

**Portsmouth School Board  
Portsmouth, New Hampshire**

**Minutes of the October 9, 2007 Meeting**

A meeting of the Portsmouth School Board was held on Tuesday, October 9, 2007 in the Eileen Dondero Foley Council Chambers at Portsmouth City Hall.

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***Attendance***

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

**ABSENT:** Mr. Carson Smith

**PARTICIPATING:** Dr. Robert J. Lister (Superintendent of Schools), Mr. Stephen Zadravec (Assistant Superintendent), Mr. Stephen T. Bartlett (Business Administrator), Mrs. Linda Briolat (Employee Representative), and Mrs. Ann Mayer (SAU 50 Representative)

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***Non-Public  
Non-Session***

Prior to the regular meeting, the School Board met in a non-public non-session with Counsel in the Legal Department Library.

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**CALL TO ORDER**

***Call to Order***

Chair LaPage called the regular meeting of the Portsmouth School Board to order at 7:19 p.m. Superintendent Lister called the roll. The Chair called for a moment of silent reflection and asked people to remember those less fortunate and those who serve us. The Chair also asked the Board to keep in their thoughts and prayers Jill LeMay, Principal of Dondero School, whose father recently passed away, and Jeff Collins, Principal of Portsmouth High School, whose grandfather recently passed away. Mr. Ristaino led the Pledge of Allegiance.

***Remembrances***

***Minutes Approved***

The Chair called for approval of the August 14, 2007 minutes. Ms. Garrity moved, seconded by Mrs. Walker, the minutes be approved. The motion was unanimously approved.

The Chair called for approval of the September 25, 2007 minutes. Mrs. Walker moved, seconded by Ms. Garrity, the minutes be approved. The motion was unanimously approved.

***NHSBA Legislative Update***

Chair LaPage reminded the Board that the New Hampshire School Boards Association (NHSBA) is hosting a Legislative Update at three locations. He said attending one of these sessions will give Board members a better understanding of what is coming before the New Hampshire Legislature and how it will affect the schools.

Agenda Approval

***Items Added to Agenda***

Mr. Lyons requested to speak on how the Board does business. The Chair stated this would be placed under "Committee Reports." Dr. Shuldman requested a brief update from the Superintendent concerning the Middle School. The Chair stated this would come up under "Items for Discussion." Mr. Hayward requested to speak on the Safe Routes to School Committee. The Chair stated this would be discussed under "Committee Reports."

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**PUBLIC COMMENTARY SESSION**

No one had signed up to address the Board. The Chair called for speakers; being none, he declared the Public Commentary Session closed.

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**ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION**

Overnight Field Trip Requests

***Eighth Grade Trip to Quebec City***

Mr. John Stokel, Middle School Principal, presented a request from Jennie Siegel, French teacher, to take her eighth grade classes to Quebec City for four days in January, 2008. Mr. Stokel said this is the same trip that has been taken by eighth graders over the last four years, and Ms. Siegel plans to use the same company, Jumpstreet, with whom they have had much success. He said the number of students participating determines the exact cost of the trip, and scholarships would be provided to those students who need it. Mr. Lyons moved the trip be approved; Mrs. Walker seconded the motion. In a roll call vote, the motion was unanimously approved.

***Environmental Club Trip to Wyoming***

Ms. Kathleen Metterville, Assistant Principal at Portsmouth High School, presented a request for the Environmental Club to travel to the Rimrock Ranch in Cody, Wyoming either the third or fourth week in June, 2008. Ms. Metterville said she presented six locations to the students, and they chose to attend the ranch. She said the Environmental Club has previously attended the ranch, and it was a wonderful experience and is such a contrast to the Seacoast area in terms of geographical aspects. Ms. Metterville stated that Mr. Donovan, Assistant Principal, will also be a chaperone along with

**Environmental Club Trip Approved** some parents. Mr. Ristaino moved the Board approve the trip; Mrs. Walker seconded the motion. Mrs. Clayburh inquired about the cost of the trip. Ms. Metterville said the estimated cost is \$2,000 per person, and there would be minimal fundraising. The motion to approve the trip was unanimously approved.

**Band Trip to Florida Approved** Mr. Eric Gagnon, High School Band Director, presented the request from the High School Music Department for the PHS Band to travel to Orlando, Florida from April 28 – May 4, 2008. The marching band would parade down “Main Street USA” in Disney World, and the concert band would have two public performances in venues in Disney World. In addition, the students would be participating in a festival sponsored by Disney. Mr. Gagnon said the logistics of this trip would be similar to when the Band traveled to Orlando, Florida in April 2005. The estimated cost of the trip would be \$800 to \$1,000 per person, and all band members would be expected to participate in fundraising throughout the school year.

