

## SCHOOL BOARD MINUTES

PORTSMOUTH ALTERNATIVE SECONDARY SCHOOL  
DATE: TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 23, 2008

PORTSMOUTH, NH  
TIME: 7:00PM [or thereafter]

### **I. CALL TO ORDER**

### **II. ROLL CALL**

Present: DR. MITCHELL SHULDMAN (CHAIR), BRENDAN RISTAINO (VICE CHAIR), KENT LAPAGE, SHERI HAM-GARRITY, ANN WALKER, DEXTER LEGG, LISA SWEET, REBECCA EMERSON, LESLIE STEVENS, DR. ROBERT LISTER (SUPERINTENDENT) STEPHEN ZADRAVEC (ASST. SUPERINTENDENT), STEPHEN BARTLETT (BUSINESS ADMINISTRATOR), JEFF COLLINS (PRINCIPAL PHS), JOHN STOKEL (PRINCIPAL PMS), ABIGAIL ROCKEFELLER (STUDENT REPRESENTATIVE) AND ANN MAYER (SAU 50 REPRESENTATIVE)

Absent: LINDA BRIOLAT (EMPLOYEE REPRESENTATIVE)

### **III. INVOCATION**

Superintendent Lister asked School Board members to remember Theresa Hickey and Alan Bishop who passed away last week. Ms. Hickey taught at Dondero Elementary for thirty-one years, retiring in 1991. Mr. Bishop was the husband of Ann Bishop who is vital to the planning of graduation every year. Mr. Kent LaPage asked the board to remember long time Portsmouth citizen Charles Griffin, Sr. whose son served on the school board at one time and served as Board Chair.

### **IV. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE**

Chair Shuldman led in the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag.

### **V. ACCEPTANCE OF MINUTES**

#### **1. September 9, 2008 Regular School Board Meeting**

Correction to be made on the name of community member Erik Anderson prior to being posted on line. Voted to approve and accept the minutes of September 9, 2008.

### **VI. COMMUNICATIONS**

#### **1. Portsmouth Elementary Lunch Menu**

Superintendent Lister provided board members with the elementary school's lunch menu, which will be included in each month's packet.

#### **2. Letter of intent to hire NHSBA**

A letter stating the school board has entered into agreement with New Hampshire School Board Association (NHSBA) to search for a new Superintendent of Schools was provided to the board.

#### **3. Letter to NESDEC**

A letter declining the services of NESDEC was provided to the board.

#### **4. Call for Resolution from NHSBA**

Chair Shuldman asked board members to go through the resolutions from NHSBA. Mr. LaPage believes it is important that the board attends the meeting in January collectively and stated that this is the one time a year that the board has the opportunity to participate in the forming of legislation. In a future meeting, time should be allotted to discuss this further. Chair Shuldman asked board members to let him know if they have interest in attending the meeting in January.

#### **5. Letter of Special Education Compliance from the State**

A letter from the State Director of Special Education was received stating the Portsmouth School District has addressed all corrective actions from the Improvement Plan and has been found in compliance with New Hampshire Rules for the Education of Children with Disabilities as required by RSA 186:C.

#### **6. On-Site letter from SERESC to Ms. Hoeflich**

Southeastern Regional Education Service Center, Inc. commended Ms. Paulette Hoeflich and the Portsmouth School Department for not only addressing issues in a Corrective Action and Improvement Plan, but also for improving services for students identified with Autism Spectrum disorder (ASD). Time dedicated by professional staff to research, develop, reflect and redesign practices has resulted in a comprehensive district-wide approach to providing quality supports and services to students with ASD as well as all other students with disabilities.

#### **7. Title I On-Site Review – Final Report**

A letter from the Department of Education to Ms. Joanne Simons, Title I Director. Strengths of the program were many. There were no non-compliance issues found and finally the Department of Education's Title I Consultant made recommendations for improvement. The consultant ended the report commending Ms. Simons and encouraging her to keep up the good work.

