

GROTON-DUNSTABLE REGIONAL SCHOOL COMMITTEE

High School Library

Business Meeting Minutes

January 18, 2006

Approved February 1, 2006

PRESENT:

Ms Cindy Barrett, Secretary
Ms Berta Erickson
Mr. Paul Fitzgerald
Ms Karen Lofgren
Mr. Chuck McKinney, Chair
Mr. Frank O'Connell, Vice- Chair
Mr. Alan Vervaeke

ADMINISTRATION:

Dr. Alan Genovese, Superintendent
Mr. Craig Young, Business Manager
Ms Joan Endicott, Director of Pupil Personnel

STUDENT ADVISOR:

Kara Cover (Left at 7:15 p.m.)

STAFF, PRESS, OTHERS: R. Savard, Lowell Sun; J. Kulesz, Groton Herald;
K. Icenogle, Dunstable News; J. Dillon, J. Robinson, J. Manning, C. Donoghue,
L. Julian, K. Sargent, J. Salo

CALL TO ORDER

C. McKinney announced the GDRSC Meeting opened at 6:00 p.m. and the Committee voted to adjourn to executive session for the purpose of litigation and collective bargaining. The GDRSC Meeting reconvened in public session at 7:06 p.m. and was called to order by the chair, C. McKinney.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Members read the prepared announcements and a copy is attached to these minutes.

K. Cover congratulated senior Caitlin Ting for receiving an All State recommendation. She has placed with first chair flute in the District's orchestra.

Dr. Genovese announced they received the Coordinated Review and this will be presented to the School Committee on February 1st. SpedPAC will also be doing a presentation that night and it will be tied to the review. He highlighted three major points in the report: 1) Special education students are receiving required services and are well supported in their needs; 2) Parent and community outreach is exemplary and 3) All students have equal access and the district strives to be inclusive of all students. He

recognized Ms Endicott and her staff for the tremendous amount of work that goes into preparing, reviewing and responding to the review.

J. Endicott said they have met with SpedPAC to review the report and they are seeking input as to corrective action plans. She stated SpedPAC had a wonderful presenter last Tuesday who shared how to write an Ed Plan. A staff development day will use this theme on January 24th.

REPORTS FROM SUB-COMMITTEES

Budget and Finance - F. O'Connell reported they met last night and reviewed the quarterly report and discussed the salary reserve. They also looked at the FY2007 budget, revenue projections and expenses. Assessments were discussed and Budget and Finance had intended to have a position for the budget discussion later tonight but because of questions that came up, they do not have one yet. They will take a position wherever possible to help Committee members make a decision and he stated this year will not be any easier than past years. Energy costs have outpaced the increase in health insurance. They are looking at places where they can trim and where the towns can come up with extra money and noted it is just not there.

The next joint Budget and Finance meeting will be held on January 26th at 7:00 p.m. in the high school library. Budget and Finance has rescheduled their February 21st meeting to February 16th at 6:00 p.m. at Tarbell.

Building Committee - A. Vervaeke reported they have not met. C. Young reported the preliminary reports on the recent water tests at the high school still show more lead than they are suppose to have. The Smith house is on line to be taken down and they are waiting for their permit to get started.

Policy - K. Lofgren reported they have not met. Due to the Middle School Winter Concert on January 24th, their meeting was re-scheduled for January 23rd at 7:00 p.m. in the high school library. The proposed agenda for that meeting will include an update on the CORI policy, Security/Surveillance, reviewing advertising policy KHB and discussion on developing a partnerships policy to help with educational funding.

C. McKinney stated he will be appointing Ms Erickson to the Policy Committee as well as to the Naming Committee, which will be meeting in a week or so.

