

GROTON-DUNSTABLE REGIONAL SCHOOL COMMITTEE

High School Library
Business Meeting Minutes
September 20, 2006
(approved October 4, 2006)

PRESENT:

Ms Cindy Barrett, Secretary
Dr. Forrest Buzan
Ms Berta Erickson
Dr. Paul Funch
Ms Karen Lofgren
Mr. Chuck McKinney, Chair
Mr. Frank O'Connell, Vice-Chair

ADMINISTRATION:

Dr. Alan Genovese, Superintendent
Timothy Sheehan, Director of Business and Finance
Dr. Susan Rubel, Director of Curriculum/Staff Development
Ms Joan Endicott, Director of Pupil Services

STUDENT REPRESENTATIVE:

Lauren Palmacci

STAFF, PRESS, OTHERS: R. Savard, Lowell Sun; J. Kulesz, Groton Herald;
P. Comtois, Groton Landmark; J. O'Hara, L. Crewe, D. Fulreader, P. Dolan-Tervo, S. Byrne,
L. Zimmaro, L. Lefebvre, G. Yanchenko.

CALL TO ORDER:

The GDRSC Meeting was called to order at 7:04 p.m. by the chair, C. McKinney. C. McKinney stated the Committee did not meet in executive session and they have no plans to go into executive session.

MINUTES

C. BARRETT MOVED TO APPROVE THE SCHOOL COMMITTEE WORKSHOP MEETING MINUTES OF AUGUST 26, 2006. SECONDED BY K. LOFGREN
SO VOTED IN FAVOR UNANIMOUSLY

C. BARRETT MOVED TO APPROVE THE BUSINESS MEETING MINUTES OF SEPTEMBER 6, 2006.
SECONDED BY K. LOFGREN

In Favor: B. Erickson, P. Funch, C. Barrett, C. McKinney, F. O'Connell, K. Lofgren
Abstention: F. Buzan

C. BARRETT MOVED TO APPROVE THE EXECUTIVE SESSION MEETING MINUTES OF SEPTEMBER 6, 2006. SECONDED BY F. O'CONNELL
SO VOTED IN FAVOR UNANIMOUSLY

ANNOUNCEMENTS

C. McKinney welcomed student representative Lauren Palmacci. Ms Palmacci said she is glad to be here. She stated she is a senior and plans to major in International Business with a minor in Spanish.

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

Following the reading of the high school announcements, C. McKinney suggested the Committee have their own booth at the Tailgate on Friday, September 29th.

Florence Roche Principal Launa Zimmaro introduced new Assistant Principal Linda Crewe. She joined Florence Roche this week and brings a wealth of educational experience and L. Zimmaro said they are very happy to have her. Ms Crewe said she is very happy to be here and to be a part of the work the district is undertaking. She stated she is very impressed with what she has seen in the classrooms in terms of teaching and learning.

T. Sheehan announced that prior to the opening of school, he made walk-through inspections of all the buildings with Mr. Byrne and the head custodians of each building and thought the buildings were in immaculate condition. He commended the head custodians and their staffs for their work. He also recognized Debra Durno, payroll clerk, stating the first full payroll went out with few problems, and Karen Roensch for how smoothly bus transportation worked for the opening of school. The few problems that arose were quickly and efficiently resolved due to her work and diplomacy.

Dr. Rubel announced a writing workshop is being offered to third through eighth grade teachers. It is fully enrolled with thirty-five teachers and eight had to be turned away.

J. Endicott announced the Pupil Personnel office has mailed out the annual mailing of the Notice of Procedural Safeguards (formerly known as the Parents Rights Brochure). Any special needs parent that did not receive one can call her office. She stated they are still welcoming survey response and to date, they have received ninety-five of the three hundred and fifty that were mailed out.

J. Endicott announced they sponsored a Tea with the Team on September 15th and this involved bringing the PAC officers together with the Team Chairs, school psychologist and herself and Dr. Genovese. This was held to help launch the school year and focus collaboration and was a very congenial event. She stated the PAC has put together a wonderful and ambitious set of speakers for the district and everyone is welcome to attend. The PAC is also in the process of purchasing books on specific disabilities from the grant they received to provide libraries for parents and staff in each of the buildings.

