

**Portsmouth School Board
Portsmouth, New Hampshire**

Minutes of the October 23, 2007 Meeting

A meeting of the Portsmouth School Board was held on Tuesday, October 23, 2007 in the cafeteria at the Mary C. Dondero Elementary School.

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, 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), Mrs. Ann Mayer (SAU 50 Representative)

***Work Session on
Deficit Elimination***

Prior to the regular meeting, a work session was held to discuss the elimination of the special education deficit.

Call to Order

Chair LaPage called the regular meeting of the School Board to order at 7:27 p.m. in the cafeteria of the Mary C. Dondero Elementary School.

***Moment of Silent
Reflection***

The Chair called for a moment of silent reflection, and asked people to remember those who protect us at home and abroad, and to also remember those who are less fortunate. Mr. Hayward led the Pledge of Allegiance.

Correspondence

The Board received a copy of the "New Franklin Gazette" and the November 2007 elementary lunch menu.

The Chair recognized Mr. Clay Hayward. Mr. Hayward addressed the Board and stated that, due to some personal circumstances, he is dropping out of the race for School Board. Chair LaPage said that Mr. Hayward spoke to him before the meeting and stated that, for personal reasons, he would not be able to run as he felt he could not commit the time to doing the job. Mr. LaPage said this shows the

utmost respect for the position. The Chair said that Mr. Hayward always gathered his information before speaking. He commended him for the work he has done on the Safe Routes to School Committee, as well as other service while a member of the School Board.

AGENDA APPROVAL

Item Removed From Agenda Mr. Ristaino requested the topic of Special Education (VI. A.) be removed from the agenda as it was discussed during the work session.

PUBLIC COMMENTARY SESSION

Concerns About Bullying At School Ms. Carol McGinty, 300 Spinney Road, Portsmouth, told the Board she is speaking at the urging of many parents of Dondero School as well as other schools within the school district. Ms. McGinty claimed that no one at Dondero School addresses the school district's bullying policy. She said her complaint is based upon a recent incident that involved her son. She said the worst part was not only was her son bullied by another student, but was also bullied by the principal as well. She said that many other parents have come forward to her regarding incidents involving their children. Ms. McGinty stated that parents have pulled their children out of Dondero School over the last three years, all due to bullying incidents.

Concerns About Student Field Trips Ms. Janet Littlefield, Dondero School parent, presented her concerns about safety issues on school field trips. She said the best team for a child's education is comprised of the parent, the teacher, and the child working together. Mrs. Littlefield said the fifth grade parents were called to a special meeting on September 19 to discuss the curriculum and what was going to happen with their fifth graders on a planned field trip. She said the meeting lasted one-half hour and the parents were told they could not go on the trip and could not ask for details. She said a field trip consent form was sent home on October 10th, and it was stated that parents could drive the students to Mount Major, drop them off, and pick them up later. The parents would not be allowed to climb Mount Major with the students. She said a second form was sent home on the 17th, and that one indicated the students would be transported by bus and the amount of money needed to defray the cost of transportation. Mrs. Littlefield said the school would take a teacher out of the classroom and hire a substitute, yet is excluding parents to such an extent that they would hire a bus and a substitute teacher when parents were willing to go. She said that she does not understand why parents are being excluded.

***Comments About
Middle School
Process***

Ms. Rebecca Emerson-Brown, 34 Woodbury Avenue, Portsmouth, said she is speaking tonight as a citizen and not as a school board candidate. Ms. Emerson-Brown, referring to the Middle School project, said the field of 17 architectural firms has been narrowed down to five, and it is now time for the School Board to narrow the field even further. She said it is time for the Board to take leadership of this process and to do its homework. She suggested that, perhaps, a sub-committee could be appointed, and she enthusiastically volunteered to serve on such a committee. She said this would provide for transparent communication, and further suggested that a review of all 17 firms might be appropriate. Ms. Emerson-Brown said that it did not seem appropriate that some of the architectural firms did not make the short list. She urged the Board to take its time and do it right. She said the citizens have the right to control their taxes through their elected officials. She said the firm that is ultimately chosen must understand the needs and wants of the City.