Mr. Ristaino asked if the percussion ensemble would still participate in competitions this year. Mr. Gagnon replied that, in talking with Mr. Cirillo, the percussion ensemble would participate in regional competitions and does not have plans for a major trip this year. He said they are both aware of not wanting to burden the community with fundraising activities. Dr. Lister said the seacoast community is very supportive of the schools and programs, and there are many groups traveling. He said the schools do not want to take advantage of the community, and are aware of fundraising activities. Dr. Shuldman moved the trip be approved; Ms. Garrity seconded the motion. Mr. Gagnon answered questions from the Board. The motion was unanimously approved.

### **Opening of School Reports**

**Opening of School Reports** Mr. Jeff Collins, High School Principal, told the Board this was his first entire summer at Portsmouth High School, and he witnessed what goes on during the summer to prepare for the new school year. He commended Arthur Ashley (custodial supervisor) and his crew for getting the building ready, and commented on the curriculum work that was done over the summer. He said there was a constant stream of teachers in and out of the building throughout the summer.

### **High School**

Mr. Collins said the beginning of the new school year welcomed 261 new “Clippers” to the family (freshmen). He said the freshmen orientation was well organized; faculty, parent volunteers and other students came in to help prepare for and implement this very important day. Mr. Collins reported opening enrollment as: grade 12 – 290; grade 11 – 243; grade 10 – 262; and grade 9 – 261.

**High School  
(continued)**

Principal Collins also reported the NECAP (New England Common Assessment Program) tests will be new to Portsmouth High School; the school has taken the NHEIAPs in the past. Testing will be done two days per week over a three-week period. He said they tried to impress upon the students the importance of these tests and that they should do their personal best when taking the test. He also reported:

- the Student Council recently held elections
- Spirit Week will be October 22 – 26
- the fall sports season is almost over, and play-off games are scheduled to be played right after Spirit Week
- the open house was very successful
- the first Parent Advisory Council meeting was held and Jackie Defreze was elected as the new President
- the Snack Shack is a pride to the community and a nice addition to the home football games and other organizations that use it
- They are looking into bringing “Rachel’s Challenge” to Portsmouth High School. Rachel was the first student shot at Columbine High School. A month before the shootings, she wrote about how she would like to spread kindness and compassion throughout the world. After her death, her family found six diaries outlining how she would carry this out, and started this program, which has been presented in various parts of the country; the closest being Timberlane High School.
- 500 students participate in various clubs and activities
- a group of students approached him and asked permission to start a Hip Hop Dance Club
- 85 students in Band
- 120 students in chorus
- 50 students participating in the fall production of “Grease.” Tim Stokel, graduate of Portsmouth High School, has been hired to direct the performance. The show is scheduled for November 15 – 18.
- the High School will host the Seacoast Choral Festival on October 16 at 7:00 p.m. (500 students from all schools will participate)
- 364 students participated in fall sports
- 53% of the student population is participating in either sports or other activities

**PASS Report**

Mrs. Nancy Roy, Principal at PASS (Portsmouth Alternative Secondary School), reported this is the first time in six years the school is at its full out-of-district capacity for the month of September. There are 27 students at PASS; 12 in-district students and 15 out-of-district students. The 15 out-of-district students represent ten different school communities. She said the school is

**PASS (cont.)**

continuing last year's theme of "Beginning with the end in mind" and is expanding upon by adding a new frame of reference: hope happens. Mrs. Roy reported the school is continuing a program with the community technical college that was started last year, and plans to expand the program. She said they have also hired a professional with experience in career education to assist students who are not interested in post-secondary education to transition into the work force. This person's responsibility will be to develop a job-partnering alternative for post-secondary education opportunity for students. Mrs. Roy invited Board members to visit PASS.

**Middle School Report**

Mr. John Stokel, Middle School Principal, reported the Middle School began the year with 528 students, which was an increase of 22 students from when school closed in June (all of these students are in grade six). He stated that class sizes are 25 to one in grade six. He said the sixth graders were welcomed with a cook out on the first day of school. The Superintendent and Assistant Superintendent attended, and he said it made for a nice day for the students.

Mr. Stokel reported:

- 119 students are participating in fall sports
- 110 students have signed up for intramural basketball, which starts this week
- 140 students have signed up for Ski Club. If there are enough students to fill another bus, they will open up enrollment for more students.
- 193 students have signed up for Homework Club
- A new theme, "Personal Best" was started at the school this year
- A rally was held to inspire the students to do well on the NECAPs. Britt Conway, a recent PHS graduate, addressed the students at the rally.
- The "word of the day" is written on a white board outside of the school every day. Teachers are encouraged to use the word within their curriculum for that day.
- Open House was last Thursday. Approximately 60% of the parents attended. Mr. Stokel said some parents missed the open house because they could not find parking.
- The school has partnered with "City Year." The organization encourages service back to the community.
- Robin McIntosh has organized the Middle School Photography Project. Eighth graders, in order to capture "a day in the life of Portsmouth," will go throughout the City on Thursday taking pictures of the various neighborhoods and will publish photos in a book.

