

MINUTES
WOONSOCKET SCHOOL COMMITTEE
WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 28, 2009
7:00 PM – OPEN SESSION
Woonsocket Area Career & Technical Center
Multimedia Room 303

Call to Order / Moment of Silence / Pledge of Allegiance

Roll Call:	Marc Dubois, Chairman	Present
	Michelle Williams, Vice Chairwoman	Present
	Linda Majewski	Present
	Anita McGuire-Forcier	Present
	Eleanor Nadeau	Present

PUBLIC GOOD & WELFARE:

Nicole Denton, WMS Band Director: Wanted to remind the WSC that the students are working very hard to keep their program. She wanted to recognize a 6th Grade student who wrote a proposal to help raise money for the WMS Band Program. Denton announced some other activities that will be held to raise funds.

Lisa Alves, WHS Choral Director: She is deeply concerned about the proposed schedule for the WMS Band and Chorus, saying, "Our students bring much pride to the City of Woonsocket at various events and competitions." She named some of the outstanding students in the music program, adding that they are outstanding because they were given the opportunity to be. Alves highlighted how music helps students in their studies. They understand the budget constraints and the unique economic climate, but she doesn't feel they should deprive the students of a music program. "The students at the WHS are successful because of the sound music program they went through at the elementary and middle school levels." She listed the cuts that the music program has suffered over the years and is disheartened that a middle school schedule without a music program is even being considered.

RECOGNITIONS & ANNOUNCEMENTS: Dr. Robert Gerardi

Gerardi introduced the Interim Director of Finance, Mrs. Dina Dutremble, saying that he is excited to be working with her because of her outstanding reputation in the state and the City of Woonsocket. He reported how Dina started her career in Woonsocket in 1975 as the bookkeeper and spent 10 years as our business manager 10 years ago. He's confident that she will not only pick up where Bob Strom left off, but will prove helpful in finding deeper cuts in our efforts to resolve our current financial crisis. Gerardi announced that Coleman School was selected to participate in a \$250 Tisdale grant with Bridges 4 Learning to develop an in-school worm composting system. He wished the contestants at tomorrow evening's Spelling Bee good luck and thanked Linda Filomeno for making this an annual event. He especially thanked the Judges of this event, Marc Dubois, Karen Karten and Sports Director of Channel 6 News, Mr. Kenneth Bell, for being the pronouncer for this event. He congratulated Alicia Mello and Mohammed Seck for being selected as one of only seven Middle and High School students statewide to earn College Crusade of Rhode Island "All Star" status. They received accolades in three categories: Academics, school attendance and premier participation in the College Crusades programs. He congratulated the girl's basketball team for making the Division II semi-finals, reporting that the team has a 9-0 record in the league. He also reported that the Division I boys' team is in the running with a 7-0 record and congratulated them as well.

Motion to receive and place on file: A. Forcier 2nd: M. Williams (Unanimously Approved)

APPROVAL OF MINUTES: JANUARY 14, 2009 OPEN/CLOSED

Motion to approve: E. Nadeau 2nd: L. Majewski (Unanimously Approved)

CONSENT AGENDA:

Motion to approve Consent Agenda with the following exceptions: E. Nadeau

- *Purchases/Transfers Over \$2,000: Kids First; RI Hydraulics--removed by L. Majewski.*

2nd: M. Williams (Unanimously Approved)

CONSENT AGENDA:

1. Personnel Actions:

Certified Appointments
Non-Certified Appointments

2. Purchases/Transfers Over \$2,000:

Auto Zone/Ed. Supplies/WACTC/Voc. Revenue
Dell, Inc./Computer/Good Shephard/Title II
Easter Seals/Contract Services/Spec. Ed/Local
Hibiscus Software/Software/Prof. Dev./Harris/School Improvement Grant
Kara McKenna Biller, OPR/L- Occ. Therapist/Spec. Ed./Local – Added by Dr. Gerardi
Kids First/Kitchen Inspection/District/Lunch Rev – Removed by L. Majewski
Norton & Associates/Contracted Services/Spec. Ed/Local
Quality Gym Services/Repairs Gym Door Dividers/Facilities/WHS/Local
RI Hydraulics Co. Inc./Repairs/Auto Lift/WACTC/Local – Removed by L. Majewski
Vortex, Inc./Asbestos Abatement/Facilities/WMS/Local
Wistow & Barylack, Inc./Legal Services/Promac/McFee/Local