***Fifth Grade Field
Trip***

Mr. Joseph Kallimanis 36 Harding Road, Portsmouth, told the Board that his daughter is a fifth grader at Dondero School. Mr. Kallimanis told the Board that he shares many of the concerns expressed by Mrs. Littlefield about the fifth grade field trips, and said he was told by the teachers that the reason given that parents were excluded was that the school wants the students to foster independence and self-reliance. He said this is not for the school to take that responsibility away from the parents. Mr. Kallimanis said he is in the Army Reserve and was taken away from his family for a year, and during that time he saw 18, 19 and 20 years olds who were forced to quickly develop their independence. He said there are certain age-appropriate times to develop independence, and he does not believe that a ten-year old kid should be developing independence and taking that responsibility away from the parents. He said we live in a day and age when there is not enough parent involvement, and said the schools need to get parents involved in their children's education. He said Dondero School is reversing that trend.

***Administration to
Work with Parents
and Staff***

The Chair suggested the Superintendent work with the parents and school personnel in regards to the two items presented to the Board by the parents. Mrs. Clayburgh made this in the form of a motion, seconded by Mrs. Walker.

***Discussion About
Field Trips***

Mr. Lyons said he has been bemoaning the fact that the Board, over time, has been approving field trips as it has other things to do. He said the one field trip in which there is a controversy does not appear on the Board's agenda. He said that he would support the motion. Mr. Smith said he does not know the whole situation, but given the immediacy of the issues and what would appear to be valid points from parents, he asked the Superintendent to comment. Dr. Lister responded the bullying issue is something the administration has been

***Discussion About
Field Trips (cont.)***

looking into, and said he has met with several of the parents regarding this issue. He said the four-day trip that is being discussed is Environmental Camp, and he said the students have been going to this camp for many years. Dr. Lister said the overnight camping trip is not going to happen. He said there is some talk about an overnight sleepover at the school. The Superintendent said he has met with the fifth grade teachers to discuss the trip to Mount Major. He said there is an issue with the way the trip was handled with the parents, and that is why he became involved. He said there is much concern about safety, and they need to take into consideration the parents' concerns. Dr. Lister said he would report back to the Board. The Superintendent reminded the Board that its field trip policy requires all overnight field trips to be approved by the Board. He said the policy will be presented to the Policy Committee for review. The Superintendent stated that Dr. Hilson put in his request a long time ago, and it had been scheduled for this meeting. Referring to the trip planned for Dondero School, the Superintendent said there had been a communication problem that needs to be addressed. After further discussion, the motion was unanimously approved.

Mrs. Walker stated the School Board has a policy that states overnight field trips must be approved by the School Board, and it is their duty to do that and she thinks the Board should continue to do that. Mr. Smith said that a parent should not have to call the Superintendent in order to get a call back from a principal. He said that, unfortunately, this is not the first time that issues in communication have resulted in problems coming before the Board.

Dr. Shuldman said that Little Harbour School has been going to Environmental Camp for a number of years, and New Franklin School has attended the Seacoast Science Center. He believes that it was last year when Little Harbour School chose to go to Camp Calumet. Dr. Shuldman said it was only two or three years ago that his daughter was in Little Harbour School. He said that he would have to disagree with comments made this evening and said it is wonderful thing the schools to take children on these trips to foster independence of the students. He said the students on his daughter's trip had a bonding experience and came back excited. He said the trip was an excellent way to culminate the school year and the interdisciplinary teaching and learning that took place.

Mr. Hayward asked if criminal background checks are done on chaperones. Dr. Lister said that anyone who accompanies a field trip usually signs up with the teacher or principal. He said the only ones that go through the background checks are new employees, substitutes, teachers, and others who work in the schools.

There was no further discussion. The Chair declared the Public

Commentary Session closed.