***Dondero Report***

Mrs. Jill LeMay, Principal of the Mary C. Dondero Elementary School, reported that Dondero School had a smooth opening. She said carpeting in two classrooms was replaced with tile, and teachers, paraprofessionals, and parent volunteers did a lot of painting at the school. She said the building was ready for opening day due to the commitment of the custodial staff. Mrs. LeMay said the enrollment at Dondero School is 325 students; 59 students in kindergarten, and 40 students in grades one through five who are new to Dondero School. She provided the following statistics:

- 13 students for whom English is a second language
- three of the above students are new to the United States
- 49 students have been identified as having special needs
- nine students have 504 plans
- 70 students qualify for free and reduced lunch
- seven of the above students are homeless
- eight new students entered the school since the beginning of the year
- eight students withdrew since the beginning of the year
- average class size is 17 to one; increases to 19 to one when the weights are added in

Mrs. LeMay said the full-day kindergarten is new to the District this year and is going well. Class sizes in kindergarten are 19, 20, and 20. She said this is the largest kindergarten class at Dondero School since 2001. The class size becomes 24 when the weighted factors are added in. Mrs. LeMay said parents were given the option of their children attending kindergarten for a half-day. She said 100% of Dondero parents chose full-day kindergarten for their children.

Mrs. LeMay also reported:

- 25% of the Dondero staff is new
- ten of those staff members are new to Portsmouth
- the Title I Program is new to Dondero School

Mrs. LeMay reported they are not able to provide paraprofessional support to the first grade classroom teachers as they have been re-assigned to different positions within the school. She said the loss of paraprofessional support is felt throughout the school by students and staff.

Mrs. LeMay said that Dondero School will begin the NECAP testing, and on Monday, October 15<sup>th</sup>, the School will be recognized by the

New Hampshire Partners in Education. Mrs. LeMay invited Board members to visit the school and sit in on a class or a science or math lesson.

***Little Harbour  
Report***

Mrs. Robin Burdick, Principal of Little Harbour Elementary School, told the Board she is a native New Englander and has been a school teacher for 38 years. She said the opening of school was easy in many ways and also complicated in other ways. She expressed her hope to be able to address the Board in depth about some of the challenges the elementary schools are facing. Mrs. Burdick reported:

- the Little Harbour teachers who retired last year represented more than 100 years of teaching experience
- five new teachers were hired at Little Harbour this year
- there were many candidates eager to work in Portsmouth, regardless of the challenges
- full-day kindergarten is new this year – 60 kindergarten students at Little Harbour and their parents have chosen the full-day option
- Little Harbour ended the last school year with 386 students
- Little Harbour began this year with 418 students
- class sizes are averaging 22.23 to one
- the school lost paraprofessional support in grade one
- the staff is working collaboratively to ensure the students receive the education they need
- the Federal Government is not fulfilling its promise to fund special education
- literacy is a major initiative at Little Harbour School

Mrs. Burdick said that, although it has not been easy, Little Harbour School is off to a good start, it faces many challenges and is up to the task. She said there is no other school district in which she would want to work.

***New Franklin  
Report***

Mr. George Shea, Principal of New Franklin Elementary School, said he would not repeat what Mrs. LeMay and Mrs. Burdick reported earlier, and he said New Franklin School is off and running. Students in grades three to five will begin the State testing (NECAPs). He reported the staff will use the early release times to discuss the elementary grade level expectations. Mr. Shea also reported:

- a smooth opening does not happen without work from many people
- he commended the staff for their hard work throughout the summer
- he commended the maintenance and custodial staff for having the building ready, even with the elementary summer program being housed at New Franklin

***New Franklin  
(cont.)***

- school ended with an enrollment of 257 students
- New Franklin opened its doors to 280 students
- kindergarten enrollment is approximately 50 students
- because of the need for additional kindergarten classrooms, people are sharing space
- the staff is in the process of identifying goals for this school year
- New Franklin has an extremely active PTO and supportive parents and community, and is a comfortable and familiar place
- the PTO will hold a dance this Saturday evening to benefit Environmental School; he invited Board members to attend

The Chair allowed Board members to ask questions of the Principals. He then thanked the administrators for coming this evening to give their presentations.

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**Professional Nomination**

***Professional  
Nomination***

Mr. Zadavec presented the nomination of Matthew Gats to the position of science teacher at Portsmouth High School. Mr. Lyons moved, seconded by Mr. Ristaino, the nomination be approved. The motion was unanimously approved.

