

GROTON-DUNSTABLE REGIONAL SCHOOL COMMITTEE

High School Library
Business Meeting Minutes
March 4, 2009

PRESENT:

Mr. Peter Carson
Ms Berta Erickson
Mr. Jim Frey (Arrived at 7:13 p.m.)
Dr. Paul Funch, Chair
Mr. Chuck McKinney, Vice-Chair
Mr. Frank O'Connell
Mr. Jon Sjoberg, Secretary

ADMINISTRATION:

Dr. Alan Genovese, Superintendent
Timothy Sheehan, Director of Business and Finance

STUDENT REPRESENTATIVES:

Rafael Glod and Brianna Riposa

STAFF, PRESS, OTHERS: H. Sato, Lowell Sun; C. Beckert-Long, Groton Herald; B. Rivea, C. Lawton, P. Comtois, Groton Landmark; N. Keegan, J. Sheffield

CALL TO ORDER:

The GDRSC Meeting was called to order at 7:07 p.m. by the chair, P. Funch

ANNOUNCEMENTS/SPOTLIGHT

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

GDEF - J. Sheffield announced they closed the spring grant cycle and they received twenty-one applications totaling \$90,400. They generally budget up to \$25,000 to \$30,000 for this cycle and she noted the number of requests highlight the needs. The approved grants will be announced in mid-April. GDEF will hold their second annual Reach for the Stars Benefit Auction on March 14th at the Groton School and they have hundreds of items. This year's theme is country cows and cows decorated by various students were displayed. More information is available at their website www.gdefinc.org.

PRESENTATIONS/DISCUSSION

Athletic Overnight Field Trips - On behalf of D. Twomey, C. McKinney said the pre-season baseball and softball trips to the Cape happen every year. The girls' varsity softball trip will be March 20th through March 22nd (rain/snow dates: March 27th through March 29th) and the boys' trip will be March 27th through March 29th.

Review of Budget - T. Sheehan had received a question from a committee member about the increase in guidance services. The category was up 11% over last year and T. Sheehan distributed two handouts that answer the question. He stated the major driver is the increase of the consultants line item from \$4,000 to \$40,000 and accounts for almost 2/3rds of the increase.

Melmark has been hired as a consultant for the new autism program that will start at the middle school in the fall and there will be at least twelve students enrolled in the program. This will keep the students in-district. He reviewed the guidance services by location.

J. Frey asked if this will be a recurring cost going forward and Dr. Genovese said they would rely less on the

consultant as the staff gets more comfortable with the program. He noted this is a cost avoidance as some out-of-district programs can cost up to \$200,000. J. Frey asked if there are currently any students out-of-district and Dr. Genovese would hope some of them could return to the district.

T. Sheehan distributed a 1000 Level Summary sheet showing the FY2010 budget request in the new format. It shows that 55% of the budget goes to direct services for students. B. Erickson said the new budget format makes the budget understandable.

C. McKinney said this new format aligns with the Budget and Finance Committee's objective of aligning policy with budget transfers. The administration will bring transfers between these line items to the school committee for approval. He noted the committee will not be approving transfers at the level 3/level 4 area as policy says they approve transfers at the level of the budget they approve. The administration will be able to make subtle adjustments within instructional services for example, but they may not move money away from here without the school committee's approval.

P. Carson is not in total agreement with the 1000 level and feels they should approve money going between schools or a figure over a certain amount. Dr. Genovese said policy will set thresholds for amounts of money that are transferred. The committee will see a variance report regardless of the amount. Policy says the committee is suppose to vote on a budget that provides an appropriate education and P. Carson does not believe they should be cutting specials and raising class sizes. He asked if they should be working with parents to ask for money as he does not believe this is the education a district of their quality should be offering. B. Erickson agrees with his philosophy but said the reality is they need to do the best with what they have.

The feedback Dr. Genovese has heard is that there is no support for an override and they need to pass a budget that has support. C. McKinney said even without an override, they do not have town agreement on budgets yet. Dunstable's proposed budget would remove another \$1M from the school budget and they have a long way to go to get the towns to support this budget as it exists.

Dr. Funch is not sure the public understands the impacts of this budget and noted every part being cut is an important service. He does not feel they are maintaining the level of quality and feels they will fall off the precipice mentioned in the EQA report. He believes the district quality will go down if this budget passes. He does not know whether there is enough public support to sustain an override and questioned whether they should be offering the community the opportunity to vote for one in admittedly difficult economic times.

Dr. Genovese said he is unaware the Groton FinCom and selectmen have taken an official vote supporting the 2.5% increase. He said they have to adopt a budget tonight to set an anchor for conversations between town officials and the school committee.