Chair LaPage asked Ms. Judie Belanger, City Finance Director, and Mr. Robert Sullivan, City Attorney, to join the Board at the table to discuss the Middle School project.

***Middle School
Project Chronology***

Dr. Lister distributed a draft chronology for the Portsmouth Middle School project. He offered to review the chronology and then answer questions. The Superintendent stated that Ms. Belanger, as the City's Finance Director, is also the purchasing director for the City of Portsmouth. He said this project will follow the exact same procedures that were followed for construction of the Public Library and renovations at the Fire Station.

Dr. Lister, in reviewing the chronology, stated the selection team that reviewed the architectural RFQs (Requests For Qualifications) consisted of himself, Steve Bartlett (Business Administrator), John Stokel (Middle School Principal), Steve Parkinson (Public Works Director), and Dan Hartney (from the City Engineer's office). This team selected five firms from the 17 proposals. The Superintendent said this process mirrors the process used to by the City to construct the library. Dr. Lister said Library Trustees were allowed to sit in the room during interviews of the architectural firms, but they could not participate in asking questions. He suggested that two School Board members be allowed to sit in and observe the interviews, and could then report back to the Board.

Attorney Sullivan said the Middle School situation is a little different than the Public Library as the Library Trustees do not have the same relationship to City government as the School Board does. The City Council totally controlled the costs of the library, while the School Board would have to be concerned with the cost of the Middle School project. Mr. Sullivan also stated that, in fairness to all of the firms, the interviews really need to take place out of the public. He said unless they do that, the second architectural firm gets to sit at the interview of the first one, and the third firm gets to sit at the interview of the first and second firms. He said the first firm would not be treated fairly unless all interviews are conducted in a non-public way. Mr. Sullivan stated the process for the Middle School is different than the process used for the high school project. He said the School Board went before the City Council for a bond authorization to build and renovate the high school. He stated that, frankly, the Middle school project is far more controversial and he does not think that process would have happened in this case.

The City Attorney answered questions from the Board, that included:

- The selection team that short-listed the 17 architectural firms to

Middle School

**Project Chronology
(cont.)**

five will conduct the interviews

- A recommendation of the final firm will be made to the School Board
- The Board may request to look at the other four plans
- The Board may schedule a public hearing

Mr. Lyons said the Board is trying to balance fairness to the applicants with a transparent process. He stated the suggestion of achieving that balance is a good one and suggested that a couple of School Board members sit in on interviews to observe. Dr. Lister stated it is important that the two Board members be able to sit through all five interviews.

Mrs. Walker asked if the School Board would have a public hearing. The Superintendent said it is not part of the process. The City Attorney stated the only requirement for a public hearing is for the bonding of the project, which occurs later in the process, but before the Board makes its presentation to the City Council on what it wants to bond the money to build.

Dr. Shuldman asked what the public's input would be and said it would not be possible for the public to have commented on any of the RFPs (Requests for Proposals). The answer was that this may not be the fairest way. Dr. Shuldman asked if the architects are paid to submit their designs. Mrs. Belanger stated that typically there are no fees, and that is dependent on the way the RFPs are written. She said the RFP is being drafted now. Dr. Shuldman said there is growing concern in the community that the process be transparent. Mr. Lyons said that sometimes information is presented to the Board and the Board votes that same evening. He suggested the Board receive the recommendation of the top firm and a presentation at one meeting, and then vote at the next meeting; thereby allowing for public comment. He said this would also allow the Board time to think about the presentation and to carefully formulate questions.

Mr. Ristaino said the Board had requested certain conditions to be met. He asked if one of these items is not met, a Board member may say that it does not follow the plan. He asked how that type of situation would work. Dr. Lister said the architects are responding to the Request For Proposals (RFPs), which are being written to reflect the conditions set forth by the School Board.

There were no further questions. Chair LaPage thanked Ms. Belanger and Mr. Sullivan for staying at the meeting to participate in this discussion.

ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION

Trip to NYC Approved

Dr. Arthur Hilson was present on behalf of the 45 students in the Black Student Union to thank the Board for approving the trip last year and to request they approve plans to travel again to New York City during spring recess (April 2008). Dr. Hilson said parents want to go on the trip, and they would be paying their own way. Mr. Ristaino moved the Board approve the trip of the Black Student Union to New York City in April 2008; Ms. Garrity seconded the motion. The motion was unanimously approved.

Technology Report

Technology Report

Mrs. Susan Birrell, Technology Director, presented a report on the “Infinite Campus” software, the new information system that will replace MMS. She reported that MMS was purchased in 1995, and it had been becoming increasingly difficult to integrate the software with the newer technology, and MMS was not able to produce the data required in some of the State reports. In addition, all schools had their own separate database, and “Infinite Campus” allows for one district-wide student information system. Mrs. Birrell reported that “Infinite Campus” was chosen because of its strong systematic implementation plan and project management. She said the system will allow the district to work more efficiently and be able to monitor individual student achievement.

Mrs. Birrell reviewed the implementation plan, which includes creating a policy and procedures manual, converting the existing data, and training. She reviewed the timeline and said the plan is to launch the system and “go live” on February 14, 2008.

Mrs. Birrell answered questions from the Board regarding cost, implementation, and conversion of data from MMS into the new system. She stated that it cost \$80,000 for the first year (the biggest costs were the conversion of data and training), and will cost \$30,000 in subsequent years. Mr. Zadavec said that one of the biggest motivating factors in the purchase of the system was with the State reporting. MMS was no longer going to be effective in producing data required by the State.

Mr. Lyons said the State offers “Performance Tracker” free of charge and the training is provided at no cost. He asked why “Infinite Campus,” at an initial cost of \$80,000 for the first year and then \$30,000 for subsequent years, was chosen over “Performance Tracker,” which is free. Mrs. Birrell said her department is in contact with the State Department of Education, and Portsmouth will be able to supply the required information to the State. She said that “Performance Tracker” is intended to be a student information

***Technology Report
(cont.)***

system, it is not designed to be a data warehouse. She explained there are many different aspects of a student information system. Mrs. Birrell said that student scheduling is a big piece at the High School, and “Performance Tracker” is not a scheduling software. She explained there are other things that this software would not be able to do, that can be done with “Infinite Campus.” She said they are looking at using both software systems. She answered questions from the Board concerning the two software systems and the system, “Case e,” used for special education.

Mr. Bartlett said the cost to the general fund for the first year was \$20,000, and not \$80,000. He explained the rest was made up from funds not used to pay for MMS and the balance was paid from the “e-Rate” rebate program, which was approximately \$50,000. He said the first year is more expensive because of data conversion and training. He said that all other costs are competitive, and are based on student population.

Dr. Shuldman said that he has known Mrs. Birrell professionally for a number of years, and he is very happy that she is working here in Portsmouth and sharing her expertise.

***Integrating
Technology Into the
Classrooms***

Dr. Shuldman reported that, as a Nation, we spend 40 to 100 billion dollars trying to get technology into schools, and that most school districts still do not know how to effectively use technology in the classroom. He said technology may be used in the classroom, for communication, for teaching, for instruction, for curriculum, and for learning. He said a big question is “are our students using technology for hands-on work in the lab?” And who is designing those lessons? He said technology should be integrated into the classroom and used on a daily basis by students. He also said it is difficult to expect teachers to use technology when there are so many issues they need to deal with.

Dr. Shuldman said that when used effectively, technology helps students learn independently, and school districts need to figure out how to integrate technology in a successful way. He said each district is unique, and there are many different ways districts are trying to solve this. He reviewed examples of what is happening in four districts throughout the State. Mr. Ristaino asked if the School Board should hold a work session in the future to discuss this. Dr. Shuldman stated there is a committee in place that could report back to the Board to move this forward.