#### **8. Article – Green on Top**

Superintendent Lister provided an article on a newly renovated school that chose to install a green roof as information to the board.

#### **9. Letter from Deputy Fire Chief Griswold**

Fire Chief Griswold expressed concern over space being available for storage in the new middle school plans. Mr. Legg recommended the board provide the Chief with the proposed middle school plan in order to gain his professional feedback and keep him informed.

#### **10. City Manager letter re: request for \$12,000.00**

A letter was received from Mr. John Bohenko reporting that at the September 15, 2008 City Council meeting, the Council voted to fund up to \$12,000.00 from the contingency fund to defray costs for a Superintendent of Schools search.

#### **11. City Manager letter re: DRAFT timeline of Portsmouth Middle School**

A letter was received from Mr. John Bohenko reporting that at the September 15, 2008 City Council meeting, the Council reviewed the proposed schedule and estimated timeline for the Portsmouth Middle School and placed it on file.

Motion to accept correspondence from Ms. Walker. Seconded by Vice Chair Ristaino. Voted and approved.

### **VII. RECOGNITION OF STAFF AND STUDENTS**

#### **1. Dr. Paul DeMinico, NHSBA Consultant**

Dr. DeMinico stated he is delighted to conduct the search for a new Superintendent of Schools in Portsmouth. Portsmouth is a premiere school district and he looks forward to working with the board. Dr. DeMinico stated it is important for a sub committee to be formed and for a general Notice of Vacancy to be announced next week. This announcement will be sent to the superintendent national organization and all fifty school board associations throughout the country. He then recommended a more extensive advertisement be created and placed in newspapers, such as Educational Week and the Boston Globe.

Dr. DeMinico also recommended that a sub committee of the board begin creating a leadership profile. (The entire board could collectively create the leadership profile as well.) Once the profile is created, it will be presented to the entire board for adjustments and final endorsement. A working group should then be chosen by the board to form the Superintendent Search Committee. As a Chair, Dr. Shuldman could delegate committee members to serve on the sub committee or the board could choose members as a whole.

The Superintendent Search Committee should include key members of the community, the superintendent, board members, teacher organizations and students, as well as City Council members. Generally the teacher's union should represent teachers in the process.

After all selected candidates have met with the Search Committee, a final few will be chosen to interview with the board, community members, teaching staff, and members of the City Council. The Search Committee may wish to visit final candidates at their place of employment to speak with staff members and other administration. Dr. DeMinico also recommended a "Candidates Night" where candidates would be given the opportunity to present a brief bio of themselves and answer questions from audience members.

Mid to late January should be the final selection for the new superintendent. Discussion of a contract would ensue. Dr. DeMinico also suggested the board attend a mini retreat with the new superintendent in the spring to discuss expectations for the upcoming year, develop relationships and set goals.

Mr. LaPage stated the new superintendent would be chosen right in the middle of budget season. Whoever the successful candidate is, they should have some input into the 2009-2010 school department budget. He asked how Dr. DeMinico saw this working? Dr. DeMinico believes it is extremely important the new superintendent understand the middle school proposal and new construction. He/she should be familiar with a budget process and hopefully a final candidate will have completed their work of visiting the City's extensive web site and be familiar with the school department's budget. Dr. DeMinico believes it is also important for the new superintendent to participate, in some way, in the hiring of administrative positions also opened for the 2009-2010 school year.

Mr. LaPage expressed some concern in the wording of the drafted announcement. He would like to see the word "student" changed to "child" The candidate that would "win" Mr. LaPage over would be the candidate that addresses the whole child. Chair Shuldman stated the intent of the drafted document was to have something for the board to read. Recommendations and corrections would be discussed prior to release.

Vice Chair Ristaino requested that Agenda item two be moved to continue discussion with Dr. DeMinico. Seconded by Ms. Garrity. Voted and approved.