A. VERVAEKE MOVED TO SUSPEND THE RULES TO CONSIDER THE ACTION ITEM TO VOTE ON THE HIGH SCHOOL FIELD TRIPS.

SECONDED BY P. FITZGERALD

SO VOTED IN FAVOR UNANIMOUSLY

C. Donoghue stated he, Jake Manning, Lauren Julian and Kara Sargent, senior class officers, are representing the senior class and are requesting members approve their senior class trip to the Magic Falls Rafting Company in West Forks, Maine from

May 24th to May 26th. J. Manning said the senior class researched and voted on this camping/whitewater rafting trip and the senior trip is a tradition and serves as a special opportunity for the class to bond and reflect on their four years prior to graduation.

L. Julian said they are asking for approval so they can start making arrangements for transportation and lodging and collecting money from the seniors. K. Sargent thanked the Committee for their time.

C. McKinney stated a policy was put in place a couple of years ago, requiring the School Committee approve any trip that required overnight travel or travel after midnight. Prior to that, the superintendent provided approval.

Stating there were difficulties with last year's senior trip, A. Vervaeke asked if there will be a discussion about expected behaviors. K. Sargent said this has not been discussed yet but it can be arranged. Principal Dillon said they have several meetings leading up to any trip and contracts are developed between students and their parents. They also have a Parent Night and what is expected from the students is clearly stated. He noted that no matter what trip students are on, they fall within the parameters of the high school handbook. K. Lofgren noted the overnight travel policy will be concurrent with any student conduct policy.

F. O'Connell asked if each raft guide will have to have a CORI check or if there will be a chaperone in each raft. J. Dillon said they will have ten to twelve adult school chaperones and students will not be with any guide without a chaperone. The bus drivers will also have a CORI check.

Stating the final number of chaperones is contingent on the number of students who sign up for the trip, C. McKinney said he assumes Mr. Dillon takes the responsibility of giving final approval for the trip. J. Dillon said yes and the ratio will be no more than ten students to one staff member.

Dr. Genovese asked what the seniors hope to get out of this trip and L. Julian said many of them are looking forward to spending one last time together and bonding as a class before going their separate ways after graduation. He asked if they look at in-state trips and J. Dillon said they expanded the options in the last five years.

A. VERVAEKE MOVED TO APPROVE THE SENIOR CLASS TRIP TO MAINE ON MAY 24TH THROUGH MAY 26, 2006, PER THE APPROVAL DOCUMENT.
SECONDED BY P. FITZGERALD
SO VOTED IN FAVOR UNANIMOUSLY

J. Dillon stated the trip to the New York Music Festival Competition is one they have done for many years with all the band and chorus students. The students have been very successful in the competition and it is also a nice bonding experience. The chaperone ratio will be similar to the senior trip and the same rules will apply.

C. Barrett noted there are a lot of opportunities for students to travel to different areas and asked if they will be traveling with a chaperone. J. Dillon said yes.

A. VERVAEKE MOVED TO APPROVE THE HIGH SCHOOL NEW YORK MUSIC FESTIVAL COMPETITION TRIP, AS PORTRAYED IN THE APPROVAL DOCUMENT, FROM MAY 4TH TO MAY 7, 2006. SECONDED BY P. FITZGERALD
SO VOTED IN FAVOR UNANIMOUSLY

Report of the Superintendent - Review of the School Calendar - 2006-2007

Members had received copies of the July 2006/June 2007 school calendar outlining starting before Labor Day (Calendar 1) and after Labor Day (Calendar 2). Dr. Genovese is asking the Committee to support starting before Labor Day and noted the Teacher's Association will be meeting on another matter and can vote on this at the same time.

C. McKinney said August 30th would be the first day of school for grades 1 through 9 and kindergartners and grades 10 through 12 would start on August 31st. The last day of school would be June 13th (June 20th with snow days). The first day of school for starting after Labor Day would be September 7th for grades 1 through 9 and kindergartners and grades 10 through 12 would start on September 8th. The last day of school would be June 19th (June 26th with snow days).