Update of PEEP

Mrs. Paulette Hoeflich (Student Services Director), Mrs. Beth Setear (Portsmouth Early Education Program – PEEP – Coordinator) joined Dr. Lister at the table to provide an update on PEEP.

***PEEP Update
(cont.)***

Dr. Lister said they were present this evening to continue discussions about PEEP and its location at the Community Campus. He said previous discussions were held on January 27 and March 13, 2007.

Dr. Lister said the rent for space at the Community Campus increased to \$53,000 last year. He said the Board instructed him to meet with Susan Bunting, the Executive Director. As a result of that meeting, the rent was reduced to \$49,000 for one year. He said the administration and Board began discussing the possibility of moving PEEP to the High School. Dr. Lister said this move could be done, including renovations to rooms at the High School, for approximately \$15,000.

Mr. Ristaino asked Ms. Setear if the program's current location is listed as being in agreement with all State guidelines. Ms. Setear said the classrooms in the current location are approved by the State of New Hampshire. Mr. Ristaino asked, if the program was to be moved to the High School, how many rules and regulations would be in compliance. Ms. Setear said it is most likely the regulations of minimum standards would be met in a location at the High School.

Ms. Setear said it is important for the Board to understand that when she looked at space at the High School, it was just to move the identified students. She said she has proposed in the report to ask the people at the Community School to move with them. There are 12 children in their program. Mr. Ristaino asked the advantage of the Community School students remaining at the Community Campus if PEEP is moved to the High School. Ms. Setear responded the advantage is that other services are available at Community Campus, and the parents would have to get their children to PEEP at the High School.

Mr. Lyons said the Board has talked about the cost of technology. He stressed to the Board the importance of spending more money in early childhood education. He said in many ways, high school is too late. Mr. Lyons said he has a very strong belief in PEEP, and thinks that it is a critical program. Mr. Lyons said that he is a member of the Foundation (for Seacoast Health) and his wife, Mary, is Chair of the Community Child Care Center. He said this is about the kids.

Mr. Lyons said he and Ms. Setear attended a meeting of the Foundation members this morning, and she was invited to speak about her program's collaborations at the Community Campus, including Head Start. Mr. Lyons said that Ms. Setear has stated that Community School would have to move with PEEP in order for the program to be successful. He also stated that she recommends PEEP maintain a presence at the Community Campus to serve the children of Head Start. Mr. Lyons said that PEEP has been recommended as a

***PEEP Update
(cont.)***

National model. Ms. Setear said that at the present time, PEEP partners with the Community Campus on several projects.

Mr. Lyons handed out a copy of an e-mail from Ms. Setear to Paulette Hoeflich date May 2007. He asked Ms. Setear if she would prefer to stay at the Community Campus. Her answer was “absolutely.”

Mr. Lyons said the rental issue is one that is faced by all of the agencies renting at Community Campus. He said he believes it is critical for the Board to do everything it can to maintain PEEP at the Community Campus. He said that Ms. Setear has created a program that is a National model, and looks forward to working in a relationship with the University of New Hampshire.

Time Extended

The Chair stated the time limit is running out and, in order to continue discussions, the Board must approve a motion. Mr. Lyons moved, seconded by Dr. Shuldman, the Board continue its meeting until 10:30 p.m. The motion was unanimously approved.

Ms. Setear answered questions from Mr. Lyons regarding services to students at the Community Campus. Ms. Garrity said she agrees that money should be spent on early education, and she asked Ms. Setear how she really felt about the program moving. Ms. Setear said it is really the Board’s decision. She said the program can work at the High School, and if they can get the Community School to move with them, they can maintain the integrity of the program.

Dr. Shuldman asked Mr. Lyons if he serves on the Board for the Foundation for Seacoast Health. Mr. Lyons responded that he is just a member. Dr. Shuldman asked if he has a sense of how the rents would change. Mr. Lyons said he does not know. Mr. Lyons said he knows the Foundation Board members are aware of the financial burden the rent increases have placed on their tenants. Mr. Lyons said that a new Executive Director has just been hired to replace Dr. Bunting, who has retired. He suggested there may a possibility to look at a number of possibilities and look towards finding a solution.