Dr. DeMinico would like to make a basic announcement next week if the board could decide on the content. Chair Shuldman asked for feedback. Vice Chair Ristaino said he would like to see the mission of the Portsmouth School District included. Mr. Legg asked for clarification on the requirement of New Hampshire certification. What does that mean for out of state candidates? There is a reciprocal state-to-state agreement throughout the New England states. Certification may only become more of a concern with candidates outside of New England.

Mr. LaPage motioned that Dr. DeMinico create a soft open ad by September 24, 2008. Vice Chair Ristaino seconded. Voted and approved.

Vice Chair Ristaino motioned to form an ad hoc sub committee with three School Board members appointed by the chairman. Mr. Legg seconded.

Ms. Emerson asked for clarification on what the sub committee would be responsible for. Would they be responsible for choosing community members as well? Mr. Legg recommended the motion be amended to state that three members of the School Board, to be appointed by the Chair, will determine, with the help of the consultant, who the search will consist of and the steps to be taken before choosing members of the community and report back to the board November 18, 2008 with their recommendations. Seconded by Ms. Garrity. Voted and approved.

## **VIII. FINANCIAL**

### **1. Other**

Mr. Bartlett requested to have board members sign cover sheets for state reports.

## **IX. PUBLIC COMMENTARY SESSION**

Mr. Bob Hopley – 175 Wibird Street. Mr. Hopley believes the time has come for the city to get back to reality and use some common sense. 16% has already been cut from the original middle school plan and if they cut any more, he believes the towns' people will not get the school they want. But if built elsewhere, Portsmouth will not only get the school they want, but for less money. Ball fields will be kept and maintained. Mr. Hopley recommended possibly using the existing middle school as City Hall and the Connie Bean Center. This would generate a bill of sale that could help pay for the new school. He encouraged board members to go back to basics and give Mr. Stokel a middle school that will work for his programs. Building elsewhere would cost two million less than what the mayor says the board can spend. Mr. Hopley also stated that the Peirce property is not included in the property price and will be more the city will need to spend.

Harold Whitehouse – 58 Humphrey's Court. Mr. Whitehouse hesitated coming out of retirement but the chair made a statement he wanted to hear from the public. With Wall Street in trouble and with the mortgage bail out, Mr. Whitehouse thinks Portsmouth should fall back and look hard at what the city is bonding. He asked board members to possibly look at other alternatives like adding on a wing to the portion built in 1976. He asked the board to hold off for six months, step back and take another look. Bonding in this city frightens him.

Eric Anderson of 38 Georges Terrace, Portsmouth also believes bonding issues are growing and believes the middle school is creating the same scenario that we are witnessing today in financial arenas. He believes the board made a wise and generous decision with the teacher contract. Mr. Anderson believes a building is an asset, but teachers teach children. The building enhances teaching but the cost of building is what has people concerned. Mr. Anderson voiced he does not understand what the middle school programs are. Why does each program need the space allotted? Mr. Anderson hoped he was not addressing a board whose mind was already made up.

Marian Ellis of 235 McKinley Road has been a teacher at the middle school since 1996. Ms. Ellis believes if the board goes with the drafted timeline, her elementary aged daughter will be in the middle of the school renovation. Many parents have concerns about their student's middle school years being spent in portable trailers. Ms. Ellis stated that teachers, right now, shoehorn programs into a structure that does not support them and she asked the board to support a building that fits programs and not ask teachers to fit programs into a building any longer.

Ann McKearin of 729 Sagamore Avenue, Portsmouth is a Family Consumer Science teacher at Portsmouth Middle School. "Industry vs. inferiority". Ms. McKearin stated this was a major concept addressed in unified arts programs. The unified arts programs teach students how to handle things in their environment. Students are sampling programs they may develop a hobby in or a career down the road. The middle school unified arts programs also feed into the high school programs. Ms. McKearin also stated that sometimes students "check out" as early as seventh grade and the unified arts programs are what keep them engaged in school. Teachers spend a lot of time integrating academics into their programs. She invited all the school board members and the public to open house.

