat for the School Committee, to be held on Saturday, January 17, 2004. There was consensus by the Committee that such a retreat would be a good first step in the FY05 budget process.

Motion: To extend meeting for fifteen minutes

(J. Scott)

(E. Brennan)

Vote:

In favor:

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

Opposed:

None

(Motion passed unanimously)

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 several representatives attended Mayo PTA meeting, with very positive results. He reported that he had spoken with professors at WPI, who indicated that they would attend the next meeting of the subcommittee on Wednesday, December

10, 2003 in the Curriculum Center. Ad-hoc subcommittee Chair Sherman also thanked the Superintendent for the use of “valued added” in his MCAS presentation.

F. Building Committees

1. High School – John Rokicki

Member John Rokicki reported that the timeline is set and the Building Committee is looking forward to the bid process. Member Rokicki reported that the Building Committee is being assessed costs for legal bills for opinions of attorneys on special meetings and in particular, \$2,724 in legal fees to defend the District against Edwin Meyer. Member Rokicki reported that he would keep the Committee informed of increased costs of this nature. To date, the costs are equivalent to four or five computers that will not be purchased.

2. Holden – Julie Scott

The Holden Building Committee has voted to disband and this will not be included on the agenda of future meetings.

3. Rutland – Naquag/Central Tree – John Rokicki

No report.

4. Rutland – Elementary School – John Nunnari

No report.

The Superintendent reported that he had received a telephone call from the DOE regarding the enrollment projections on the original submission. The projections have been corrected and forwarded to the DOE.

5. Sterling

Member Charles Capparelli reported that the driveway is all set to be done in the spring.

G. School Council Reports: Central Tree Middle School (J. Nunnari), Chocksett Middle School (C. Capparelli), Davis Hill Elementary

School (R. Rodriguez), Dawson Elementary School (M. James), Houghton Elementary School (N. Plourde), Mayo Elementary School (M. Watson), Mountview Middle School (D. Benson), Naquag Elementary School (E. Brennan), Paxton Center School (A. Livdahl), Thomas Prince School (C. Connell), and Wachusett Regional High School (N. Mello, T. Tod).

V. Superintendent's Report

- A. Presentation of Comparative Analysis of Mat-8/MCAS Test Results
- B. Discussion of Report
- C. Recommendations requiring action by the School Committee

VI. Public Hearing

Joseph Sullivan, Holden Selectboard, commented that everyone involved in the FY04 budget process has collectively gotten waylaid. The District, and the communities have benefited from Education Reform and little or no discussion between the municipal side of government and the District needed to take place. There was a sound economy. Mr. Sullivan noted that very few of the current elected officials have gone through this before. He urged the Committee to work towards a better process for the FY05 budget season.

VII. Unfinished Business

VIII. New Business

The Superintendent was requested to ask legislators to re-file special legislation for an early retirement bill. The Superintendent indicated that he would look into it, but would make no promises, as the leadership in the House has not changed since last year.

IX. Adjournment

Motion: To adjourn

(N. Mello)
(C. Capparelli)

Vote:

In favor:

Duncan Leith

Natalie Mello
Donald Benson
Elizabeth Brennan
Charles Capparelli
Clifford Connell
David Dickman
Patricia Gates
Mark James
Alice Livdahl
John Nunnari
Norman Plourde
John Rokicki
Julie Scott
Michael Sherman
Margaret Watson
Patricia Young

Opposed:
None

(Motion passed unanimously)

The meeting adjourned at 10:17 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

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

ADT:ss/School Committee/Minutes