Dr. Rubel announced over thirty parents attended the Title 1 program held at the middle school on Monday. They were given an overview of the programs and feedback received from parents will be incorporated. Information will be posted on the website in the near future.

With respect to the news events of the past few days regarding the investigation into the theft of the pennies from the middle school and the subsequent discovery that the suspect had other legal matters pending, C. McKinney thanked members for recognizing that in the ongoing police investigation, their role was not to try to get "out in front of it". He noted they all received many phone calls from people trying to understand the emotional situation. As a result, a discussion on hiring policies has been added to the agenda.

PRESENTATIONS/DISCUSSION

Hiring Policies

Dr. Genovese stated it came to their attention at the end of last week that a crime was committed with pennies missing from the middle school. The police began their investigation on Thursday, had a suspect on Friday and an arraignment on Monday. In light of these events, the district was advised not to comment and this was respected. Information that the suspect was not registered as a sex offender was brought to his attention on Friday and this added a new element. He noted the students are committed to raising one million pennies in awareness of the children who lost their lives in the Holocaust. While they were disappointed about the theft, the students were resilient and re-grouped.

Dr. Genovese stated there are a lot of questions about how a substitute custodian came into the system and they were not aware that the individual had not registered as a sex offender. He stated they are looking at their hiring practices.

A CORI (Criminal Offender Records Information) check is done on all new employees and all district employees are done every three years. The three year cycle was completed this past spring. Dr. Genovese

stated positions are posted and candidates are also recruited through word of mouth. There are screening committees that interview candidates and once completed, reference checks and a CORI check are done prior to a person being offered the position. He noted in the case of custodial positions, most of the people who are on the "call custodial list" are really referred by people who work in the district and this was the case for this individual. He was interviewed by three people on July 14th and was given a CORI form at the end of the interview. They received the CORI back on July 18th and the individual was called to work on July 24th. Reference checks were also done and there was nothing of concern on the CORI. Dr. Genovese stated the process mirrored the process used for hiring a part-time or full-time employee.

Dr. Genovese stated a CORI check is limited to what happens in Massachusetts and the report will tell if someone had an appearance in court, was guilty or not guilty, what the disposition is and that is it. It will also report if there is nothing on record. When he came into the district, he changed the practice of doing CORI checks by paper and they are now done online since it takes much less time. He noted the law is very specific about who can review the results, how the records are kept and how long they are kept. He stated this process is very efficient and saves money by not having to pay postage.

Dr. Genovese stated a SORI (Sex Offender Registry Information) is a separate database and a SORI request form is not available online. If they decided to implement this check, he stated they will have to go back to mailing out the request and waiting for the return of information for at least two weeks. While it may be time well spent, he noted when they go through this on their hires, the waiting holds people up and they could have another job. He stated when something happens as a juvenile, it does not appear on a CORI or a SORI unless it meets certain thresholds. He will be looking into what the turnaround time is and what information he would be getting from a SORI check. Because of the circumstances surrounding this individual - leaving the state, not registering, being a juvenile at the time and other factors, Dr. Genovese doubts whether the information would have appeared. There was no classification of this individual. Dr. Genovese said he has spoken with the Committee's legal counsel to see what value a SORI might be.

Dr. Genovese stated a number of their employees come from New Hampshire and any information that happened there would not show up in Massachusetts. He said he would probably implement doing a background check on candidates coming from New Hampshire and noted the cost is \$15.00 per request while the requests are free in Mass. The process in New Hampshire also requires the candidate's signature be notarized. Dr. Genovese said he would have to see what the turnaround time is. He stated he has "Googled" people once and a while and feels they should make this a practice. He also feels they should narrow the CORI in terms of what they are asking them to review it by - name, maiden name, social security number. He stated he wished there was a common database between the SORI and the CORI and stated he still has questions around this.