## **X. AGENDA**

### **1. Middle School Update**

Chair Shuldman opened with excerpts of the city's 1931 annual report, which stated a reorganized middle school opened with an enrollment of 631 people and was rated attractive and best of design. The building was state of the art with movable furniture, an attractive lobby, 28 classrooms, exterior lighting, and 615 seats in the auditorium w/ 65 in the balcony. A "Powerizer" and loud speakers were installed in every room.

Chair Shuldman then stated that Portsmouth is entering its fifth year of the recent middle school process. On September 23, 2003 the middle school committee was formed containing School Board members, district educators, and council and community members. Chair Shuldman believes it is time for everyone to work together and reach an agreement.

Architects presented a proposal and, when the board realized the cost, the architects were asked to downsize wherever possible. They deleted team rooms, a weight room, and an auditorium. They reduced the size of the band room and combined areas wherever possible. The architects deleted ensemble rooms, incorporated kitchenettes into classrooms and combined media to leave a building plan that is 38% larger. Dr. Shuldman anticipated that the board will focus on cost the next meeting and that the meeting tonight will discuss current space challenges and use of proposed space.

Steve Zadravec briefly introduced Mr. John Stokel, principal of the middle school stating that the PowerPoint presentation tonight shows that the new middle school design is based on existing programs. It does not include expansion of programs or new teaching positions. Mr. Zadravec explained that the best middle school environment takes advantage of the team design.

One fundamental belief of the Portsmouth School Department is all students should achieve a high level of academic success. Some students need more structure and support to achieve success. Many schools have made the difficult decision to cut back on unified arts, believing this would improve their core academics. Mr. Zadravec stated that line of logic is not valid and that Portsmouth started higher in core academics and has grown faster in reading proficiency than the state average or schools that have cut unified arts programs. Math is above the state average and scores have gone up faster

than the state average as well. Mr. Zadavec commented about enrollment saying we need to consider choices that parents will make when choosing where to purchase a home. A school that shows a robust unified art program will be desired.

Mr. Stokel then discussed space needs for a better understanding. Most areas need to be increased simply because state standards require a minimum of square footage per student. Some highlights of the PowerPoint presentation were:

- **Health suite** is following state standards. If a school system employs a full time nurse, certain requirements need to be followed.
- **Guidance.** In 1975, Guidance created small office spaces, which are inadequate today. Counselors cannot meet with parents and students in their area. This leaves them trying to find other areas to hold parent meetings. When a parent comes to register a student, Guidance is the first experience they will have with our schools. Very cramped.
- **Team area.** Special Education is now incorporated in the team area. The Portsmouth School Department made the decision some years ago to have a Special Education teacher and paraprofessional on every team in order to fully incorporate students with disabilities into the classroom. The Special Education classroom space is used for small group interventions, skills classes and homeroom advisory periods.
- **Conference room/collaboration rooms.** Today we have parents in all the time for conferences and the teacher's work hard to accommodate parents' schedules. These spaces will be needed at all times during the day for parent conferences, grade level meetings and team meetings.
- **Limited bathrooms are open at the middle school with many being used for extra storage because they are inoperable.** Bathrooms will be set up per grade level, encouraging students to own the space for a year and take pride in it.
- **Special Education.** Not all schools offer these programs. Some districts tuition students out of district. Because we accept out-of-district students, it actually helps offset costs. Vice Chair Ristaino asked what the tuition cost was? Mr. Stokel stated the cost was roughly \$25,000 to \$34,000 per year, depending on services. Mr. Legg clarified that costs could reach \$60,000 per student with transportation costs included. Chair Shuldman stated that when the building was designed in 1930, no consideration would have been made for special educational needs. The Special Education law 94-142 was enacted during the 70's, which impacted teaching and learning areas.
- **KIDS program.** A specialized program where one out of district student is enrolled at cost of \$42,000 plus. Currently, there are eighteen students. Sending these students out of district would result in astronomical tuition costs if this program did not exist.