B. Erickson is nervous about the precipice warning as well but said they have not seen any proof quality has gone down. F. O'Connell feels the town departments and 80% of the residents are on a precipice too. He stated Dunstable's draft budget is very bleak and it will be difficult for them to come up with the \$52,000.

Dr. Genovese said they have reallocated services and deployed them in different ways and will monitor it very carefully.

Rules for Public Comment - Members had received a copy of the proposed changes in their packets.

J. Frey said the goal is to simplify and be more embracing of comments and public involvement . He noted this is a set of guidelines and not policy. B. Erickson provided J. Sjoberg with some minor edits.

QUESTIONS/COMMENTS

N. Keegan stressed how important reading is to an elementary grade student and as a former educator in the district, she is aware of the good work done with the Reading Recovery program and the reading specialists.

She said reading is the fundamental foundation of how kids learn and being able to read gives them self confidence. Class size is also a concern because a teacher cannot reach all the children. She feels any extra curricula activities should be on the butcher block if reading is and said it would be worth a \$1M to bring back just one reading teacher.

B. Erickson hears Ms Keegan's passion and asked if she would be willing to take this to her community and have a fundraiser because passion can work into action. She noted one community decided teachers will take one day without pay. Dr. Genovese said there can be a warrant article that advocates for an "x" amount of money in addition to the town's appropriation. He said 1 ½ reading teachers will remain at the elementary level and they are looking at how they will be providing services outside the Reading Recovery program.

REPORTS FROM SUB-COMMITTEES

Policy - P. Carson reported their meeting was postponed.

Sustainability Committee - P. Carson reported there is an interest to utilize existing programs at the high school and work together to conserve energy. They are interested in knowing if there are policies in place for maximum heat levels in a building.

Budget and Finance - C. McKinney reported they will be meeting at 7:00 p.m. on March 25th. Dr. Genovese advised he will be asking them to meet earlier on a particular topic.

Communications Committee - J. Frey reported they will be meeting tomorrow morning. A few things have been fixed on the website and the public can now click on this year's meeting dates. Public comments are now being shared with members.

Think Tank Committee - B. Erickson reported they will be meeting tomorrow night at 7:00 p.m. in the MSN library.

Retirement of Facilities - Members had electronically received a final draft report from C. McKinney which incorporates comments from the public forum. He reported they did not have a quorum at their last meeting so no formal vote was taken to forward the report to the school committee but all members have seen it and had the opportunity to comment privately. The committee did not put a timeline together to return Tarbell to the town. C. McKinney said the committee would expect a school committee representative to present a report to the Groton Board of Selectmen.

Report of Director of Business & Finance - T. Sheehan reported several employees recently attended a two day seminar on QuickBooks as part of the administration's plan to expand its use for the inventory of custodial supplies, food service operations and funds controlled by Ms Tuomi at the PTYC.

He will have a comprehensive third quarter report for Budget and Finance on March 25th.

Report of the Chair

Vision One Meeting - Dr. Funch reported he attended the Division One MASC meeting at the Billerica High School last Thursday on budgeting in tough economic times and energy conservation. Members received copies of handouts and he will provide a report at the March 18th meeting. Another meeting is being held in Lowell on March 28th at 9:00 a.m. B. Erickson said G. Hoagland is working on this aspect for the Think Tank and perhaps he can attend the meeting.

Focus Group Update - Committee members will meet at Prescott next Wednesday at 6:30 p.m.

Report of the Superintendent - No report

ACTION ITEMS

None Consent Action Items

None

VOTE: Consent Action Items**Accept Final Draft of Tarbell Study Report**

C. MCKINNEY MOVED THE SCHOOL COMMITTEE ACCEPT THE FINAL DRAFT OF THE TARBELL STUDY REPORT. SECONDED BY B. ERICKSON

SO VOTED IN FAVOR UNANIMOUSLY

Dr. Funch thanked the committee for their work.

Athletic Overnight Field Trips

C. MCKINNEY MOVED THE SCHOOL COMMITTEE APPROVE THE BASEBALL AND SOFTBALL CAPE TRIPS AS PRESENTED IN OUR PACKETS. SECONDED BY P. CARSON

SO VOTED IN FAVOR UNANIMOUSLY

VOTE: To Adopt FY2010 Budget

T. Sheehan distributed three proposed budget adoption votes. The first two motions reference a specific document and the third makes no reference to a document. The administration recommends Option 2 which references the 1000 Level Summary document distributed tonight.