Mrs. Clayburgh stated that this is a budget question and that it should be brought up within the budget work sessions. She said the Board needs to ask itself how much it wants to spend for rent, and said the Board could vote to keep PEEP at the Community Campus. She said the Board, in January or February, may decide to change the location or leave the program where it is. She said it does not make sense for this Board to vote on this issue; it is a subject for the next Board to discuss.

Mr. Lyons said that he does not necessarily disagree with Mrs.

***PEEP Update
(cont.)***

Clayburgh, however, this is not just a budget issue. He said the Board is asking the City of Portsmouth where they are going to put the Middle School based on an educational narrative. He said PEEP is a critical program in the area of early childhood education.

Mrs. Clayburgh stated that early education very important, however, she reminded the Board that its sister SAU, SAU 50, has expressed concerns that the budget have some priorities for the SAU 50 high school students who attend Portsmouth High School. She asked if the Board talks about PEEP or tries to satisfy SAU 50. She said these are budget issues and the Board should not be talking about it right now.

Chair LaPage stated that in 2002-03 there was a major outreach to all nursery schools and day cares throughout the area to identify children who might benefit from the services provided at the Community Campus. He said that when PEEP entered into a rental agreement with the Community Campus, Peter Torrey (former business administrator) stated this was the first City department to lease space from a private foundation; no one else in the City does that. The Chair said the Board will need to make a series of budget decisions.

***First Budget Work
Session***

Dr. Lister said the School Board's first budget work session for the 2008-2009 budget is scheduled to be held at 5:30 p.m. on Tuesday, November 13, 2007 at City Hall. The Superintendent recommended that the administration pursue conversations with Community Campus and Head Start and report back to the Board in a timely fashion. The Chair agreed to this.

Leave of Absence

Mr. Zadavec presented a request from Mary Ann Romero, computer teacher at Little Harbour School, for a leave of absence for the remainder of the 2007-2008 school year. Mr. Smith moved, seconded by Mr. Lyons, the request be granted. The motion was unanimously approved.

COMMITTEE REPORTS

Policy Committee

Policy Committee: The Superintendent stated the Policy Committee will meet the first week in November and will report back to the Board.

***Safe Routes to
School Committee***

Safe Routes to Schools: Mr. Hayward reported this committee will hold an informational meeting at the Public Library on Monday, October 29, 2007 at 7:00 p.m.

***Middle School
Architect Interviews***

Middle School Interviews: Mr. Lyons moved the Chair appoint two School Board members to sit as non-voting observers on the

Middle School Architect Interviews (cont.) Selection Committee for the purpose of reporting back to the Board as to the selection of the architect for the Middle School. Dr. Shuldman seconded the motion. Dr. Lister reminded the Board that interviews may be conducted over two full days, and it is important for the Board members to be available on both days. The motion was unanimously approved (the Chair abstained from voting).

NEXT AGENDA

Next Meeting The next meeting of the School Board will be Tuesday, November 13, 2007 at 7:00 p.m. in the Eileen Dondero Foley Council Chambers. The Chair stated that Dr. Cushing, Superintendent of SAU 50, will be invited to participate in the 5:30 p.m. budget work session.

Holiday Fundraiser Chair LaPage announced that an informational session will be held on Monday, November 5, 2007 in the Little Theatre at Portsmouth High School at 6:30 p.m. to discuss a fundraiser. He said the fundraiser will have a holiday theme, and he would be looking for 400 “elves.”

ADJOURNMENT

Adjournment There was no further business to come before the Board. On a motion by Mrs. Walker, seconded by Ms. Garrity, the Board unanimously voted to adjourn. The meeting was adjourned at 10:15 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Dr. Robert J. Lister
Executive Secretary