- **Security for storage of files is extremely necessary.** Vice Chair Ristaino asked what the current file storage status was. Mr. Stokel answered that guidance storage is maxed out and many files are being stored in locations that are difficult to access.
- **Media center.** Dropping 1500 square feet by computer labs being reduced from 3191 to 2600 square feet. There will be no need for two computer labs because computers will now be available in classroom spaces.
- **Student commons.** The cafeteria received a slight increase in order to continue offering three lunches. Mr. Stokel does not want to go to four lunches and split kids up. This is their only time of the day when they can freely socialize.
- **Physical Education and performing arts.** Today, seventh grade chorus has a waiting list. Band and chorus are highly successful and Mr. Stokel only sees them increasing. New spaces will be designed to do double duty.
- **Foreign languages.** Kitchenettes were taken out. Again, classes are maxed out due to the success of the program. We will need to look at personnel issues in the upcoming budget process.
- **Technical Education.** This space will contain two teachers with two classrooms and a new space for a 600 square foot CAD class that will feed into the high school program.
- **FACS.** Current program does not have a place for storage.

With the concerns from the fire department on storage space, Mr. Legg asked if it would be appropriate to the Chief a copy of the middle school proposal for professional feedback.

Mr. LaPage stated there isn't any fat left and certainly there aren't any student programs we can jeopardize. If the board decided to build on an alternative or new sight, the cost could be below \$36 million.

Mr. Zdravec mentioned there might be potential wavers Portsmouth may be able to apply for.

Ms. Emerson then motioned that the School Board vote to keep the middle school on Parrot Avenue. Mr. Legg believes the plan will move forward but if the city refuses to fund, he believes it is the board's responsibility to at least consider other alternatives.

Vice Chair Ristaino requested a breakdown of cost/student with educational and emotional disabilities if we were to cancel programs and send out of district. Mr. Stokel will provide a three-year comparison.

## 2. Superintendent Search

Moved in agenda.

### **3. Public Library Trustees**

Chair Shuldman met with trustees and has agreed to meet with them and Lisa DeStefano in October. They want the architects to hear their concerns.

## **XI. COMMITTEE REPORTS**

### **1. Curriculum Council**

One primary task is to move toward a 5-year plan. How will we determine what students will learn, and how will we collaborate with SAU 50 to make sure we are aligned with what we do?

### **2. Other**

Communications – An ad hoc committee has been created to better communicate with the public. The committee has met once and is meeting again on Friday to decide what would be the most relevant info to include in a FAQ document to be posted on the school's web site.

Safe Routes To School – Ms. Emerson reminded the board of National Walk to School Day scheduled for October 8, 2008. A tentative 45 minutes before school, parents and students will meet at designated areas. The walk to school will be approximately fifteen minutes and will occur rain or shine. There will be refreshments and a raffle at each school for participants to enter and win prizes. There also will be an all school walk during the school day for students that are unable to walk to school.

Chair Shuldman passed out JCJ's calculations showing where the 636 and 696 student numbers derives from. Ms. Emerson inquired if the board has demographics to back the numbers up. Mr. Legg stated the board would present the three demographic studies posted on line as supporting evidence.

Chair Shuldman stated that at the next School Board meeting, JCJ Architects will be in attendance to discuss numbers and Mr. Legg will discuss the state's definition of educational capacity and reimbursement issues. Mr. Legg stated he believes reimbursement may be more than previously anticipated and the proposal was very consistent with what other schools have recently built. Mr. Legg requested that Mr. Bartlett verify with the state that we are not missing anything.

**XII. NEXT AGENDA ITEMS (September 23, 2008)**

1. School Board newsletter
2. New Staff Members
3. Principals Opening of School report
4. Field Trips Update

**XIII. ADJOURNMENT** At 10:00 p.m., voted to adjourn.

Respectfully submitted by:

Dr. Robert J. Lister

Superintendent of Schools