While she is not opposed to starting before Labor Day, K. Lofgren stated this could be hard for children that have difficulty with transition and establishing routine since they would be at school for two days and then have four days off. Dr. Genovese said an advantage is that people have the opportunity to still get away for a long weekend but the kids will have met their teachers and classmates and teachers are able to do some planning over that weekend. A. Vervaeke, B. Erickson and P. Fitzgerald said they support starting before Labor Day. C. Barrett asked if the teachers have the final decision on the schedule and Dr. Genovese said they decide if they start before or after Labor Day.

Review of School Physician Selection - Dr. Genovese said he will be meeting with the nurses and Ms Endicott on January 23rd. C. Barrett asked what they are doing in the meantime and Dr. Genovese said he would consult with Dr. Staub if necessary. In an emergency/critical situation, he would ask the Department of Public Health for recommendations. C. Barrett noted Dr. Staub used to do physicals for spring sports and Dr. Genovese said they will make this service available for students that need it.

High School Graduation - Dr. Genovese stated many area schools have their high school graduation on Friday night. He is not sure whether or not mosquitoes would be a problem but parents and students are favoring Friday night. He noted the objective is to have students not be put in the position of having to choose between attending their graduation or participating in a state meet.

Principal Dillon stated 60% of the students favor a Friday evening at 6:00 p.m. and a parent survey (with about 60 responses) showed a marginal difference between Friday night and Saturday at 1:00 p.m. He recommends graduation be held on Friday night at 6:00 p.m., with a raindate of Saturday at 6:00 p.m and a second raindate on Sunday. He noted more faculty will probably be able to attend on Friday night. Realizing this is a significant shift and that relatives come from all over the country, he wants to give families four and a half months to plan.

Review of School Committee Calendar - C. McKinney stated the calendar has been re-published and the "bolded" items are things the superintendent has asked for with the other items being suggestions from Committee members. Dr. Genovese noted there is a public forum scheduled for May 11th at 6:30 p.m. in the Black Box Theater. A. Vervaeke requested this information be included in the Connections newsletter as well as placed on public cable and in the local newspapers.

A. VERVAEKE MOVED TO APPROVE THE BUSINESS MEETING MINUTES OF DECEMBER 21, 2005. SECONDED BY C. BARRETT

In Favor: C. Barrett, A. Vervaeke, C. McKinney, F. O'Connell, P. Fitzgerald, K. Lofgren
Abstention: B. Erickson

QUESTIONS/COMMENTS

P. Fitzgerald asked if they will be getting a follow-up on football plans. He said this has been a popular topic around town and there seems to be a general agreement that while they do not want funds to come out of the operating budget, there is sufficient support to raise funds to modify the facilities, build the infrastructure and get things going.

Dr. Genovese said one of the issues is where they would practice and he wants them to be respectful of the successful soccer program. He feels it is doable and people can speak with Dan Twomey. K. Lofgren said there is a link on the webpage. Dr. Genovese said he will look at a timeline and bring information back to the Committee when there is something to share.

A. VERVAEKE MOVED TO SUSPEND THE RULES TO ADVANCE THE ACTION ITEM TO VOTE ON THE WELLNESS POLICY. SECONDED BY P. FITZGERALD
SO VOTED IN FAVOR UNANIMOUSLY

K. Lofgren said this policy was discussed at a previous meeting, was put out for comment and having received none, feels it is what they need. Dr. Genovese stated members are approving a Wellness Policy which is very good but noted the work has just begun. It has implications for the next several years and will be implemented in phases and protocols and regulations will flow from here. Members will be advised as each phase is ready to be implemented. This policy had to be approved by June and noted they have met that mandate.

A. Vervaeke asked if it is safe to assume that by passing this policy no new activities will be brought on board that will violate this policy. Dr. Robinson said once it is approved,

procedures need to be in place and parents and the communities will need to know about those procedures.

C. Barrett stated she would like to have the word "policy" in the last sentence of the last paragraph changed to "intent", and in the same sentence the words "regulations herein" changed to "this policy reflects" and the word "their" changed to "the child's". With respect to the next to the last sentence in the same paragraph, she would also like the words "reduces" and "increases" changed to "discourages" and "encourages", respectively.

