

**Portsmouth School Board
Portsmouth, New Hampshire**

Minutes of the December 9, 2003 Meeting

A meeting of the Portsmouth School Board was held on Tuesday, December 9, 2003 in the Council Chambers at Portsmouth City Hall.

Attendance

PRESENT: Mr. Kent F. LaPage (Chair), Mr. Raimond Bowles, Mrs. Roseann Vozella Clark, Mrs. Nancy Novelline Clayburgh, Mrs. Nansi Craig, Mr. Clay Hayward, Mr. Carvel Tefft, Mr. Charles Vaughn

ABSENT: Mr. John Lyons, Jr.

PARTICIPATING: Dr. Lyonel B. Tracy (Superintendent of Schools); Dr. Robert J. Lister (Assistant Superintendent); Mr. W. Peter Torrey (Business Administrator), Mr. Adam Irish (Student Representative), Diane O'Leary McGee (Employee Representative), Ann Mayer (SAU 50 Representative)

Non-Public Session

Prior to the regular meeting, the School Board met in a non-public non-session with Counsel in Conference Room A.

CALL TO ORDER

Call to Order

The Chair called the meeting to order at 7:02 p.m. Dr. Tracy called the roll. The Chair called for a moment of silent reflection and asked people to keep in mind, during this holiday season, how fortunate we are in the State of New Hampshire and City of Portsmouth. He said the City of Portsmouth is blessed with so many good people that work for our children and elderly and those who teach our children on a daily basis. He asked that people remember there are children in the world who have to work for food and are not able to receive an education. Mr. Tefft led the Pledge of Allegiance.

SECRETARY'S REPORT

Minutes Approved

The Chair called for approval of the minutes of the November 25, 2003 meeting. Mr. Vaughn moved, seconded by Mr. Hayward, the minutes be approved. The motion was unanimously approved.

The Chair stated the December elementary school lunch menu is included in the Board packets.

PUBLIC COMMENTARY SESSION

***School Calendar
Survey***

Mrs. Kate Leith, Woodbury Avenue, Portsmouth, spoke on the survey that was recently sent home about the school calendar. Mrs. Leith said that she, along with some other parents, felt the survey did not state what it was for, and “new” parents of kindergarteners and first graders might not understand what the dates that were “Xed” off meant. She said other parents would know one of the questions would be if Portsmouth should have the same weeks as Maine and Massachusetts for February and April vacations. Mrs. Leith also said that some parents received multiple surveys if they had children in the elementary, middle and high schools, while parents of children at one of the levels received one survey. She does not believe that will account for a fair or accurate survey.

Mrs. Leith said the residents of Portsmouth live in a City where taxes have risen considerably over the last few years, and the families should be taken into consideration when the calendar is proposed. Mrs. Leith said it is less expensive for families to go on vacation during the New Hampshire vacation week as opposed to the Maine and Massachusetts week. She did some comparisons and found that a family of four going on a ski vacation for five days during the Massachusetts vacation week would pay \$3,597 as opposed to paying \$2,125 for the same accommodations during the New Hampshire vacation week; a difference of \$1,472. She also said that a family of four flying to Orlando, Florida during the Massachusetts week would pay \$2,548. The cost of this trip during the New Hampshire week would be \$962, for a savings of \$1,586 (almost 62%). She said the difference in price could determine whether or not a family living in Portsmouth would go on vacation.

Mrs. Leith said she hopes the School Board would reconsider the survey so that it is presented in a way so that the findings are more accurate and to take into consideration what she thinks is a pretty severe financial impact on the families of this City.

The Chair stated, as a point of information, the survey and development of the calendar comes from the teachers’ association. He said he will ask Mrs. McGee, representing the teachers’ association, to bring this information back to the teachers serving on the Calendar Committee.

***Recognition of
Board Member***

Chair LaPage asked Drs. Tracy and Lister to join him at the podium. Mr. LaPage said he has worked with a gentleman over the last four

***Recognition of
Board Member
Carvel Tefft (con't.)***

years who has become a friend; a gentleman who has accomplished a great deal for the Portsmouth School System. He said that elections will come and go, but the individuals that represent this City make a difference. Mr. LaPage said he is greatly saddened to see Mr. Tefft leave this Board, and that he does not have the words that can explain what he has accomplished in four years. The Chair highlighted a few of Mr. Tefft's accomplishments. (Mrs. Craig arrived at the meeting at this time – 7:10 p.m.)

