

SPECIAL MEETING MINUTES

WOONSOCKET SCHOOL COMMITTEE

WEDNESDAY, MAY 20, 2009

5:30 PM – OPEN SESSION

WACTC – ROOM 303

MULTIMEDIA LAB

Called to order by Marc Dubois.

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

1. Approval of FY2010 Budget – 1st Passage

Mr. Dubois asked if anyone wanted to address the WSC as part of the FY10 Budget Hearing. There were no speakers.

Dr. Gerardi gave an update about their meeting with the City Council this afternoon. He said it went well and some paperwork had been placed on a table for the public for tonight's meeting. It included a graph that he prepared after he saw the newspaper article this morning about everyone being stunned by a 60% increase request for the FY10 school department budget. "The school department doesn't want a 60% increase, but we are required to provide a BEP according to state and federal laws," said Gerardi. He explained the chart and what it showed. "It shows that our expenses are in line with what they had been prior to 08-09," he said. Gerardi referred to increased non-BEP budget items and explained that these items are computer programs that every other district has that Woonsocket doesn't. Sports and music were put back in and the WSC decided to let a judge decide if they will be allowed. Gerardi doesn't anticipate any fees other than those listed for the computer programs. Mr. Dubois asked about the internal email program and why it's needed. Gerardi explained that RIDE is the email system provided by the state. "The WED-mail program we have is incomplete. It will save on paperwork and printing with our own internal email," said Gerardi. Dina added that Article 31 money helped pay for this program when she worked in Cumberland. Gerardi explained that the Alert Now program emails parents and calls home phones and cell phones in case of an emergency. The prices given for these programs are the consolidated group prices. Mrs. Nadeau asked about the need for the ASEOP program because we have staff that call for substitutes now. Gerardi explained that part of one secretary's job is work doing that and transportation also. He said that an assistant principal is doing it at one elementary school. ASEOP needs to be monitored, but the person who calls the substitutes would be needed to do this. Gerardi explained how the program works. "Right now, you have to call people once you know someone is out sick, which is usually first thing in the morning. With ASEOP, it's all done online. Substitutes can look online to fill these positions, especially long-term positions. It also helps track if employees are abusing sick time. Every morning, the principal can go online from home to see if anyone is going to be out. It's a wonderful program and will save money in substitutes," said Gerardi. "Can it post documents on this program also, like tests or classwork that needs to be completed?" asked Mrs. Majewski. "Yes. It's an amazing tool," said Dutremble.

Dr. Gerardi indicated that last year's request from the City was \$11,686,560 and this year's request is \$19,647,194. Gerardi summarized the list of recommendations made by the Mayor, which include: 1) The elimination of the Effective Salary Increase; 2) Institution of Health Care Co-Payment by all Employees; 3) Reduction in Capital Improvements; 4) Reduction in Educational Supplies; 5) Reduction in Textbooks; 6) The elimination of all busing except for special education students; and 7) Reduction in Blue Cross by replacing the existing contract with Government Health Group of RI with a self-insured system like the one in place for city employees. Her recommendations would result in a \$3,453,000 reduction in the budget. Atty. Ackerman said we would be violating a contractual obligation if we implement the first two recommendations without renegotiating with the unions and will probably be taken to court. However, we could do it and still proceed with a Caruolo Action. Mrs. Nadeau asked when the WSC was going to get answers from the unions about making more concessions. Dr. Gerardi explained that Mrs. Nadeau was referring to doing these things to work on eliminating the deficit from FY09. "We were working on these things before filing the Caruolo Action," he said. Ackerman said that the WTG President said that he needed to see some movement from the City before considering further concessions from the unions. The Mayor recommended reducing Capital Improvements from \$966,00 to \$500,000 and cutting Educational Supplies by \$43,000. She wants to decrease Textbooks by \$148,000. In regards to bussing, Dr. Gerardi discussed the different options that we have. We have gone out to bid for the services that we already provide. Dr. Gerardi thought that Pawtucket had eliminated all bussing, but he has since found out that they still provide bussing for students up to the 4th Grade. He thinks the best option would be to just enforce the rules we have. To reduce our costs for Blue Cross, the Mayor recommended switching to a self-insured system like the City uses. Government Health Group of RI is

claims based and this year it went up 14%. Dr. Gerardi wondered if it would be legal for us to terminate our contract with Government Health Group this year because you have to give 90 days notice. Gerardi added that Sue Vadenais recommended reducing #200-445 Library Books by \$10,000. Someone asked about the line item for Vehicles & Outside Equipment #200-571 and Dr. Gerardi explained that this item and #200-334 are two separate accounts. One is for purchase of equipment and one is for the repair of equipment. He recommended keeping the repair line item and reducing the equipment purchase line item. Line #104-21520 Education and Training represents Article 31 Funds that the Governor froze. Dina recommended putting this allocation back in for FY10. Mrs. Forcier asked why no increase had been allocated for Sewer and Water for FY10. Dina predicted a decrease in these costs, but Forcier feels that these costs will probably go up. Forcier also noticed that the allocation for Gas & Diesel Fuels was decreased. Forcier would like that line item increased to \$40,000 just in case and would like Sewer and Water level funded. Dutremble explained that they had a huge water bill because there were delays in the readings. That's why there wasn't as much allocated for next year in that category. Forcier still wanted to at least level-fund these items.