Respecting Ms Barrett's comments, A. Vervaeke said there are times when focusing on specific words and how a phrase runs together can be more counterproductive. Members agreed to the changes to the last sentence and the rest of the policy will remain as written.

A. VERVAEKE MOVED THE SCHOOL COMMITTEE ACCEPT THE WELLNESS POLICY, WITH A LETTER CODE TO BE ASSIGNED LATER, AS DETAILED IN THE HANDOUT DATED JANUARY 10, 2006, WITH THE INITIAL EDIT RECOMMENDED BY C. BARRETT. SECONDED BY K. LOFGREN SO VOTED IN FAVOR UNANIMOUSLY

C. McKinney encouraged members to use the drafting portion of the process whenever possible.

PRESENTATIONS/DISCUSSION

Quarterly Report

C. Young stated the revenue budget is running a bit above what they anticipated and this is primarily due to receiving notification from the state, after the budget was adopted and voted, that they would be receiving more money. At this time, he is projecting a surplus of \$48,336 and this will help offset some of the funds they had voted to take from E&D.

Expenditures are not as bright as energy prices have doubled in some cases. The schools have been asked to conserve energy and they are responding to this request. Tuition costs associated with special education are a concern as they know there are a number of placements that have yet to manifest themselves in terms of costs. Legal costs will likely be higher due to issues requiring legal counsel. He stated they had a slight change in their borrowing strategy and this will generate surplus dollars in their debt service this year. There will also be some savings with the BANS and bank charges.

C. Young distributed a copy of the FY2006 budget status and noted the forecast has been adjusted in the natural gas line item from what Budget and Finance saw last night. While five line items are running a deficit of roughly \$350,000, there is a similar amount in the area of borrowing that will generate surplus balances, making it just about even. A copy of the memo sent to the Administrative Council explaining a temporary freeze has been placed on discretionary spending was distributed. C. Young noted the freeze does not apply to materials necessary for an effective education.

Revolving Funds are doing fine with the exception of the school lunch fund.

C. Young meets with the cafeteria personnel on a regular basis and they are trying to trim costs and the goal is to end the year with a positive balance. They still have expenses even when they do not have the opportunity to support those costs because of holidays, school vacations, field trips and snow days.

With respect to federal funds, they will be spending their grants and requesting additional funding. It is anticipated Title One funds will drop down again and C. Young stated they support a number of positions with the 94142 special education funds.

J. Endicott said they will be lucky if they know by June what they will be receiving for entitlement. She stated all the federal funds are at risk of going down.

C. Young stated the building projects are coming to an end and the Building Committee will need to meet soon to go over the finances. A representative from SBA came out today to review all their facilities. The audits will be done shortly.

Preliminary FY07 Budget Review

Dr. Genovese stressed the budget document is a draft and very fluid and has not been released to the towns. He stated the budget process started October 4th and there have been at least fifteen meetings all ready. It is going to be a very difficult development process and the impact on the towns hinges back to the revenue they will get from the state. The administrators gave a line by line presentation to town officials over a five hour period. C. McKinney recognized the participants and a copy is attached to these minutes.

Dr. Genovese explained the process used for building the budget. They had a "Have To" column that included things that would bring them into compliance and more in line School Committee regulations (ie: class sizes) and federal and state requirements. Their "Ought To" column was for expectations and demands the communities expect to happen. The "Want To" column was to provide vision as they looked at the Strategic Plan. He stated a budget increase of \$1.5M will be necessary to provide the same services and programs. He noted there are not a lot of discretionary items in a school budget and as they look at reductions to consider, they are looking at things furthest away from raising student achievement and having a direct impact on students.

Dr. Genovese said they will assume Chapter 70 increases by 5% and all other state funding is flat lined. He said they are looking at an overall assessment increase of 13% and the number gets distributed disproportionately because it gets tied to the enrollment numbers of each town. He stated they have discussed with the Administrative Council what they might cut if they had to reduce the budget by \$1.1M.

