

**SELAC MINUTES**  
**February 7, 2008**  
6:30PM to 8:30PM

**6:30-7:00**

**Old Business**

(Please note that Ms. Lerner was not yet present when old and new business were first addressed but we returned to those issues and added her comments below.)

**1. Website**

a. Minutes still not posted to website (2/07, 5/07)

b. New method to forward minutes to Carole Lerner in word for review, then back to SELAC for review then back to McFee in pdf format for posting on web page

When asked at our last meeting, Ms. Lerner advised that she believed that all but one set of minutes were on the website at this point. She also indicated that the method suggested to get the minutes to her, as described to Elaine Hazard, had not been indicated to her but sounded fine. Minutes will now be sent in word for review and editing by WED, then return to SELAC in word, who would then return them to WED in pdf format for posting the WED website. Ms. Lerner has not received the minutes of late and suggests that Denise Bouley may be sending them directly to Elaine Hazard. However, a check indicates that those minutes (2/07 and 5/07) remain missing from the website.

**2. Final Regulations are now posted on the RIDE website [www.ride.ri.gov](http://www.ride.ri.gov) for clarification you may call the RIDE helpline @ 222-8999 or RIPIN (Rhode Island Parent Information Network) @ 727-4144 or 1-800-464-3399.**

Changes to the Special Ed. Regulations adopted by the Regents in January of this year are finally available on RIDE's website. Information regarding the link to the RI Regulations is on the table with the agenda. They cannot be provided in whole because the document is over 100 pages long.

**3. Provision for Long Term Absences by SLPs, PTs, OTs and other Service Providers – including notification to parents if services are not being provided and alternatives offered to such parents.**

This burden of notification of lack of services should not be on the teacher. There needs to be a formal notice in place to be sent to parents to advise of lack of services and to describe how/when these services will be made up. School Committee member Linda Majewski brought this up at the last school committee meeting and gave Ms. Lerner a name of an agency that can provide such make up services. As per Ms. Lerner, we are presently all set for SLP and long term absences via a contract with an agency. They just contracted for a COTA who will be available for fill-ins and make-up services. There is not a formal policy yet because they wanted to get the means of make-up services in place before providing that notice. Now, notices will be going out to parents and that notice will detail exactly how much needs to be made up. A sample will be provided to School Committee person Linda Majewski.

**4. Shortage of slots for preschool 10:1 classrooms for students for whom community placement is not their least restrictive environment and cannot meet the IEP requirements.**

It has been indicated to the SELAC leadership by parents that slots for preschool for children who needed 10:1 placements but are being offered community placements which are inappropriate for their child. There are no 10:1 slots available right now and, due to budget issues, there will not be any new rooms opening this school year. The question remains what to do with these children. If we don't provide slots, our school department out of compliance with IEPs and this is an actionable violation of state and federal law. It's an issue we have raised and will continue to raise repeatedly until it is satisfactorily resolved. Elaine Hazzard said last month that there were sufficient community placements for students. But parents have a concern that this might not be the right placement for their children who need a more restrictive environment. Mrs. Lerner indicates that the school department has not encountered a situation where a child requires a 10:1 placement and they have been unable to provide it. WED currently has sufficient availability for 10:1 placements. The community placement children are receiving the equivalent of a resource service, not an all day service. They are getting SLP, OT and PT in their community placements. A new placement has been opened with Connecting with Children on Hope Street. They will be providing a resource teacher, OT and SLP from the district to go in and provide services to those children.