Mr. LaPage said that Mr. Tefft joined the Board as any new member would and was immediately involved in the budget process. Using his business skills, he realized and stated the Board could do a better job with its budget – and they have. Mr. LaPage said the budget that we have today is a reflection of Mr. Tefft's work. The Chair said that Mr. Tefft knew the District was going into a very difficult period of imbalance among student populations at the elementary schools. He entered into, along with other Board members, a process to redistrict the elementary schools. This process included the participation of over 100 parents and educators through the use of study circles. Mr. LaPage said he is asked throughout the State how the Portsmouth School Board was successfully able to have redistricting without there being an outcry of unfairness. The Chair said he credits the Board members who served on the Redistricting Committee (Carvel Tefft, Rai Bowles and Nansi Craig) along with the others who served on the committee and those who participated in the study circles. He said Mr. Tefft then moved on to become a member of the Joint Building Committee for the renovation of the New Franklin School. The meetings were held at 7:30 a.m., and Mr. Tefft was seldom absent from those meetings. At the same time, the Joint Building Committee was getting ready to break ground for the new high school. Chair LaPage said although the initial price tag of the new high school was initially \$42 million, the City of Portsmouth is paying a lot less for the new high school because of Mr. Tefft's hard work and his devotion to the City of Portsmouth. The Chair credited Mr. Tefft, along with Mrs. Clayburgh and City Councilor Joanne Grasso and others, for being instrumental in the purchase and installation of the new auditorium seats. Through family and business contacts, Mr. Tefft was able to negotiate an extremely favorable deal for the purchase of the auditorium seats.

Mr. LaPage said he believes that Mr. Tefft will come before the Board over the next few years to tell them when they are going astray. The Chair stated that friendships are built among Board members as they work together. He said that over the years Board members have found they could disagree with Carvel over an issue and remain friends. Mr. LaPage concluded his remarks by saying he has been blessed to know Carvel Tefft. He asked Mr. Tefft to join him and Drs. Tracy and Lister at the podium.

Recognition (con't.) The Chair presented Mr. Tefft with a certificate of appreciation for his service to the students and community over the last four years. Dr. Tracy presented Mr. Tefft with a gift from the Board and school district.

Dr. Tracy stated that he has worked with 157 school board members throughout his tenure as a superintendent of schools in three states. He said that Mr. Tefft is one of the most child-centered board members he has worked with. The Superintendent said he will miss Mr. Tefft being on the Board, but he knows that he will be advocating for kids. He said the Portsmouth schools are fortunate that Mr. Tefft is still a resident of this City.

Dr. Lister thanked Mr. Tefft, on behalf of the students and teachers, for the work he has done on the Board, particularly by serving on the Curriculum Committee. The Assistant Superintendent said the curriculum is the major focus of the schools, and Mr. Tefft made them think about things by some of the questions he asked.

Mr. Tefft said he was surprised by this extraordinary tribute. He thanked his family for showing up, and said he was not aware any of this was going to happen this evening. He thanked his fellow Board members for making the last four years so rewarding. He said he has gotten to know each of them over the years from serving on various committees. He said it was great to work with such extraordinary people. He commended Mrs. Clayburgh for all the wonderful work she does in the community and for adding energy to the Board's tasks. Mr. Tefft said that leadership, to him, is the balance between being tough-minded and sensitive; he credited Dr. Tracy as having those traits. He credited Dr. Lister with having those traits as well, and said the School District has excellent leadership. Mr. Tefft said there is no one more dedicated in this community than Kent LaPage. He said that if Mr. LaPage wants to serve on this Board until he is 90, he is sure the community would love to have him stay because of his character and hard work.

The Chair thanked Mrs. Tefft and her family for coming to this evening's meeting to honor and support Carvel.

RECOGNITION OF STAFF/STUDENTS

Curriculum and Professional Development

Dr. Lister presented a report on curriculum and professional development. He said the Board has recently heard from the five Principals on test scores and from Dr. Diane Law, Reading/Title 1 Director, on reading across the curriculum district-wide. He said the successful test scores happens by the District recruiting, training, and retaining the best teachers available with professional development

Curriculum and Professional Development (con't.)

opportunities that relate to teaching and learning. Dr. Lister said that Dr. Tracy was hired four years ago promoting a child-specific education for all students in all schools. From that time, professional development activities have focused on student progress and achievement that are child-centered. Dr. Lister reviewed the various initiatives that are in place and that have taken place to promote a child-specific education as well as changes that have taken place. He said the curriculum reflects thinking skills, effective problem solving, decision making and creativity, and students as individuals. Dr. Lister answered questions from the Board.