It was clarified the CORI check did not identify this person because in this offense, the individual was a juvenile and there had not been a determination of this classification. In this particular case, the SORI probably would not have had the information either unless he had registered and been classified as a sex offender.

F. Buzan asked if a juvenile can still be classified for the offense and why this individual was not classified. Dr. Genovese said he is looking into this and believes it has to do with what the conviction was. F. Buzan feels what shows up on a SORI should show up on a CORI since a sex offense is a crime. Dr. Genovese stressed he is only speculating and stated CORI has been in place for a long time and SORI is relatively new with different procedures and boards in place. He stated police chiefs have been struggling with the interpretation as well.

K. Lofgren asked how long it takes to enter the information for an online CORI check and Dr. Genovese said only a few fields have to be completed. The SORI document is also quick to fill out but the mailing, processing and return period takes much longer. K. Lofgren reminded the Committee a CORI policy was adopted in

February and she read the first paragraph of the policy.

F. O'Connell stated they implemented a mandated program and have now identified the gaps. He asked Dr. Genovese if there are other ideas and practices that other superintendents have suggested. Dr. Genovese said doing the CORI by social security number rather than by name, using Google as that has catches not appearing on a CORI and perhaps using a SORI. Dr. Genovese stated the police have a more comprehensive system for getting information but he cannot access that information. He stated he was involved with all the interviews this summer and at the conclusion of some of them, has ended some of the candidates from moving forward. He noted you can get a lot of additional information in conversational interviews. F. O'Connell asked if it is correct that Dr. Genovese has received information from a CORI check that has caused other candidates not to be hired and he said yes. He stated the practice is to tell a person they are interested in offering them the position, subject to a CORI check.

If they are going to require using the social security number, C. Barrett noted the CORI form will need to be revised. Dr. Genovese said this may have all ready been done. The form also asks people to fill out former addresses and if a person has moved here from another state, she feels that state's CORI equivalent should also be checked. She feels they should continue with the CORI checks, add the SORI checks and add a check for those who lived out of state.

Dr. Funch said he was surprised the CORI is not a national database and agrees they should be looking at other states when applicable and supports doing the SORI check. He stated any of the things they put in place are part of an overall security policy and they should not rely on any one of these things to feel secure. He said other organizations do not have someone unsupervised with children for a period of time since you cannot tell everything from a form or interview and there are lots of possibilities to consider to be sure they have done due diligence to help insure the kids are safe.

B. Erickson asked where the CORI exists and how the information is received. Dr. Genovese said it falls under Public Safety and he distributed packets regarding the hiring practices which includes information on requesting the information. She stated she is disturbed that CORI checks are not done on those from out of state and C. McKinney clarified a CORI is done but if an offense happened outside of Massachusetts, it would not show up. B. Erickson asked if a person has recourse if the information is wrong and was told yes. Dr. Genovese said there are guidelines available for people authorized to do CORI checks and stated there are categories of offenses.

Since there is no communication between the states in creating a federal database, K. Lofgren suggested this may be something school committees could take up to begin to change.

C. McKinney complimented the Groton police and the State Police for their thorough job and diligence and believes even if the theft had not occurred, this individual would have been identified because there are other systems in place. He stated there is some comfort in knowing there is an active environment trying to maintain safety.

Dr. Genovese said he met with the local and state police and noted it was amazing how quickly they can analyze information and move it forward in a short period of time. He stated this has been a learning curve for him as well and he is disappointed the person got into the system.

B. Erickson said she wants the district, or the judge, to ask that the money be repaid and Dr. Genovese said part of what they are looking for is restitution.

Florence Roche Playground Design (Informational)

Principal Launa Zimmaro thanked the Committee, Dr. Genovese, Mr. Young, Mr. Sheehan and Mr. Byrne for responding so quickly to make the necessary changes at the playground. She noted over fifty parents have been involved with the project that began three years ago and she acknowledged Janet O'Hara, Laura Lefebvre and Gregg Yanchenko.