Forcier noted that Reading Recovery was listed on the Summary Page and that program has been discontinued. The revenue from that program will also have to be deducted. Mrs. Majewski explained why this would happen. Forcier asked why #200-313 Dues & Subscriptions is going up \$11,000. Dr. Gerardi said these estimates were done according to the budgets submitted by the principals of the various schools for contractual dues. Dutremble said there were fees for services that were also added and are a new expense, but she couldn't think of it right then. Forcier asked why #200-446 Cleaning & Housekeeping Supplies was decreased 52%. "I don't want our schools to be filthy!" she said. Dr. Gerardi explained that the year before this year, it was \$119,000 and then jumped up this year. Dutremble predicted about \$10,000 less for this year. She thinks that the maintenance service contracts need to be reviewed to see if we can save there. "What we save on one account, we can move to another account and realign them," she said. Forcier recommended making a small increase of \$10,000 to Cleaning & Housekeeping. Mr. Dubois asked if #200-383 Legal Services was for outside the district. Dr. Gerardi told him it's for the projected cost of joining the case for the fair funding formula. Dubois recommended adding \$5,000 to this line item. For Capital Improvements, Mrs. Majewski asked if we needed a waiver to make the reduction requested by the Mayor due to some fire code violations. Gerardi noted that we need money for the roof at the WHS and money to show good faith to meet the fire code and ask for a waiver. "We were fortunate to get a waiver the first time. I don't want to be caught short," said Dubois. Mrs. Majewski wants Atty. Ackerman to look at the bussing laws to see what would happen if we went with the Mayor's recommendation and also the Blue Cross contract. Ackerman thinks there isn't any statewide mandate that there is bussing if the students live within a certain number of miles (except for special education students). Dr. Gerardi noted that Pawtucket told him that under Chapter 16, if it's impractical for a student to not have bussing, it could be a violation. Ackerman referred to our students in the Elder Ballou Road area and bussing wasn't provided. The state required it because the parents fought it and there are no sidewalks and many curves on that road. He doesn't think there is any regulation that requires bussing that he's aware of, but we have parents who will fight it. "You'll need to add money for appeals and to fund successful appeals. It would not amount to the savings that the Mayor has projected," said Ackerman. As far as Blue Cross is concerned, he believes we are contractually bound to our Group and would have to pay a penalty if we break this contract. "You would have to figure the savings less any penalty that would need to be paid," he said.

Mrs. Forcier didn't see how they could vote on this budget if the numbers aren't accurate. Mrs. Nadeau and Dr. Gerardi suggested discussing the decreased items and then the increased items. "We are obligated to approve a budget because it was due back in March. The Mayor has to submit her budget by June 1st," said Gerardi. Mrs. Majewski asked what the revenue was from R. F. Harris. She was told that it's money from a philanthropist that was placed in a foundation for us. When Majewski asked if grant funds were included in this budget, Gerardi told her that professional development funds, literacy and technology funds are included. Not all grant revenues have been included in this budget. Majewski asked if there's any projection for stabilization funds. Dina told her that these funds are projected, but they could be taken away. She also told her that the language assistance money is ESL Target Aid, which are funds for to be used for specific items. Dr. Gerardi believes that the Mayor's recommendation to cut Capital Improvements is doable. Everyone was okay with her recommendations to cut educational supplies and textbooks. With the bussing, we need to wait for the bids to come back. Forcier would like to contact RIDE for a legal opinion on what a reasonable distance is. Gerardi thinks that RIDE will refer her to Attorney Ackerman. Mrs. Nadeau asked if one of the proposals is bussing for the younger kids. She was told it was. Dubois is not supportive of elementary kids walking long distances to school. No action was taken on busing. No action was taken on the Blue Cross reduction, the Health Care Co-Payment, and the elimination of the salary increase on July 1, 2009. Mrs. Nadeau is concerned that they haven't heard anything back from the union about the health care co-pay and salary increase elimination issues. "We're in limbo," she said.