3. Field Trip/Conference Requests:

Woonsocket Debate Team, Newark, NJ/WHS/Fund Raiser
National Title I Conference, San Antonio, TX,/ Prof. Dev./McFee/Title I Grant

END OF CONSENT AGENDA

EXEMPTIONS FROM CONSENT AGENDA:

1. PURCHASES/TRANSFERS OVER \$2,000:

- ***Kids First/Kitchen Inspection/District: \$3,500.00 Lunch Revenue***

Mrs. Majewski asked if the kitchen inspections were included in our Sodexho contract. Dina Dutremble explained that the revenue from Sodexho pays for them and it includes all the schools. She said that the state used to do it, but for the past couple of years we have had to do it.

- ***RI Hydraulics Co. Inc./Repairs/Auto Lift/WACTC: \$3,850.00 Local***

Mrs. Majewski said she called Dr. Bedard because another lift had been repaired a few months ago. She has spoken to Dr. Gerardi about some options down the road because these lifts are about 25 years old. "That program does take in revenue," she noted.

**Motion to approve exemptions from the consent agenda: A. Forcier
2nd: M. Dubois (Unanimously Approved)**

COMMUNICATIONS: None.

COMMITTEE REPORTS: Mrs. Majewski announced that the Uniform Committee will meet on February 26th at 7 p.m. at the WACTC. She said there was some legislation presented recently, but now a vote has to be taken. Dr. Gerardi said that there was a positive response at the hearing. Mrs. Majewski announced that a SELAC meeting will be held on Feb. 5th at Pothier School. The School Success Coalition meets tomorrow at 4:30 p.m. The PAC met on Jan. 21st and the next meeting is scheduled for March. They are working on the middle school transition. Majewski also announced that the Transportation Committee met and will have some additional meetings as they do more research.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS:

1. Discussion and Update of Corrective Action Plan – Dr. Gerardi

Dr. Gerardi referred to a letter he has written to the Auditor General for another 30-day extension that was provided to the WSC in their packet. Mr. Strom had contacted the Auditor General's Office and is confident that, with the data supplied, we will get approval of another 30-day extension in light of the current uncertainty of funding at the national and state levels.

2. Discussion of Four-Day Work Week: Dr. Gerardi, A. McGuire-Forcier

Dr. Gerardi outlined the steps he has taken at this time to pursue this issue. He has contacted the unions to see if they would entertain this idea and both unions responded that they are willing to discuss it after RIDE approval has been obtained. He has communicated with Commissioner McWalters and Deputy Commissioner Abbott from RIDE; and they have said that, preliminarily, they believe that it is possible to satisfy their requirements by making the four-day school week of equivalent minutes to our traditional 5-day school week. However, we need to present a Comprehensive Plan that would include input from all members of the school community. The Commissioner identified the current law that requires the school year to be 180 days long as a potential obstacle. Dr. Gerardi is in the process of working with our local representatives to get a bill passed that would allow Woonsocket to achieve the 180 school day law with equivalent minutes in a 4-day school week. He will keep the school committee apprised of the progress our legislators can make with this bill. Mr. Dubois asked if any other districts have done this. Gerardi said that no one in RI is doing it yet, but there has been talk about it. Mrs. Forcier has heard from many parents who say that they liked the idea once they received information about it. The majority of people she has spoken to are in favor of it. Mrs. Majewski asked if any cost analysis has been done to see if this would be cost-effective. Gerardi said that one hasn't been done yet, with the business manager transition, but we could realize a big savings in transportation—a big line item in the budget. Majewski would like to see public forums held about it because people have many concerns. Ms. Williams was concerned about the special needs students that require 230 days and whether or not their Medicaid would cover something like this. Carole Lerner explained that the law has changed and the 230-day requirement doesn't exist anymore. Ms. Williams also spoke about parents who have had significant cuts in day care reimbursements and them not having the money for day care. Dr. Gerardi noted that parents would not have to pay for before- and after-school day care anymore and just have to pay for one day, which may work out to their advantage. Mrs. Nadeau asked Dr. Gerardi to figure into to cost analysis what we will have to spend to bus students to private schools for a day a week that we wouldn't have school.