L. Zimmaro stated Project Playground's vision has been to provide a safe and inviting outdoor space for students to support the development of the social, emotional and physical skills of their K-4 student population. An earlier report prepared for a CPA grant, which they were not able to pursue at this time, includes a detailed history and research that went into the development of the playground design. The proposed design was developed to address the many issues related to the playground that preceded the findings of soil contamination in the most cost effective manner. Slides showing what they started with and what they have now were shown. She noted a large maple tree had to be taken down but it was replaced with seventeen new trees and a multitude of shrubs.

The new surface is in place and phase one of the landscaping is done. The second phase of the landscaping will start on September 21st. Posts for the basketball/dodge ball court fence are installed and the fencing is scheduled to be installed on Saturday, September 23rd. In response to concerns about injuries with the change in the surface, L. Zimmaro said they have been monitoring this closely by tracking the number of falls and injuries over a four day period and comparing them to the same time period of a year ago. So far, they have experienced a 60% reduction in the number of injuries (4 falls over 4 days compared to 10 falls over 4 days last year). The nursing staff is reporting that the injuries are not as severe as the ones they were seeing from students slipping on the pea stone. She stated they will continue to monitor this.

Fund raising efforts are continuing and they are looking at grants, private and corporate donations and possibly having a concert series. They will also be looking at applying for some CPA funds. They will be researching the equipment needs and finding equipment appropriate for the primary age students. They started developing a community service component and will have classrooms "adopt a flower bed".

L. Zimmaro said they will be assessing the possible need for additional shade area because of the large area of blacktop. She said it has not been a problem so far. Last year, three paraprofessionals attended a playground workshop that explored ways to optimize the time when children are on the playground and to get them to be involved and more responsible. "Recess Rodeo" will insure that students understand the expectations and foundations of playground behavior. In the spring, five hundred and eighty students were involved with creating the rules. She stated they understand the equipment they have will be a matter of funding and are prepared to have a staggered acquisition with a plan in mind.

B. Erickson asked what "Double D's" are and L. Zimmaro said this is part of the Open Circle Program and it is "dangerous and destructive" behavior. She stated the playground rules are closely aligned with the Open Circle philosophy.

Dr. Funch said it is great that they can teach kids to have fun without having aggressive and disruptive behavior. He asked if there is a separate classroom lesson before going to the playground and L. Zimmaro said they talk about the school rules in several venues. He asked why they chose "Rodeo" and she said this was taken from the workshop.

C. Barrett asked if the area will be plowed in the winter and S. Byrne said as the project progresses, they may not be able to plow it but they would use the snow blower and do other things.

K. Lofgren asked if the old pieces of equipment between the portables have been removed and L. Zimmaro said they have been moved to the side and they are hoping they will be able to salvage some pieces.

F. Buzan asked if there is an estimate on how much money they are looking for and L. Zimmaro said the equipment is very expensive and they are looking in the \$50,000 to \$70,000 range.

L. Palmacci said the idea of Recess Rodeo is a great approach and what has been done looks really great.

REPORTS FROM SUB-COMMITTEES

Budget and Finance - F. O'Connell reported they discussed a three year budget plan and what the timeline should look like. He and F. Buzan were invited to attend Dunstable's FinCom meeting to discuss the budget process and information was brought back to Budget and Finance and incorporated into the FY08 budget timeline. Their next meeting will be held at 6:00 p.m. on October 10th at Tarbell.

Policy - K. Lofgren reported they met and agreed to meet at 6:30 p.m. every third Tuesday of the month in the high school "fishbowl" (Room 219). Their next meeting is October 17th. They have set a goal of reviewing ten policies a month and will dedicate an hour of each meeting on those policies. The advertising policy will be at the top of their next agenda and it was agreed they need to find out what they agree on and move it forward.

Report of the Director of Business and Finance - T. Sheehan reported he attended his first Budget and Finance Committee meeting on September 12th and they discussed a number of items. Members were provided with an agenda from that meeting. They focused on the roof replacement of the PTYC and will proceed as the School Committee voted and do an extensive temporary repair this fall and then plan for the permanent roof replacement as part of the FY2008 budget. They will be looking at alternative methods to fund that proposal and at equitable ways to allocate the capital costs between the two towns.