PERSONNEL

Professional Nomination

Dr. Lister presented the professional nomination of Christine Kwesell to the position of math teacher at Portsmouth Middle School. He said that Ms. Kwesell has been a permanent substitute in that position, which was vacated when Ms. Swainbank became the Dean of Students at Portsmouth Middle School. Mr. Tefft moved, seconded by Mrs. Clayburgh, the nomination be approved. Mr. Tefft added his congratulations to Ms. Kwesell. He said his oldest daughter is a student in her math class, and that Ms. Kwesell has already made an impact at the Middle School. She e-mails the parents with updates and progress reports, and the kids have taken to her friendly manner. Mrs. Clayburgh added her compliments to Ms. Kwesell and said her daughter is in her seventh grade math class. Mrs. Clayburgh, referring to the Curriculum Committee, said her cousin teaches in Massachusetts and said her school district does not have enough money for the “Connected Math” program. She said that program would be her first choice. Mrs. Clayburgh said Ms. Kwesell is doing a great job in teaching the “Connected Math” to the Middle School students. The motion to approve Ms. Kwesell’s nomination was unanimously approved.

COMMITTEE REPORTS

Joint Building Committee

The Chair stated the Joint Building Committee will meet next week; however, there are two related items that Mr. Torrey needs to discuss with the Board.

High School Renovations

Mr. Torrey stated that at the last meeting there was discussion about the possibility of construction/renovations for the Career Technical Department. He said the City Attorney has advised a motion is in order for the Board to send a clear message to the Joint Building Committee that it has the authority to produce for the Board any renovation revisions or enhancements to the current Technical Center’s building plans. Mr. Bowles moved the School Board

***High School
Renovations (con't.)***

authorize the Joint Building Committee to proceed with the preliminary engineering and architectural study to possibly upgrade or alter the current renovation plan of the Technical Career Center at Portsmouth High School. Mr. Vaughn seconded the motion. Mr. Bowles said it is most fortunate that these funds are available at the time the high school is undergoing renovation and new construction and the motion does not involve any additional money of any kind from the taxpayers. The money is appropriated from State funds.

The Chair thanked City Attorney Sullivan for looking into this. He reiterated there is no cost to the City of Portsmouth and said the money comes to the City from the State for upgrades to the Vocational Technical Center. In a roll call vote, the motion was unanimously approved.

Mr. Torrey distributed a spreadsheet indicating the status of the budget for furniture, fixtures and equipment for the high school. He said this information will be reported to the Joint Budget Committee next week, and the information will probably change as the process moves along. He stated that because of a 60 – 90 day ordering process, all of the furnishings have been ordered. Mr. Torrey pointed out there still remains a contingency of \$110,000 for those items that may have been overlooked. He said it is likely that we will not know until the new building is occupied what those items may be. Mr. Vaughn questioned the purchase of playground equipment, and was told it is for the Career Technology child care center.

***Technology
Committee***

Mr. Tefft reported on the recent Technology Committee meeting. Dr. Mitchell Shuldman, Head of the Division of Media Services at the University of Massachusetts at Lowell, was present. Dr. Shuldman had expressed an interest in how computers are used for media production in Portsmouth schools. He had previously met with Ed Stokel and Pam MacArtney. Dr. Shuldman offered his thoughts and suggestions. The Committee toured the new Main Distribution Facility at Portsmouth High School where all the networks come into one place. Mr. Tefft reported that Ed Stokel has been working with several vendors to get the best products at the best prices. Mr. Tefft also reported that Mr. Stokel has only spent a portion of the technology budget to date in order to leave as much as possible in the accounts to be combined with the available funds from the high school project. The Technology Committee will present its plan to the Joint Building Committee next week. Mr. Tefft reported that Mr. Stokel has recently filed the paperwork for the District's 2002-03 reimbursement from the E-Rate Program. He expects the District will receive approximately \$34,000, which will be used to fund the second payment on the mobile wireless computer labs purchased last year for the elementary schools.

