

GROTON-DUNSTABLE REGIONAL SCHOOL COMMITTEE

High School Library
Business Meeting Minutes
September 2, 2009

PRESENT:

Mr. Peter Carson
Mr. Erik Dichter
Ms Berta Erickson
Mr. Jim Frey, Chair
Dr. Paul Funch
Ms Alison Manugian, Secretary
Mr. Jon Sjoberg, Vice-chair

ADMINISTRATION:

Dr. Alan Genovese, Superintendent

STAFF, PRESS, OTHERS: C. Beckert-Long, Groton Herald; P. Comtois, Groton Landmark;
M. Barker, M. Gilbert, L. Lutz, K. Hartner

CALL TO ORDER:

The GDRSC Meeting was called to order at 7:01 p.m. by the chair, J. Frey

ANNOUNCEMENTS/SPOTLIGHTS

Dr. Genovese distributed an information card created by MRM Associates which lists phone numbers for Groton's town services and the school district on the front and the district school calendar on the back.

Dr. Genovese recognized the custodial staff for the work they did over the summer and stated the buildings look fabulous. He invited members to walk through the school buildings.

Dr. Genovese recognized Police Chief David Palma, Jr. for increasing traffic details on the first day of school and for attending the high school orientation. Dr. Genovese said over 95 upperclassmen were in attendance to welcome the freshmen class. Thursday is the first day of school for all students and he reminded parents there will be school on Friday. Swallow Union and Florence Roche found this to be the best opening day they have seen in years.

Dr. Genovese introduced Dan Lillis, who will be taping the school committee meetings for cable television.

PRESENTATIONS

Food Services - Maria Barker, Director

Dr. Genovese said Ms Barker brings a lot of experience to the district and she is also a dietician. He noted the balance was \$69,000 in the black when she came in and the balance was at \$119,000 at the end of FY09. The Department of Education recommends a school district keep three months worth of operating expenses in their account and for Groton-Dunstable, that would be about \$210,000. It can be expensive if a piece of equipment goes down or someone is out on workers comp.

M. Barker acknowledged her dedicated staff and said about 35% of the budget is for labor costs and 45% is for food. Since there was no accountability of the hours people were working, she instituted the use of sign-in/sign-out timesheets to keep track of their hours and also for security. She noted three employees were being paid for more hours than they were contracted for and this was immediately remedied through the payroll department.

She said she is probably the only food service director that takes the time to personally call in the food order and she does this every Friday morning, making sure she is getting the best price and quality. Government commodities are offered on a monthly basis, which she accepts, but does not divert. She explained diversion is taking a commodity item such as cheese, sending it off to a processor and bringing it back. It is an expensive procedure and nutritionally, the products have a high calorie value and added ingredients. She noted the previous director diverted a lot of the commodities and that was a contractual agreement she had to keep. She saved about \$88,000 on food and still maintained state requirements for nutrition.

A study has shown the cost of a lunch, which is food and labor, is \$3.14 and the district charges \$2.50 and \$2.75. To make up the difference, they sell a la carte items and have vending machines, except at the elementary schools, with items sanctioned by the Nutritional Institute. She is part of the committee that determines what goes on the accepted A list.

With so many schools having financial difficulties, they have been fortunate that they have not had to substitute fresh fruits and vegetables with canned products, reduce staff or limit the menus. M. Barker said no one is allowed to take home leftovers. Every lunch is subsidized from the state and the district receives \$2.58 for every free lunch and 25 cents for every paid lunch. Fifty-six students receive free lunch and nine receive reduced lunch. Should a family need to apply for a free or reduced lunch, forms are sent home the first week of school. The local Board of Health comes in twice a year, without warning, to do an inspection and she also has a service that comes into all the schools once a month, without warning, to check the temperature of the refrigerator and freezer, check the oven, make sure hairnets are being worn etc.