NEW BUSINESS:

2. Approval of Post Graduation Party- Woonsocket Prevention Coalition *(Taken Out of Order by Unanimous Consent)*

Lisa Carcifero, Executive Director of the Woonsocket Prevention Coalition, reported on last year's successful post-graduation party and how well attended it was. She introduced Nicole Robin, a WACTC Senior, who is participating in statewide leadership training for planning this year's event. She has undertaken the planning and coordination of this event as her Senior Project. Nicole addressed the WSC, saying that she attended the party as a Junior. She listed activities that took place last year, saying she would like to do dance classes and other activities this year as well. She wants to open it up to the entire student body—not just to Juniors and Seniors, so that they can be involved and still be able to attend the party. Mrs. Majewski supports this idea, but thinks that if she opens it up to the whole school, she should make sure the fire codes can accommodate it. Majewski asked how it will be funded. Nicole said that they will go out into the community to ask for their support and write letters to different businesses. Ms. Carcifero said that the Woonsocket Prevention Coalition has acquired some funding through one of their grants to help fund the event. Mrs. McGuire-Forcier said that her daughter attended last year and had a great time, adding that they have her support also.

Motion to approve: M. Williams
Roll Call Vote: 5 yes.

2nd: A. Forcier
APPROVED.

1. Special Education Staffing Policy – 1st Passage – C. Lerner, L. Majewski

Mrs. Majewski highlighted the changes that were made, adding that Atty. Ackerman can contact Carole Lerner if he feels any additional changes need to be made. Mrs. Forcier applauded Mrs. Lerner and Mrs. Majewski for what she felt was a great job, but she is still concerned about a future school committee trying to put 30 kids in a classroom to save money. Mrs. Lerner assured her that there are safeguards to prevent this from happening.

Motion to approve: A. Forcier
Roll Call Vote: 5 yes.

2nd: E. Nadeau
APPROVED.

3. Elementary Restructuring Discussion- Dr. Gerardi

Dr. Gerardi read his memo that was included in the WSC's information packet. He told them that the administrative team has been investigating the cost savings that could result from a restructuring of the district's elementary schools. There could be cost savings by having students attend their neighborhood schools that are within walking distance. The WSC was provided with maps of each of the district's elementary schools showing

“w’s” for walkers and people figures for students riding busses to those schools. They considered the possibility of eliminating one elementary school or changing all the schools to K-5 models instead of the early childhood center models that are currently run at Pothier and Fifth Avenue. The preliminary findings indicate that due to the student population, they could not justify closing an elementary school. They also indicate that savings can be realized by reassigning students to their neighborhood schools. On the district maps, the people figures were circled because the administration believes these students could walk to their neighborhood schools. Conclusions that were drawn were that we could minimize bussing expenses, equalize our student demographics for Title I services in each elementary school, and equalize the student populations based on school sizes to prevent overloading in some and under-populating in others. Gerardi also provided the current enrollment figures for each of the elementary schools. Mrs. Forcier said that if a student has been in a school since kindergarten and the parent wants their child to stay there, they may be accommodated if they are willing to provide transportation for their child. Mrs. Nadeau asked what the history was behind the shuffling around of the elementary population. Dr. Gerardi said that when Social Street Elementary School was closed, some students were sent to Harris and never went back to their old neighborhood school. Arrangements were also made along the way to accommodate parents. “How many kids do you think are affected by this?” asked Nadeau. Gerardi said he doesn’t have the exact numbers yet. “Do we still have school choice where parents can send their children to a higher performing school if they want to?” asked Nadeau. Gerardi told her that it’s not an issue at this time because none of the elementary schools are under-performing. Mrs. Majewski asked about the special needs students that are situated at a couple of the schools and how they would be affected. Mrs. Lerner explained that those programs would stay where they are because the schools were built to accommodate them. There are only the Pothier pre-school and the Globe Park medically fragile programs. Dr. Gerardi indicated that this plan is being looked at for September 2009.