As far as the increases in non-BEP budget items go, Capital Improvements and Textbooks will be decreased. Mrs. Majewski thought they should eliminate the allocations for Alert Now, Internal Email, and the Website Program. She thinks we should keep the ASEOP and Digital Portfolio computer programs, however. Mrs. Forcier asked why Dues and Subscriptions has increased by \$11,000. Dina will look into it and email her. Mrs. Nadeau asked about reductions in staff for special education. Gerardi said he was thinking of re-posting the 230-day teaching positions so that they would be paid as regular teachers at \$30 per hour. It would be the same as for the physical therapists and occupational therapists.

#103-10201: Mrs. Majewski asked what the rationale was for the increase of \$356,007 for General Instruction 1-5 & Specialists. Dina explained that it is for Step increases and also taking into account the structural deficit.

#103-21520: Teacher Ed. Training - Majewski asked why this training isn't covered by Article 31 funds. Dina explained that it is.

#106-10144: Kindergarten – Increase of 48% may be a coding error Dina indicated. Teacher Assistants are up by 11% overall, but Dina accounted for them by name. This line is for all teacher assistants.

#156-41735 Food Service Lunch Systemwide: Dina was asked why there were no figures put in for this line item. She said that we are bidding this service out right now.

#200-341 Rental Equip. & Furn.: Dina was asked why there's a decrease in rental fees. She noted that the fees for rental amounts came in less and right now there's no money in the budget for middle school sports.

#103-32330 Special Ed. Administration: A 96% increase in this line item was explained by Dina as a coding issue. Department chairs at the elementary level and the high school were coded differently.

Mrs. Majewski asked if this budget took into account the layoff notices that were sent out. "Every position we had last year is still in place, except for a reduction of 15.2 positions," said Dutremble.

BUDGET ADJUSTMENT SUMMARY:

#200-356 SEWER USE: To be level-funded.

#200-383 LEGAL SERVICES: Add \$5,000 to this line item.

#200-423 GAS & DIESEL FUEL: This line to be raised to \$40,000.

#200-446 CLEANING & HOUSEKEEPING: Add \$10,000 to this line item.

#200-454 WATER: To be level-funded.

#200-381 Other Support Services: Dina said this item should be increased by \$97,400. She was checking the budget after it was prepared and the numbers hadn't carried forward.

Mr. Dubois asked the other WSC members if they would be in favor of reinstating the middle school sports program for \$44,000, since they chopped off \$600,000 from the rest of the budget. Mrs. Majewski, Mrs. Forcier and Mr. Dubois were in favor. Dr. Gerardi recommended reinstating the middle school sports program also.

Motion to reinstate the middle school sports program at a cost of \$44,000: M. Dubois 2 nd : L. Majewski	Roll Call Vote: 3 yes – 1 no (EN) Approved.
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#200-411 Office Supplies: Dina recommended decreasing this item to level fund it.

#200-448 Non-Public Textbooks: Dina recommended decreasing this allocation by \$3,500 and level fund it.

#200-357 Ins./Fire,Boiler,Theft: Dina noted that insurance rates are dropping and we have a dividend coming back.

#200-382 Auditing Services: Dina indicated that this item shows a real number, but Atty. Ackerman said that we would have to pay for the audit for Caruolo.

Some discussion took place about the Advertising line item and the cost of School Spring. Dr. Gerardi said that we get a lot of candidates from all over the country, but not necessarily locally. "This is not always better. We tried it, and we got a lot of people who weren't certified," said Gerardi and didn't advise it.

#200-336 Equipment Repair: Dina recommended a \$17,200 decrease in this line item.

Motion to reinstate the music position that was cut at the WHS: L. Majewski No Second. Motion died.
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Dr. Gerardi noted that there was some concern about the Athletic Director Stipend. He thinks we should set it at the middle of the range of stipends that other communities were paying. "That range was from \$4,000 to \$12,000, so \$4,600 would be on the low end. A football coach makes a \$10,000 stipend. I think it should be increased to about \$6,000 or \$7,000 for a program our size," said Gerardi. "Why? I think I know why, but I don't like the reason behind it," said Nadeau. "At \$6,500, it would be more comparable to a stipend at Davies, which has a small program," said Gerardi. Mrs. Nadeau didn't like the idea at all, as well as Mr. Dubois. "If we don't attract any qualified candidates, we can revisit it then," said Dubois.

Motion to approve the first passage of the FY10 School Budget as presented this evening with the corrections: M. Dubois

2nd: A. Forcier

Roll Call Vote: 4 yes. APPROVED

Motion to adjourn at 8:20 p.m.: A. Forcier

2nd: E. Nadeau (Unanimously Approved)

Respectfully submitted,

Nancy G. Belisle, WSC Recording Clerk