A significant amount of time was spent on the budget process for FY2008 and he distributed a copy of the draft budget calendar. He noted it closely follows last year's process. He stated he made a courtesy call to the chairman of the Dunstable Board of Selectmen shortly after joining the district and the chairman commented favorably on the process used, particularly with the presentations that detailed various parts of the budget. If the draft is acceptable, T. Sheehan stated they recommend sending it to the Boards of Selectmen and FinComs for their comments prior to final publication.

T. Sheehan stated the School Committee voted on July 26th to authorize the expenditure of \$9,500 for the Union Building roof inspection and development of specs but the minutes did not reflect the source of funding. They understand the funding was to come from E & D and are asking for the Committee's clarification in tonight's vote.

The Committee will also be asked to authorize payment of FY06 bills from the FY07 budget.

T. Sheehan stated one of the generally accepted accounting principles for an accrual accounting system is that bills should be paid with funds appropriated for the year in which the expenses occurred. Money is encumbered at the end of the fiscal year to pay open PO's but for some reason, there were some bills for maintenance on their special education vans that were not encumbered. He stated he brought this to the attention of the superintendent and Dr. Genovese concluded the process would be for the Committee to vote to allow them to pay those bills with FY07 funds. He has taken steps to make sure the proper procedure is followed next year. The bills total approximately \$2,100.

B. Erickson asked if there has been any discussion with the Peter Twomey Foundation about the HVAC system. T. Sheehan stated he and Dr. Genovese attended a meeting with several members and they believe the Foundation is willing to consider funding the HVAC portion of that repair. With respect to the roof replacement the district agreed to pay for, he stated they need to allocate that capital expense in accordance with the regional agreement which is based on head count in a particular building. Since the PTYC has people in the building for varying periods of time, it is difficult to come up with a ratio that meets the terms of the agreement and they will need to figure out how to do that.

Report of the Chair - C. McKinney apologized for not having the September 27th workshop agenda ready and advised it will be e-mailed to members.

Update on Temporary Lighting - C. McKinney stated they approved the use of portable lighting behind MSS for the youth football team and are aware of the concerns. He stated the issue of Planning Board jurisdiction and whether the building inspector views the zoning as applying directly to the district has not been definitively answered but neither the Planning Board nor the district want to spend a lot of time and money arguing back and forth about the applicability of local zoning on school buildings and grounds. The building inspector asked the football group to bring a lighting unit to the field so he could see it and hear it and after doing so, he agreed it was okay, from his point of view, to put up the temporary lights. Concurrent with that, the School Committee has submitted a letter to the Planning Board indicating, without prejudice, they are willing to submit an application to use the temporary lights for the remainder of the season. He stated he, Dr. Genovese, Mr. Byrne and a couple of representatives from the football group had a pre-submittal review with the Planning Board and a Level 1 site plan review application will be done tomorrow night at 7:00 p.m. The Planning Board believes a site plan is required for any permanent lighting on the school grounds and the building inspector feels even temporary lights are subject to review.

S. Byrne distributed copies of the information that has been provided to the Planning Board regarding the equipment being used on the fields. Four diesel powered generators are being used and there are four lights on each pole which extend out twenty-eight feet. Each light is 1000 watts. He showed a schematic plan and noted the pins indicate where the lights are located. He also showed a scale model where the light will show on the field. C. McKinney showed a chart that shows the concentric areas that indicate how bright the light is depending on the location of the light itself. The brightest area is about five foot candles and he noted the zoning requires at least a half foot candle for safety purposes in any lighted area and allows up to a maximum of 30 foot candles.

The lights are being turned on at 5:30 p.m. at the request of the building inspector and Dr. Genovese said members can stop by prior to the Planning meeting. The meeting has been posted in anticipation of School Committee members attending.

F. Buzan asked if there are any zoning guidelines relative to distances from the lights and C. McKinney said in the site plan review areas that reference lighting, there is no specific category on the lighting of fields, it only talks about the lighting of parking lots and walkways. F. Buzan said it appears from Mr. Byrne's chart that the closest houses on Champney are about 500 feet and about 1000 feet on Common Street. Mr. Byrne agreed.