CONFERENCES: None

SUPERINTENDENT’S REPORT: Dr. Robert Gerardi

Said he’s looking forward to being a judge at the Spelling Bee on January 29th at Harris School at 7:00pm. He encouraged everyone to attend. He’s also looking forward to the SELAC Meeting on February 5, 2009 at Gov. Pothier School Library between 6:30 and 8:30 PM. It will be a question and answer night with the superintendent and he welcomed everyone to attend.

Motion to receive and place on file: L. Majewski

2nd: M. Williams (Unanimously Approved)

SCHOOL COMMITTEE GOOD & WELFARE:

L. Majewski: She spoke about the many comments made about whether school should or should not have been cancelled. “Children’s safety must come first. Many students do walk. We also live in New England and the weather changes constantly.” She wants parents to be aware of that. Majewski reported that Senator Cote introduced a bill that state mandates be fully-funded or be unenforceable. She supports this bill. She congratulated the boys’ and girls’ basketball teams and wished them continued success. **Majewski asked Dr. Gerardi to really look at putting band and music back into the WMS schedule somehow, with the possibility of using administrators and house leaders to instruct one class.**
Revised 2-12-09

A. Forcier: Said she went to many forums last week. She went to the State House on a couple of matters and they were very receptive to our uniform proposal. “They don’t vote immediately.” She thinks it will pass, however. Forcier spoke about President Obama’s stimulus package and how Woonsocket stands to gain \$8 million. The money will be earmarked for certain purposes. “If some communities lose money with the fair funding formula, this stimulus package makes up for it in some cases.” She urged people to contact their legislators about the fair funding formula. As far as the snow cancellations go, she agrees with putting the kids’ safety first. “We have many kids walking to school in the road most of the time. We are stuck with having to guess if we should cancel school or not.”

E. Nadeau: Said the only complaints she got about the cancellation today was the time that it was announced. She asked if there was any way to set a time the announcement must be made by because there are people that travel and were already at school when the cancellation was called. Dr. Gerardi said he would rather call early, but added, “The last time we did and look what happened. This time we waited until the last minute,” he said. He was glad to know that the school committee would rather take the safety first stance. Nadeau agreed with Mrs. Majewski about the music program and her idea about the house leaders and administrators teaching a class to help restore that program. She announced that next Friday is Reading Day at Globe Park School.

M. Williams: She thinks that it’s important to cancel earlier rather than later. “We should err on the side of caution. We have so much snow that we don’t know where to put it! Tomorrow is going to be a horror show!” She thanked Dr. Gerardi, Mr. Henderson and Dr. Garcia for addressing a situation they had at one of the housing developments, saying it really helped the kids. Thank you.

M. Dubois: Dubois said he knows it was a late call this morning, but after the last time, they wanted to make sure. "People are going to complain either way." He spoke about President Obama's stimulus package that's going to the states, saying that Governor Carcieri has already figured that into his budget. Dubois just hopes it's allocated appropriately. Dr. Gerardi mentioned that Carcieri is using a small part of it for education. He suggests that he use all of it now. Mr. Dubois supports Mrs. Majewski's plan for the WMS house leaders and administrators pitching in to teach one class during the day to allow the music program to continue. Dr. Gerardi said that there may be some certification issues, but he will definitely look into it. Dubois also doesn't want the idea of one middle school for girls and one for boys to be dropped and would like to have it put on the next agenda for discussion. He thanked everyone for coming out tonight with the weather conditions and wants everyone to be careful driving home.

Motion to adjourn at 8:25 p.m.: L. Majewski

2nd: M. Williams (Unanimously Approved)

Respectfully submitted,

Nancy G. Belisle, WSC Recording Secretary