

**Portsmouth School Board
Portsmouth, New Hampshire**

Minutes of the April 10, 2007 Meeting

A meeting of the Portsmouth School Board was held in the Eileen Dondero Foley Council Chambers on Tuesday, April 10, 2007.

Attendance **PRESENT:** Mr. Kent F. LaPage (Chair), Mrs. Nancy Novelline Clayburgh (Vice-Chair), Ms. Sheri Ham Garrity, Mr. Clay Hayward, Mr. John Lyons, Jr., Mr. Brendan Ristaino, Dr. Mitchell Shuldman, Mr. Carson Smith, Mrs. Ann Walker

PARTICIPATING: Dr. Robert J. Lister (Superintendent of Schools), Mr. Stephen Zadavec (Assistant Superintendent), Mr. Stephen T. Bartlett (Business Administrator), Mrs. Linda Briolat (Employee Representative), Ms. Elisa Loeser (Student Representative), Mrs. Ann Mayer (SAU 50 Representative)

***Non-Public
Non-Session with
Counsel*** Prior to the regular meeting, the School Board met in a non-public non-session with Counsel at 7:00 p.m. in the Legal Department Conference Room. The non-public session was adjourned at 7:35 p.m.

Call to Order Chair LaPage called the regular meeting of the Portsmouth School Board to order at 7:40 p.m. He apologized for the late start, and asked Mr. John Stokel, Middle School Principal, to lead the Pledge of Allegiance following a moment of silent reflection. The Chair asked people to remember those less fortunate, and said the war in Iraq hits close to home; the Principal of Hampstead lost his son in Iraq a few days ago. The Chair asked that we always keep in our thoughts and reflections those who protect our Nation. Mr. Stokel lead the Pledge of Allegiance.

SECRETARY'S REPORT

***Minutes
Approved*** The Chair called for approval of the minutes of the March 22, 2007 special meeting. Mr. Lyons moved, seconded by Mrs. Walker, the minutes be approved. The motion was unanimously approved.

The Chair called for approval of the March 27, 2007 regular meeting minutes. Mr. Lyons moved, seconded by Mrs. Walker, the minutes be approved. The motion was unanimously approved.

Minutes
Approved (cont.) On a motion by Ms. Garrity, seconded by Mrs. Walker, the minutes of the January 25, 2007 budget work session were unanimously approved.

On a motion by Ms. Garrity, seconded by Mrs. Walker, the minutes of the February 1, 2007 budget work session were unanimously approved.

On a motion by Mr. Lyons, seconded by Ms. Garrity, the minutes of the February 6, 2007 budget work session were unanimously approved.

On a motion by Mr. Smith, seconded by Ms. Garrity, the minutes of the February 8, 2007 budget work session were unanimously approved.

PUBLIC COMMENTARY SESSION

Comments About
Strings Program Mr. Steve Scott, 377 Richards Avenue, Portsmouth, told the Board he spoke at the last meeting and did not mean to dismiss his daughter or son, who attend Portsmouth schools but do not participate in the strings program. Mr. Scott said he supports music education for a variety of personal reasons, and he read the District's mission statement. Mr. Scott said his last presentation was "off the cuff" and heartfelt; and said he has done some research since then. He cited that various studies have revealed the following: student behavior on school buses improved by playing music; student musicians have reduced absenteeism; student musicians score 80% higher on tests and have higher learning comprehension. Mr. Scott said he found a study that compared 148 students that play strings to 148 students who did not. Matched by grade level and ability and reading, it was found those students who played strings scored better in reading. Mr. Scott said he hopes the School Board realizes the arts are not just about playing music, but to influence students to do better.

Ms. Tracey Clarkson, 85 Warren Street, Portsmouth, told the Board she is the mother of two kids in the Portsmouth School System. Her daughter is a sixth grader and has participated in the strings program since she was in the second grade. Ms. Clarkson said she supports keeping the strings program. She said there are 50 kids in the strings program this year; some of whom may never have picked up a violin, viola or cello, make beautiful music, and connect with other kids who are doing the same thing. She said that she cannot imagine the difficulty in finding \$19,000 for this program out of a \$32 million budget. She said the Board is spending \$45,000 for athletic transportation, and she feels confident the Board will make the strings program happen.