C. Young stated they want to put forward a responsible educational program where student achievement is maintained and improved upon and the environment is conducive to learning. These are the issues they are mindful of as the budget is prepared but he stated they have to be sure citizens can financially support it. There have been steep increases in costs that do not go directly to education (electricity, natural gas, health insurance). State and federal revenues do not keep pace and the burden shifts to the taxpayers. An overall increase of 7.8% was projected when a preliminary budget was presented in November and they are now projecting a 6% increase.

C. Young stated adjustments have all ready been made to the draft budget and a copy of these, as well as a copy of various operating assessment figures, were distributed. They are targeting an operating assessment of 6% and if his figures are correct, there would be about a \$700,000 increase in Groton's assessment and about a \$200,000 increase in Dunstable's assessment. Personally, he believes getting to this level without any increased revenue would be somewhat devastating to their program and there would be radical change. Programs would most likely go or be diminished, class sizes would increase and ancillary services would be severely impaired. He stated the Governor's Budget will be coming out in January and he will take the known numbers and generate a revenue sheet.

A. Vervaeke stated Dunstable's debt assessment will also increase with an increase in student population. C. Young said it will depend on the number of Dunstable students at Swallow Union and doing a debt assessment at this time would just be a guess.

The budget submission of January 12, 2006 was \$33,862,138. C. Young reviewed the budget adjustment sheet and stated other adjustments will be coming forward. He recommends they adjust the draft budget to meet these first changes before the joint finance meeting next week.

The FY06 approved budget is \$31,949,088 and the proposed FY2007 budget request as of January 18th is \$34,194,477.

Dr. Genovese suggested they move the budget public hearing to March 1st as he feels they will have a better idea of the numbers. A special meeting on the budget could be held on March 8th to adopt the budget and this will meet the forty-five day deadline. Their regular Committee meeting could be on March 15th. A. Vervaeke said they had a special Saturday forum at the Performing Arts Center a couple of years ago and more people may be able to attend on a Saturday.

Dr. Genovese said he plans to meet with the public on February 2nd to inform people of what they are struggling with and what the impacts will be. They are asking administrators to show what a \$1.1M reduction might be and will share this with the public. It is also an opportunity for him to hear what people have to say. The budget timeline will be restructured from where they are now to the adoption date and given to Committee members.

A. Vervaeke asked if the \$1.1M reduction is on top of what is in the budget or if the budget represents the \$1.1M reduction. C. Young said they have all ready taken out about \$580,000. Dr. Genovese noted the bottom line number has all ready jumped up and negated that deduction.

F. O'Connell asked if the minimum contribution at this point is Mr. Young's calculation and he said yes. He took what is on the DOE website for this year and increased it 3%. C. Barrett asked if last year's town assessments were similar and Mr. Young said they were close. Although not readily apparent to him, C. Young said there is also some interplay between School Choice and Charter School students that impact the percentages.

Mid-Year Superintendent Self-Assessment Portfolio

As part of the evaluation process, Dr. Genovese has the opportunity to tell the Committee how he thinks he is doing and in turn, the Committee can tell him how they think he is doing. He distributed a copy of his mid-year self-assessment and reviewed his four goals.

1. To Create and communicate a transition plan for 2005-2006. He stated he developed a transition plan, shared in with the Committee and posted it on the website. Implementing the plan is a work in progress but he feels he is on target.
2. To create more focus on how to integrate technology into curriculum to facilitate teaching and instruction. He stated he is not satisfied with the progress he has made. As a strong believer that using technology well can help facilitate teaching and learning, he feels additional things can be done to provide additional opportunities. He has worked with the Technology Director to begin developing competency standards for students K-12. He stated they need to take advantage of people resources within the communities and stated he will continue to focus on this goal.
3. To explore and implement methods of communication that will inform the school community and the towns of Groton and Dunstable. He has developed press releases for distribution and has tried to be accessible to the press. He worked with staff to implement the Connect-Ed communication system and has many informal conversations with staff. He stated he is accessible to Committee members, meets regularly with the Administrative Council and attends Board of Selectmen meetings. He visits the schools and classrooms, used an open communication budget process and has been a guest speaker at various meetings. He stated he is on target with this goal.
4. To facilitate the process to recruit and hire a business administrator for FY2007. This position has been advertised and townspeople have shown interest in participating in the process. This goal is on target.