**5. RTI (Response to Intervention) update – is there a formalized district policy on implementation and parent/professional notification yet?**

We are still looking for a formalized policy from the district as to the implementation of RTI, as well as notification to parents and, if needed, consent from parents. For those who might be unfamiliar, a brief explanation of RTI was provided. School Committee member Linda Majewski will be attending a seminar on RTI given by RITAP and its implementation and will, hopefully, be able to report back to SELAC. What happens if a parent wants to refer a child to RTI where a teacher is not making that referral for whatever reason. Under current understanding, school principals are the overseers for RTI and therefore we can presume that a parent could go to the school principal seeking a referral to RTI. However, there is currently no formal policy and, therefore, we don't know if this is certain. As per Mrs. Lerner, they are still waiting for final guidance from the department of education. An RTI team has been formed and developed Woonsocket's forms and tiers and processes and procedures. It is all in draft form right now but they will be finalized and then presented to the schools. Ms. Lerner also confirmed the procedure that a parent can request a referral to RTI for their child via the school principal. System must be in place for July 1, 2008, so they still have some time to finalize things.

**New Business**

1. **SELAC Elections** – please consider running for a position – chair, co-chairs, secretary, liason to school committee

We are supposed to have them once a year. No one has every really come forward to volunteer to run for anything but please consider it. We need a chairperson

and vice-chairpersons or chairpersons, a secretary and a treasurer (although we have no budget!). Right now, we have no secretary other than a trusty tape recorder. Please consider running. We may also want to consider a liaison to the school committee as well, rather than leaving that to the chair.

**2. Change in SELAC schedule** – we are considering going to a bi-monthly format for 08/09 year

We are considering going to a bi-monthly meeting format, as opposed to monthly. We think that this might be easier on parents to be able to get her more frequently. Consider this and we will discuss it further. Will this be enough? Share your thoughts with us.

**3. Announcements, information and/or concerns from attendees**

Reference is made to the handouts that were available at the meeting.

**4. Next meeting 4/3/08 will be a regular meeting.**

**5. Changes to Graduation Requirements.** These changes are coming in 2010. Diplomas may be issued by the Board of Regents rather than the school committee. They are now proposing a change as to how state-wide assessments are used for grading purposes. Right now the NECAP can be used for up to 10% weight in the graduation decision. If these new regulations are passed, they may be given 33% weight in the graduation decision. This is a concern for those of us with special education children who are not offered a different test but must take the same test as every other child on the state for these statewide tests. It may be difficult if not impossible for some of our special needs kids to perform well on these statewide tests, which would further drag them down in the graduation requirements. This is over and above the issue of common tasks and PBGRs. Parents were urged to be vocal as to their concerns on these new requirements if they concern you.

6. Community information is on the table.

**WORKSHOP: Question and Answers with the Superintendent and the Special Education Director**

Question: There is an SLP going out on long-term leave. Will parents be notified as to what will happen while she's gone?

Answer: (Carole Lerner) Parents likely will not even have to be notified because her sub is already in place and ready to take over her caseload when she goes out.

Question: A parent came into our system with an IEP from Lincoln and she was told that her son doesn't really need an IEP and now he no longer has one. Yet her son is behind and in a low level in reading. She is concerned that he will be kept behind because he is no longer getting the services that he was getting and so obviously needs. How can she get him that IEP again because he needs services?

Answer: Carole Lerner: The parent has to make a referral to the evaluation team. She should contact the principal at the school and request that evaluation. She can also contact Tracy Andrews Mellouise to get that referral as well.

Question: A parent objects to her child's teacher being removed from the classroom, with a sub replacing her, to cover for the principal at Savoie who was called from the building to cover for another principal. The parent is upset and wants to know why the teacher cannot remain in the classroom until she is needed and then she can be pulled into the office. The parents suggests that the teacher's sub sits in the office until a principal is needed and, then, the sub can go to the classroom to replace the teacher/leader who would then go to the office. The parent expressed concern about the disruption created in the classroom when a sub is placed in there unexpectedly.