Ms. Nancy Lehoux, 53 Wibird Street, spoke in support of the strings program. She said students as young as three years old can play a strings instrument. She said the test scores of first and second year strings students are higher than the same population of the school across all socio-economic students. She said strings students in all grade levels out-perform the non-strings players. Ms. Lehoux held up a notebook in which she said contained 100 signatures of people supporting the funding of the strings program. She said her son, who is

**Comments About
Strings Program
(continued)**

present tonight, asked her to tell the Board that playing (strings) is more fun now, and he really enjoys playing the strings. She urged the Board to support the strings program.

Mr. Nathan Booth, 19 South School Street, said he has been playing cello since third grade and would not have started playing the instrument had it not been for the strings program. He said he is glad that he started playing the cello, and he still plays it now and he is grateful for having been able to participate in the strings program.

The Chair called three times for speakers. Being none others to address the Board, he declared the Public Commentary Session closed.

RECOGNITION OF STAFF/STUDENTS

**Request for PASS
School-Wide
Field Trip**

Mrs. Nancy Roy, Principal of the Portsmouth Alternative Secondary School (PASS), and Ms. Erica Carey, counselor at PASS, presented a request for a school-wide trip to Washington, D.C. in June. Mrs. Roy said this is the first time in the last seven years that they are attempting to do a school-wide trip. Mrs. Roy said they have applied for a grant that will help fund a portion of this trip. She thanked the Portsmouth Rotary Club for its financial support to PASS. Ms. Carey said it was extremely important to the PASS faculty that all students have access to this opportunity, and they want to stress the community aspect of the trip. She said students will fundraise and each family will be asked to contribute. Responding to a question from Mr. Hayward, Ms. Carey said it is presently expected that 19 students and six adults will go on this trip.

Mr. Lyons said the Board is hearing the word “Rotary” come up a lot recently. He said the School Department and Rotary have developed a wonderful relationship through Rotary, who really wants to support the schools in many ways. Mr. Lyons said he admires the wonderful things that are done at PASS. Dr. Lister said this is a great opportunity for all students at PASS to visit the Nation’s Capitol.

Mr. Ristaino moved the Board accept the proposal for the PASS trip to Washington, D.C. Mrs. Walker seconded the motion. The motion was unanimously approved.

**Little Harbour
School Fifth
Grade Field Trip**

Mrs. Robin Burdick, Principal of Little Harbour School, and Mr. Robert Snow, fifth grade teacher, were in attendance to request permission for the Little Harbour School fifth grades to attend Environmental School at Camp Calumet in Ossipee, New Hampshire from May 29 – June 1, 2007. Mr. Snow said this would be the school’s 15th year of sending students to Camp Calumet, and that it has been an enriching experience for fifth graders, and ties into the fifth grade science curriculum. Mr. Lyons moved, seconded by Ms. Garrity, the Board approve the Little Harbour School fifth grade trip to Camp Calumet in Ossipee, New Hampshire. The motion was unanimously approved. Superintendent

Lister acknowledged the classroom teachers who give of their own time to accompany their students on these overnight trips.

***Presentation by
Members of the
Music
Department***

Mr. Wendell Purrington, Department Head for the Arts, was present along with music department members Eric Gagnon, Steve Cirillo, Katie Papini (check spelling), Maria Sheppard, and Courtney Randall to discuss the music program and to answer questions from the Board. Mr. Purrington thanked the Board for this opportunity, and said they consider the arts to be the heart of education and one of the big three: academics, athletics, and the arts. He said that Gwen Baker, Choral Director, is not here this evening as she is with the choir, which is performing. Mr. Purrington said that he and Ms. Baker will take 80 choir students to New York City to attend an invitational performance, and next week the high school percussion ensemble will travel to Dayton, Ohio for international competitions. Mr. Purrington said there are 180 Middle School students in choir, and an equal number in the bands. He reported there are 130 members of the high school choir, and over 50 students receive strings instruction (20 at Dondero, 16 at Little Harbour, 8 at New Franklin, and 12 at the Middle School). He said that his vision is to provide each student musician with an opportunity to play and perform while learning valuable skills. He said that he hopes the Board will consider level-funding each of the present teaching positions. Mr. Cirillo and Mr. Gagnon provided the Board with details of the instruction and activities of the Middle School and High School bands. Ms. Papini provided information about the strings program.