With respect to accountability areas, Dr. Genovese said he feels he has a good relationship with the School Committee and uses discretion in handling situations when an immediate response is required. He has been maintaining strong relationships with legislators and advocating for legislation that benefits the district. While he has had conversations with the staff about curriculum, reviewed MCAS results, visited classrooms and reviewed strategic plans relative to curriculum, he does not feel he has spent enough time in this area and more attention is needed.

With respect to general management, Dr. Genovese said he has maintained the focus of the strategic plan and reviewed with staff in the initial budget process. He noted previous and projected budget cuts are impeding implementation. While he is handling the daily business of the district and accomplishing tasks that need to be done, he stated there is much more to do. He also noted he had to handle some fairly difficult situations during his first six months and there are more on the horizon. The transition period will take some time.

Dr. Genovese stated he works closely with the Business Administrator in monitoring the budget and reviews all purchase orders to become familiar with purchases in relation to need. He also reviews expenditure reports and other financial documents. He created an open process in developing the budget and is working with the Administrative team to identify potential reductions. He strives to maintain open lines of communication and works with the staff in a collaborative manner. He stated he has tried, through example, to promote an atmosphere of respect for self and others. He is working with a small subcommittee to develop a consistent evaluation process and instrument for the administrators and is meeting with them regarding their respective expectations of accomplishments for this year.

With respect to communications and public relations, Dr. Genovese said this is an area in which he cannot do enough but he has been very accessible to the news media and has made time to meet with groups of people and attend community and school function.

Dr. Genovese said his first six months have gone by quickly and noted when he first arrived, there were a number of personnel issues and outstanding grievances that required immediate consideration and attention. He believes these were handled in a satisfactory manner. He stated he is fortunate to have a strong administrative team, a supportive school committee, dedicated teachers and support staff and parents who want to be involved. Barbara Magnuson has been an incredible resource for him and stated the district is fortunate to have someone with her degree of professionalism, dedicated work ethic, knowledge and skill. Dr. Genovese believes town officials have a sincere desire to work with school officials to understand the budget and to provide the best for the students within the limitations of affordability to the residents. A formalized goal for next year will be to involve talented people.

C. McKinney said Dr. Genovese's decision to be accessible has been extraordinary and noted he works long hours and has gained a rapid understanding of the district. Dr. Genovese said he does not consider this work; he loves what he is doing and this is a vocation. K. Lofgren said Dr. Genovese's accessibility and leadership by example are very positive. P. Fitzgerald feels Dr. Genovese is doing a terrific job and stated without exception, the community has had nothing but good things to say. He thanked him for doing a fantastic job. A. Vervaeke agrees Dr. Genovese's visibility, particularly in the classrooms, has been great and his ability to communicate and be available is amazing. B. Erickson stated Dr. Genovese's presence in the community has enhanced the district and said she has learned that he is a good teacher.

ACTION ITEMS

See previous votes

QUESTIONS/COMMENTS

Dr. Genovese presented Ms Erickson with a Peace Lily. He stated that while there is another story that goes along with the plant, he feels it represents the children in the district and that it needs to be nurtured, cared for and talked to in order to flourish and it is their responsibility as administrators and school committee members to nourish and love the kids and give them the tools to flourish. A. Vervaeke said the plant will survive without water but when given attention, like any relationship, it will reward you.

ADJOURNMENT:

P. FITZGERALD MOVED TO ADJOURN THE MEETING AT 10:25 P.M.

SECONDED BY A. VERVAEKE

SO VOTED IN FAVOR UNANIMOUSLY

Respectfully submitted,

Susan H. Smith
Recording Secretary

With attachments