***Middle School***

Dr. Lister, as requested, provided an update on the Middle School. He said the RFQs (requests for qualifications) were due at City Hall on September 27<sup>th</sup>, and packets were received from 17 architects. Dr. Lister said the committee has just begun to review the qualifications to see if they meet the criteria listed in the letter the School Board sent to the City Council. Dr. Lister said that he is receiving assistance from three City engineers, along with Mr. Bartlett and Mr. Stokel, Middle School Principal, and the list of architects will be cut from 17 to three to five. He also said he will work with Mr. Bartlett and the City engineers to discuss the application for State aid reimbursement and make recommendations to continue the process. Dr. Lister said applications for State reimbursement aid are due on December 31, 2007, and they are still seeking information on that process. He said the next step would be to release RFPs (requests for proposals) in order to receive a dollar figure. The Superintendent said that much work is involved in an RFP and, therefore, the information would not be available by December 31<sup>st</sup>. He said the architects may need several months to complete this. In the meantime, the school district will apply for whatever funds are reimbursable from the State of New Hampshire. Dr. Lister said the public will not be involved in choosing the architect; that is totally a City staff process. Dr. Shuldman stated this does not seem realistic to him.



***Middle School  
(cont.)***

Mr. Lyons asked if an architect would be hired without first coming before the Board. Dr. Lister responded the committee will make a recommendation to the School Board following the same procedure used by the City's purchasing department for the high school, library, and fire station projects. Chair LaPage stated that the City Manager will assist the School Department through this process. Mrs. Clayburgh requested the information be placed in writing for the Board so that everyone knows exactly how this process will work.

Mr. Lyons said he received a phone call last night and he knows there are people in the community who believe the Board has created an educational narrative to sandbag this process with the intent that the Board has no real good intention of even looking at the middle school; and he said that belief is preposterous. Because of this, he stated that it is critically important that the process be as transparent as possible. He said the rumors are still out there despite the Board's previous vote.

Dr. Lister stated that he would be glad to provide the Board with a timeline on paper so that everyone will know what the process is.

The Chair asked, once the architects are narrowed down to five, do the names of the firms then become public knowledge. The Superintendent responded that was his understanding.

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**COMMITTEE REPORTS**

***Suggestion from  
Board Member on  
Agenda Items***

Mr. Lyons said his term on the Board will end soon, and he knows that everyone supports Mrs. Clayburgh's efforts to continue her service to the City. He suggested the School Board change the way it does business, and said there will be four others to make that decision. Mr. Lyons said the approval of coaching nominations and field trips is the Superintendent's obligation. He said the School Board needs to spend more time on financial oversight and program issues. Mr. Lyons said he was not able to specifically answer to a constituent how the School Department eliminated the special education deficit. He said Board members need to know specifically where the money came from. He said the Board needs to spend time discussing PEEP (Portsmouth Early Education Program) and all-day kindergarten. He said the Board is diverted from these discussions by other actions that it must take. He said the new school board will need to look at the items they discuss as it moves forward.

Mrs. Walker stated that she did understand how the deficit was taken care of and felt comfortable answering questions from people.

(Approved by the Portsmouth School Board on November 13, 2007.)

Dr. Shuldman agreed with Mr. Lyons that the Board needs to look at programs and budgets. Mr. Ristaino said he has previously stated at meetings that the Board should not be approving coaches; that is the Athletic Director's job. Mr. Ristaino requested the topic of special education funding be placed on the next agenda and that Mrs. Hoeflich and Mrs. Burdick be asked to attend and participate in the discussion.

Mrs. Clayburgh said that Mr. Bartlett did a good job of explaining the special education deficit and how the funds became available to pay off the deficit and she understood his presentation. She believes this information was also communicated to the school principals.

***Safe Routes to  
School Committee***

Safe Routes to Schools – Mr. Hayward reported the Safe Routes to Schools Committee met last Monday, October 8. He reported the Safe Routes to Schools Program is funded 100% by the Federal government, and an application has been written for a local program. He said the Committee is hosting a meeting at the library on October 29<sup>th</sup> at 7:00 p.m.

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**FINANCIAL**

There was no financial business to come before the Board.

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**NEXT AGENDA**

***Next Agenda Items***

Chair LaPage stated that Mrs. Susan Birrell, Technology Director, and Dr. Shuldman will give a report on technology, and Mrs. Hoeflich will speak about special education funding (Mrs. Burdick will be present to talk about the effects of having no paraprofessionals to work in grade one).

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**ADJOURNMENT**

***Adjournment***

There was no other business to come before the Board. Mr. Lyons moved, seconded by Dr. Shuldman, the meeting be adjourned. The motion was unanimously approved, and the meeting was adjourned at 9:20 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Dr. Robert J. Lister  
Executive Secretary