PERSONNEL

***Professional
Resignations***

Mr. Zdravec presented the resignation of Kim Thornton from her position as high school physical education teacher effective the end of the 2006-2007 school year. Mr. Lyons moved, seconded by Ms. Garrity, the resignation be accepted. The motion was unanimously approved.

Mr. Zdravec presented the resignation of Richard Hugener from his position as a science teacher at Portsmouth High School effective the end of the 2006-2007 school year. Mr. Lyons moved, seconded by Mrs. Walker, the resignation be accepted. The motion was unanimously approved.

Mr. Zdravec presented the resignation of Susan Rafferty from the position of sixth grade teacher at Portsmouth Middle School effective the end of the 2006-2007 school year. Mr. Lyons moved, seconded by Mrs. Walker, the resignation be accepted. The motion was unanimously approved.

COMMITTEE REPORTS

Mr. Lyons said he was asked by the Governor's Office to speak in support of the Governor's proposed Constitutional amendment, of which Senator Gregg is one of the sponsors. Mr. Lyons said he was happy to do so because it is

important for the City of Portsmouth, and it is important for all children of the State, and particularly the children of Portsmouth.

Safe Routes to School Committee

Chair LaPage announced that Clay Hayward will serve as the School Board's representative to the committee that has been established regarding safe routes to schools. The Chair stated the Superintendent will serve on the committee in an ex-officio capacity.

NEW BUSINESS

First Reading of Policy

A policy entitled, "Admission of Homeless Students" was presented for first reading. Ms. Garrity said the Policy Committee reviewed this policy with Attorney Dwyer. Mr. Lyons moved the first reading of the policy be approved; Mrs. Walker seconded the motion. In a roll call vote, the motion was unanimously approved.

Graduation Dates

Dr. Lister presented the following dates for graduation, yet cautioned that any school days missed because of stormy weather or emergencies may cause these dates to change:

Friday, June 1, 2007	Portsmouth Alternative Secondary School (PASS)
Thursday, June 7, 2007	Portsmouth Middle School (at PHS)
Friday, June 8, 2007	Portsmouth High School

Graduation Dates Approved

Mr. Lyons moved the Board approve the graduation dates as outlined by the Superintendent of Schools. Mrs. Walker seconded the motion. The motion was unanimously approved.

SAU 50's Budget Concerns

Chair LaPage said that he, Dr. Lister and Mr. Bartlett met with the Chairs of the AREA School Board (Rye, Greenland, Newington, and New Castle) to discuss the budget. He said they look forward to having a work session with SAU 50 in the near future. Chair LaPage said Portsmouth's budget process was discussed. He suggested that Dr. George Cushing, Superintendent of SAU 50, work with Dr. Lister and the budgetmakers to discuss the impact of decisions on SAU 50 students. Chair LaPage said the Towns are concerned that they are paying more and receiving less. Mr. LaPage said he does not disagree that tuition to the Towns, like everything else, has gone up.

Mrs. Mayer read a letter signed by the Chairs of the Greenland, Newington, Rye, and New Castle School Boards. In the letter, the Board Chairs state the "product" they are purchasing from Portsmouth is education, and they stated their concerns about larger classroom numbers, the elimination of programs that

have not been restored or reinstated, and that their students are missing vital educational opportunities. The Board Chairs asked the Portsmouth School Board to take into consideration that the funding for these and other areas come at the expense of Portsmouth High School. Mr. Lyons suggested the Portsmouth School Board needs to address these issues, and he further suggested that, in the future, someone from SAU 50 sit in during the presentations at the budget work sessions. Mr. Lyons requested that all Board members receive a copy of the minutes from that meeting.