P. Carson said he would like to change it to Version 2, Level 2. He is concerned that in the past, things have moved within line items and the committee has not known about it until later. T. Sheehan said referring to the entire packet will not make it clear what level is being approved. C. McKinney agrees the objective to approve transfers has been around for a long time and this motion is more specific and will be followed up with clarification language in policy and in the business office's operation. Dr. Genovese said the document references nine categories and shows where the money is being spent.

T. Sheehan noted the document being referred to by Mr. Carson has thirty-three line items and the administration would be free to transfer within all of those. He suggested the administration review the regional agreement as it is not clear whether or not the school committee can set dollar thresholds.

J. SJOBERG MOVED THE GROTON-DUNSTABLE REGIONAL SCHOOL COMMITTEE ADOPT THE FISCAL YEAR 2010 OPERATING BUDGET IN THE AMOUNT OF \$31,545,545 AND A DEBT SERVICE AND INTEREST BUDGET IN THE AMOUNT OF \$4,357,931 FOR A TOTAL BUDGET FOR THE DISTRICT IN THE AMOUNT OF \$35,903,476 - AS OUTLINED IN THE DOCUMENT "FISCAL YEAR 2010 BUDGET REQUEST - 1000 LEVEL SUMMARY", VERSION 1, DATED 03-04-09. SECONDED BY B. ERICKSON

P. CARSON MOVED TO AMEND THE MOTION TO CHANGE THE LAST LINE TO READ VERSION 2, DATED 02-25-09, SECTIONS LEVEL 2 AND LEVEL 3. SECONDED BY J. SJOBERG

C. McKinney said money cannot be moved out of one area to a significantly different area without the committee's approval even without the amendment. He feels there is the implication that the district would save money, spend it somewhere and the committee would never know and stated this is not true.

F. O'Connell is comfortable voting for the original motion since any changes outside of Level 1 need to come back to the committee for approval and reports will be provided for other variances.

In Favor: P. Carson

Opposed: B. Erickson, J. Sjoberg, P. Funch, C. McKinney, F. O'Connell, J. Frey,

Discussion on the original motion ensued. J. Frey would like to hear the administration's prioritized order for restoring programs and Dr. Genovese said this is in progress. J. Frey asked where they are in relationship to the unions regarding pay increases and Dr. Genovese said meetings have been set up.

P. Funch feels the budget was predicated on a number agreed upon with Groton and while done in good faith, he does not feel it puts the district's priorities forward. He is uneasy about programs being impacted and these cuts, on top of all the others, are not sustainable and he would like a budget brought to the towns that maintains the quality of the district. He feels the budget needs to be a collective decision by the town leaders and the townspeople. He would like to see the cost of having their highest priorities met and said he cannot support a budget that does not support education and if they are going over the precipice, they need to let the people be part of the decision.

B. Erickson thinks the cooperation of the unions should be an essential part of this. P. Carson said they can vote a higher number and continue negotiations. While he shares everyone's concerns, J. Sjoberg does not feel it is worthwhile to submit something that will fail and said he has not gotten the impression from anyone that there is support for an override. F. O'Connell said the funding is just not there but the towns will not let educate fail. He said they are forcing change and will need to be even more creative.

P. Carson said in the future, they need to be more forceful and louder to educate people that there is nothing left to cut. As an art student, B. Riposa said she is concerned about cuts in art classes and is also concerned about cuts in reading.

A roll call vote was taken on the original motion.

In Favor: B. Erickson, P. Carson, J. Sjoberg, C. McKinney, F. O'Connell, J. Frey
Opposed: P. Funch

Dr. Genovese said he is glad someone voted no as it gives the message that they are doing the best they can but it is not unanimous and there are concerns.

OTHER

C. McKinney reminded members they will be hearing a report from Karen Tuomi on the PTYC at their next meeting and any questions or requests for information can be sent to him.

ADJOURNMENT

J. FREY MOVED TO ADJOURN AT 9:16 P.M. SECONDED BY F. O'CONNELL

In Favor: F. O'Connell, C. McKinney

Opposed: J. Frey, P. Funch, J. Sjoberg, P. Carson, B. Erickson

J. FREY MOVED THE SCHOOL COMMITTEE ACCEPT THE NEWLY AMENDED RULES FOR QUESTIONS AND COMMENTS FROM THE PUBLIC, WITH MINOR EDITS. SECONDED BY P. CARSON
SO VOTED IN FAVOR UNANIMOUSLY

ADJOURNMENT

J. FREY MOVED TO ADJOURN AT 9:18 P.M. SECONDED BY F. O'CONNELL

SO VOTED IN FAVOR UNANIMOUSLY

Respectfully submitted,

Susan H. Smith
 Recording Secretary