***Technology
Committee (con't.)***

Mrs. Craig inquired if the Portsmouth schools plan to have a program similar to the program in Maine where all seventh graders are given a laptop computer. The Chair and Mr. Tefft stated that laptops and desktop computers are available at the schools to all students. Mr. Tefft stated the next level of portable computers is called a tablet and by the time this district is ready to make a decision on laptops for all students, the tablet would be the way to go. In closing, Mr. Tefft commended Ed Stokel for his hard work and dedication to the Portsmouth schools. He said the new high school will be state-of-the-art thanks to the hard work of Mr. Stokel and his department.

***Joint Budget
Committee***

Dr. Tracy summarized the December 4, 2003 meeting of the City's Joint Budget Committee. He reported this year the Committee did not establish a percentage increase for each department. Instead, the City will use a conceptual frameworks model that will allow a little more flexibility for each department. Any department that wants to add personnel or programs will need to make that appeal directly to the City Council. Mr. Vaughn said they will know within the next ten days what the cost of living adjustment (COLA) will be. He estimates it will be in the mid to high three's. He stated that each of the departments have different components of the collective bargaining settlements. Mr. Torrey said the Board has seen the final settlements of some contracts, and there are three others that are technically agreed to (the bargaining units have to meet and vote).

***NHSBA Delegate
Assembly***

Mr. Vaughn asked Board members to bring with them to the next meeting their handouts of proposed resolutions made by the School Boards Association. He said a report on the Delegate Assembly would be made at that time. Chair LaPage said he has invited Ted Comstock, Executive Director of the New Hampshire School Boards Association, to meet with the Board prior to a regular meeting and to attend a meeting of the Portsmouth School Board in January. Mr. LaPage said he extended the invitation to the entire NHSBA staff.

***Bequest to Establish
A Scholarship Fund***

The Chair reported the Board was informed over a year ago of a bequest left to the School Department for a scholarship. Mr. LaPage said the late John Leary of Hampshire Road in Portsmouth left a total of \$610,277.08 for the purpose of providing a scholarship to a graduate of Portsmouth High School. During the non-public session this evening, the City Attorney advised the Board on a motion to accept the bequest should the Board desire to do so. Mrs. Craig moved the School Department accept the bequest of John F. Leary and direct that the proceeds of that bequest be placed with the Trustees of Trust Funds of the City of Portsmouth for administration in accordance with the Last Will and Testament of Mr. Leary. Mr. Vaughn seconded the motion.

Mr. Vaughn stated the Trustees of Trust Funds manage funds going

**Scholarship Fund
(con't.)**

back to 1872. He requested the School Board receive a copy of information listing the various scholarship funds and other accounts that are managed by the Trustees. Mr. Torrey said the Trustees administer 31 scholarship funds that produce between \$120,000 and \$130,000 in scholarship benefits. He also stated another source of maintaining scholarship funds is the Greater Piscataqua Community Foundation.

The Chair stated that if the motion passes, he will ask Board members to volunteer to serve on a sub-committee that will establish guidelines for awarding the scholarship. He said the only stipulation required by Mr. Leary is that the student or students graduate from Portsmouth High School who have been a resident of Portsmouth for at least one year prior to graduation. The Chair further stated that he will not limit the number of Board members who may serve on this sub-committee. Mr. LaPage said he knew Mr. Leary, who lived around the corner from him. He said the Board should also find a way to acknowledge Mr. Leary's generosity.

**Public Commentary
Session**

Mr. Irish, speaking about the parent who addressed the Board at the November 24th meeting, said the Board did not address her concerns until the end of the meeting. By that time, she had left the meeting. He suggested the Board should consider addressing concerns that are brought forth to them. The Chair explained the Board is only to take in information during the public commentary sessions. He said the Board held a special meeting the following week to address the concerns of parents and the community in light of the bomb threats. The Chair said that, in the past, Board members have moved items up on the agenda when they recognize people are present at the meeting for that issue, and all Board members should feel free to do that.

CONTINUING BUSINESS

**School Board
Retreat**

Dr. Lister reported the School Board Retreat will be held on Saturday, January 17, 2004 at the Greenleaf Recreation Center. The Chair stated that although this is during a holiday weekend, the retreat must be held before the budget work sessions begin and this is the only date available. The Chair further stated that he hopes people will honor and remember Dr. King and how he fought for civil liberty and not use the time for a mini vacation or shopping day.