Answer: Dr. Macera: This will continue to happen as we do not have the money for assistant principals who could do this. If the absence will be short (a few hours), a teacher/leader with the necessary certification can cover for the building principal during his/her absence. We also have between school partnerships where one principal may be called to cover for another principal in another building. We simply cannot afford substitute principals at the cost of \$350.00/day. Therefore, we use teacher/leaders that have adequate training to cover. It also provides a training ground for what will be our new principals in the future. As for the parent's suggestion that the teacher's sub sits in the office until a principal is needed and, then, the sub can go to the classroom to replace the teacher/leader who would then go to the office, Dr. Macera indicated that that was the normal practice but, due to serious issues at Savoie on the day in question, that is now how it worked out and the teacher/leader was actually needed in the office all day. She will however look into why this happened for a full day.

Dr. Macera: The principals were all brought to McFee on the day of the meeting and given pink slips which were delivered to elementary school teachers on the day of the meeting and will be presented to all others the day following the meeting. This is required because she must submit a balanced budget to the School Committee and all pink slips must go out by March 1<sup>st</sup>. The financial situation in Rhode Island is especially dire and the schools will suffer greatly as a result.

Question: A parent of a special needs child has been informed that her child may lose essential services as a result of these layoffs. She is concerned about the loss of the 230 day year and TAs in particular.

Answer: Dr. Macera explained that the state is trying to cut back on the funding for the 230 day program which may lead to cuts in our program because we will lack the funding. However, no final decisions have been made yet. Dr. Macera also explained how the state is now trying to cut funding for universal free breakfast. The city is trying to determine whether we can still afford to do it without state support. The problems are all created at the state level by abuses by state's elected officials yet we must still deal with them. She agrees with the parents that none of this is fair. Woonsocket is placing approximately 65 teachers on lay off notice. She laid off 67 last year and brought them

all back. Fifteen TAs are on lay off notice. Dr. Macera brought back all that she laid off last year. She is still hoping for some wage concessions from the union to try to help with the layoffs. Dr. Macera argues that, if the city had just provided the school department with more support each year, rather than relying wholly on the state for funding, we would be in a much better position right now. A wage freeze will not be enough to make up the shortfall in the budget created by level funding. Therefore, layoffs are required to plug the holes in the budget. Dr. Macera reviewed some bright spots including great savings as a result of reworking of health insurance program design (increased copays, etc.). As a result of those changes, and the staff's acceptance of it, the city school department had no increase in their health insurance costs this year and, likely, will not see them next year either. Dr. Macera urged all parents to contact their legislators to remind them that urban cities have greater need and, therefore, need more support.

Question: Where is Woonsocket on the issue of consolidation/regionalization of school districts.

Answer: Dr. Macera favors regionalization but it must come from the state level. Therefore, it will likely be a political issue. They are discussing a statewide bussing contract right now and we may actually suffer if it is regionalized because we have a very good bussing contract. The same is true of our health insurance contract. Woonsocket is also suing, with other cities, the Northern RI Collaborative for their surplus which they obtained by overcharging the districts for out-of-district tuition. They amassed a surplus of over \$8 million dollars which the districts are trying to get back. This might yield about \$500,000 back to the city. She raises this to demonstrate the need for oversight.

Question: What are the time frame targets and possible obstacles coming for the new middle school?

Answer: Dr. Macera looks forward to the transition to the middle school and has found most special ed students are equally excited and handle it well. The first building will be ready for occupancy by 12/09 and the second building in early spring of 2010. She thinks we've hit all possible obstacles at this point, even down to the wire. It's all very exciting. The present 6<sup>th</sup> graders will be the first 8<sup>th</sup> graders to graduate from the building. There will be no money, however, at this point to renovate for an alternative middle school so those students will be remaining at Social Street at this point.

Question: Is there a way for a parent to volunteer to help in the schools?

Answer: Dr. Macera advises that such parent opportunities are available in Woonsocket, provided a parent can pass a BCI check. However, we do not have as involved parents as some other communities.

Dr. Macera urged all parents to become more vocal and to contact their legislators to tell them that the urbans need more money to run their schools. Contact the federal

representatives too. A lot of the problem arises from our large renter population who do not contribute to real estate taxes.

We all wished Dr. Macera an enjoyable retirement.

Meeting adjourned at 8:35PM.