Dr. Genovese stated he walked the field and hoped residents have had the chance to express any concerns so alterations to the positioning could be made if they are not quite right.

ACTION ITEMS

VOTE: Union Roof, Inspection and Development of Specs - \$9,500

T. Sheehan stated the Committee voted to authorize \$9,500 for the purpose of an inspection of the roof and structural members of the Union Building at their July 26th meeting but the funding source was not made clear. He recommends the Committee vote to clarify that the money was to come from E & D.

F. O'CONNELL MOVED THE SCHOOL COMMITTEE IDENTIFY E & D AS THE SOURCE OF FUNDS TO PAY FOR THE UNION ROOF INSPECTION AND DEVELOPMENT OF SPECS, IN AN AMOUNT NOT TO EXCEED \$9,500. SECONDED BY C. BARRETT

SO VOTED IN FAVOR UNANIMOUSLY BY ROLL CALL

VOTE: Authorize to Pay FY06 Bills

T. Sheehan stated he is requesting that the Committee votes to allow the administration to pay approximately \$2,100 in invoices for special education van transportation that date back to FY06, to be paid with FY07 funds.

Dr. Funch asked why the amount is "approximately" and T. Sheehan said it is slightly less than \$2,100.

F. O'CONNELL MOVED THE SCHOOL COMMITTEE AUTHORIZE THE ADMINISTRATION TO PAY APPROXIMATELY \$2,100 IN INVOICES FOR SPECIAL EDUCATION VAN TRANSPORTATION THAT DATE BACK TO FY06 FROM FY07 FUNDS. SECONDED BY F. BUZAN
SO VOTED IN FAVOR UNANIMOUSLY BY ROLL CALL

VOTE: Accept Donation From Squannacook River Runners to PTYC

Dr. Genovese stated this donation of \$250 comes into the Revolving Fund. Dr. Funch noted there is an error in the letter and the donation is being given to the PTYC and not the Groton Fire Department as stated.

C. Barrett asked if this goes into a specific PTYC Revolving Fund or the district general fund and

Dr. Genovese said it will go into one of the PTYC's specific revolving accounts.

P. FUNCH MOVED THE SCHOOL COMMITTEE ACCEPT THE DONATION FROM THE SQUANNACOOK RIVER RUNNERS IN THE AMOUNT OF \$250 ON BEHALF OF THE PETER TWOMEY YOUTH CENTER. SECONDED BY B. ERICKSON

F. Buzan suggested they make sure they intended to give them the money.

SO VOTED IN FAVOR UNANIMOUSLY

QUESTIONS/COMMENTS

J. O'Hara thanked the Committee for letting Florence Roche do a presentation tonight and for moving so quickly this summer to see that the project happened as timely as possible. She stated parents are very pleased that the money used to deal with the arsenic remediation, resurfacing and drainage was not going to have to come out of their pockets and the amount of money they need to raise to finish the playground has been reduced. She thanked all community members and parents for their efforts in this project. With respect to the football lights, J. O'Hara said this is an issue that is talked about consistently in the community and has created a life of its own. She would like the Committee, and all other committees, to try and resolve this as quickly as possible because parents she has spoken with believe there are other more important issues.

J. O'Hara thanked Dr. Genovese and the Committee for reviewing the hiring processes and stated many parents are trying to find the real information. She believes the CORI did the job it is intended for and said that it is important to remember that juvenile records are blocked for a reason - kids make stupid mistakes and they should not have to live with that forever. While she is not excusing the ongoing mistakes the suspect made that need to be rectified, she feels they need to be a little more empathetic to the situation. She agrees they should look for a national avenue when doing employment checks and pull records for applicants that list other states.

ADJOURNMENT

F. O'CONNELL MOVED TO ADJOURN AT 9:22 P.M. SECONDED BY K. LOFGREN
SO VOTED IN FAVOR UNANIMOUSLY

Respectfully submitted,

Susan H. Smith
Recording Secretary

With attachment