***“Green”
Cleaning
Products and
Environment***

Mr. Ristaino said he is concerned with making our schools a non-toxic environment. He met with Steve Bartlett and Ken Linchey to learn what products are currently used. Mr. Ristaino said the school district has an outstanding maintenance/custodial staff who keeps our classes and schools clean day in and day out. They also attend classes and workshops throughout the year. Mr. Ristaino said he encourages the use of “green” products, and he provided Board members with a copy of “Child Safe Guidelines.” He said the use of toxic chemicals poses an increased threat to children than to adults. Mr. Ristaino said products used by the school district are about 65% - 70% “green.” He said the schools are doing a tremendous job of making sure they keep our children safe in that manner, and they are moving towards organic fertilizer for all fields. Mr. Ristaino said he would like for the Board to work with Mr. Linchey and help him and his department moves towards a green community as this is very important in kids safe and healthy. Mrs. Clayburgh said the schools work with the City of Portsmouth to accomplish this. Mrs. Walker said the Sustainable Practices Committee works on this topic. She said the committee works not only on looking at health products, but also the conservation of energy. Mr. Ristaino said he would like for the Board to set guidelines. Mr. Bartlett said that some of these issues are connected to the budget process; funds have to be put into the maintenance budget so that it would not go in the negative. The Chair thanked Mr. Ristaino for taking time to meet with Mr. Bartlett and Mr. Linchey.

CONTINUING BUSINESS

***Second Readings
of Policies***

Six policies were presented to the Board for second reading. Mr. Lyons asked if the policies could be voted in a block. The Chair said this would be acceptable. Mr. Lyons moved the Board approve the second readings of the policies listed one through five (Awards for Achievement, Discipline, Married/Pregnant Students, Promotion/Retention, and Student Drug and Alcohol Policy). Mr. Smith seconded the motion. Dr. Shuldman stated he has questions and concerns about each of the policies and would prefer not to discuss them at this late hour. Mr. Lyons withdrew his motion; Mr. Smith withdrew his second. The Chair stated this would be placed on the agenda for the second meeting in May. He suggested that Dr. Shuldman meet with the Policy Committee to discuss his concerns and questions. Dr. Shuldman requested the topic be discussed early in the meeting.

Chair LaPage requested a word be deleted from the proposed weapons policy. The policy will be referred back to the Policy Committee.

**Public
Information
Meeting Re:
Middle**

Mrs. Clayburgh asked if the School Board would consider having a public information night regarding the Middle School. She said at last week's meeting with the Little Harbour School PTA, there were many questions from parents that were not answered due to time constraints. She suggested a public information evening be held, and said questions could be written down and submitted. Mr. Ristaino said he would be in favor of questions being written down and submitted to the Superintendent. He said submitting questions would allow questions to be answered in a timely fashion. Mr. Lyons agreed that written questions would be a more efficient use of time. Mrs. Walker said she has been approached by people who are asking why the Board has not yet made a decision concerning the Middle School. Mr. Ristaino said the School Board has scheduled public input sessions before it takes a vote. He suggested the School Board also receive information about demographics and have a conversation with the Middle School team leaders who can tell them what they want to see in an educational setting in the Middle School. He said it would be premature in the process for the Board to vote on this.

The Chair reminded Board members that a retreat will be held on April 26th beginning at 5:30 p.m.

The Chair reminded Board members that the public hearing for the Middle School will be held tomorrow evening at 7:00 p.m. in Council Chambers.

The Chair also reminded the Board that tomorrow is Student Government Day.

FINANCIAL

**March 2007
Financial Report**

Mr. Bartlett presented the March 2007 financial report. He said the maintenance account will be over-expended, and they will try to make up for that through the energy account, and he is watching other cost centers. Ms. Garrity asked about the status of the school lunch program. Mr. Bartlett said the program is very close to breaking even.

OTHER

**“Portsmouth
Listens”
Meetings**

Ms. Garrity said there may be some dates when she is not available to attend the Portsmouth Listens meetings, and if that is frequent then perhaps someone else could replace her.

(Amended and Approved by the Portsmouth School Board at its regular meeting of May 8, 2007.)

Adjournment There was no other business to come before the Board. Mr. Lyons moved, seconded by Mr. Ristaino, the meeting be adjourned. The motion was unanimously approved. The meeting was adjourned at 10:19 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Dr. Robert J. Lister
Executive Secretary