**Negotiations with
Transportation
Providers**

Mr. Torrey reviewed information concerning his negotiations with the two transportation providers. He told the Board that Laidlaw Transportation has been in Portsmouth for eight years; knows the community well; and has an excellent relationship with the School Department. Mr. Torrey said The Provider, Inc. has been in business since 1991 giving special needs transportation services. He said they

***Negotiations with
Transportation
Providers (con't.)***

have provided high quality service to students with special needs and continues with a very good working relationship with the special education staff and administrators. Mr. Torrey reviewed the provisions of the agreements and answered questions from the Board. He recommended the Board authorize him to proceed with the power to finalize the contractual terms with Laidlaw Educational Services, Inc. and the Provider, Inc. for five-year agreements for student transportation services and, when complete, the Superintendent be authorized to execute the two agreements on behalf of the School Board and Portsmouth School Department.

Mr. Vaughn moved the Board authorize the Business Administrator to proceed with the power to finalize an agreement with Laidlaw Educational Services, Inc. for the period July 1, 2004 through June 30, 2009 as outlined in his memo of December 3, 2003. Mr. Hayward seconded the motion. Mr. Torrey answered questions regarding logistics and the bidding process, and reviewed the District's history with Laidlaw since 1996. Mr. Vaughn moved the question. In a roll call vote, the motion was unanimously approved.

Mrs. Clayburgh moved the Board approve the five-year contract with The Provider, Inc. for pupil transportation as outlined by Mr. Torrey in his memo of December 3, 2003. Mrs. Craig seconded the motion. The motion was unanimously approved in a roll call vote.

Mr. Torrey said there have been discussions about COAST Transportation having a bus go to the high school later in the afternoon for those students who stay for after-school activities. He said there is City committee looking into public transportation.

Exchange City

Dr. Lister reported that he and Dr. Tracy visited the Exchange City when its doors were open to students. It was recommended to them that the School Board hold one of its meetings there. Dr. Lister suggested this could possibly be done at the second meeting in September, 2004. Dr. Lister said the Nashua School District sent its students last week and have requested 12 visits for next school year.

FINANCIAL

***November 2003
Financial Report***

Mr. Torrey reviewed the November 2003 financial report. He highlighted some accounts that he will be watching; the substitute account (which will be somewhat offset by the teacher salary account due to two sabbaticals); the unemployment compensation account; and out-of-district tuition.

Mr. Tefft complimented Mr. Torrey for his fine work and said that he is extraordinarily competent. He said Mr. Torrey has always been on

top of the game and very helpful to Board members.

NEXT AGENDA

Future Meetings

The Chair stated the School Board will hold its reorganization meeting on Tuesday, January 6, 2004 in the Board Room at 7:00 p.m. The next regularly scheduled meeting of the School Board will be on Tuesday, January 13, 2004 in Council Chambers at 7:00 p.m. The Chair reminded the Board that the holiday dinner will be held on Tuesday, December 16, and the yearbook photo will be taken that evening.

OTHER

Auditorium Chairs

Mrs. Clayburgh reported that 85 auditorium chairs were “sold” at the November 30 talent show. She thanked Tom Bergeron for donating his time. The committee had planned to donate a chair in Mr. Bergeron’s name, but he insisted on paying for it.

Holiday Concerts

Mrs. Clayburgh stated the Middle School Concert, held last week, was wonderful. She reminded the Board that the high school holiday concert will be held tomorrow evening, featuring the Dondero School fourth and fifth grades choir.

Rescheduled Events

Mrs. Clayburgh reminded Board members that the holiday parade was rescheduled to this Saturday, December 13. She also said the Holiday Home Tour for PEP was rescheduled to this Sunday, December 14.

Mr. LaPage said he will send a letter of thanks to Mr. Bergeron and ask that he designate a charity to which an auditorium chair will be given in his name.

Mr. Vaughn stated that he will miss Carvel Tefft being on the Board, and he encouraged Mr. Tefft to run again for the Board.

Holiday Greetings

Mrs. McGee, on behalf of the employees that she represents, wished everybody a happy holiday season. The Chair added his holiday greeting to the citizens of Portsmouth and encouraged them to spend time with their families.

(Approved by the Portsmouth School Board 1-13-04.)

Adjournment

There was no further business to come before the Board. The Chair entertained a motion to adjourn. Mr. Tefft moved, seconded by Mr. Hayward, the Board adjourn. The meeting was adjourned at 8:57 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Lyonel B. Tracy, Ed.D.
Executive Secretary