M. Barker is concerned that some families, mainly at Swallow Union and Florence Roche, are not paying their bills and currently \$1700 is outstanding. She has called parents, notes have been sent home, Principal Myerson sent out a Connect-Ed message to parents and Principal Silverman also talks with parents. Since these are Revolving Funds, the balances remain outstanding. She noted they have never denied a child lunch, nor will they, although they are not required by law to provide one. She read what the **Beverly** school system does when students consistently arrive without lunch or lunch money and continue to not pay.

She suggested holding the student's report card until the bill is paid. J. Sjoberg noted the problem seems to be at the elementary level and if there is going to be the suggestion of a harsh penalty, he said they need confirmation that the note sent home with the child was actually seen by the parent. M. Barker would like to have parents pay by the month and eliminate cash at the elementary schools. Dr. Genovese suggested a free/reduced lunch form be sent home with second notices. M. Barker said by law, parents are still required to pay the money owed. Dr. Genovese asked the policy subcommittee think about a policy to provide support. B. Erickson likes the idea of using a Connect-Ed message at the beginning of the school year.

M. Gilbert suggested they make sure people who owe money understand the free and reduced lunch program is available. He noted the ultimate answer, after they have done everything to chase them, may be small claims court but this has associated costs.

Superintendent Search Process - Mike Gilbert, MASC (Massachusetts Association of School Committees)

M. Gilbert explained they have past, or presently sitting, school committee members that have been through the process and they will work to create a process that works for the committee and be sure they comply with applicable laws. MASC recruits from across the country and they have contacts around the country. They have a list of interested superintendents around New England and the information is given to every superintendent and assistant superintendent in Massachusetts.

They assist with advertising, contract negotiations and even if they are not hired as a consultant, they will provide technical assistance over the phone. They will also be there to ensure the success of the person hired and the building of the relationship between the superintendent and the school committee.

They do 10 to 25 searches a year and Mr. Gilbert said he currently has four proposals out. MASC would provide the initial screening process and the search committee would likely screen 8 to 10 candidates but it could be more depending on the number of people who meet the criteria. MASC does some initial background work if they do not know the candidate and they will do some reference checking. He said they cannot do a CORI check since MASC is not the employer.

B. Erickson asked if he has been involved with assessment centers and he said he has not seen them used for public education as they are generally used for scenarios where specific outcomes are necessary.

E. Dichter asked how they match wanted "soft skills" that come from focus groups to the candidates.

M. Gilbert said they look for the things that are repetitious and "pop to the top".

B. Erickson asked if the screening committee can see all the resumes and M. Gilbert said no but they will see the finalists' resumes as MASC does the initial screening and cut down. Otherwise, the committee would be open to having made the cut down and issues with the Open Meeting Law would prevent the screening committee from doing everything in executive session. Once a cut down of candidates has been made, and if the district or screening committee made that cut down, everything has to be done in public from that point forward.

J. Frey said their screening committee has one non-voting school committee member and M. Gilbert said one or two school committee members on the screening committee would not put them in violation of the Open Meeting Law. He said the school committee member(s) should be allowed to vote. Dr. Funch thought this would be showing bias.

MASC's quoted price does not include advertising costs, since they do not know where they will get the best value, and travel expenses for committee members and the final candidates. M. Gilbert said February is an aggressive timeline and no less than 4 weeks are needed from the time the position is advertised until the deadline for accepting applications. Candidates also need enough leeway to get here if they are coming from out of state. March is a reasonable deadline.

QUESTIONS AND COMMENTS FROM THE PUBLIC

L. Lutz stated her daughter is a junior at the high school and her son had hoped to be entering 9th grade here. They had applied for School Choice but because there are no openings, he has been enrolled in his home school district. She said he is in limbo and really struggling because he wants to be here. She asked if Dr. Genovese is any closer to making a decision on how the enrollment numbers played out.

Dr. Genovese said they have a waiting list of up to 40 families trying to come into the district. The high school starts tomorrow and they need to wait to see what the enrollment numbers will be in each grade and he may have a recommendation at the September 16th school committee meeting to open up School Choice seats in several of the grades.

Dr. Genovese noted the school committee made a conscious decision last year to not open any seats until they knew the impact on class sizes. The committee will not see a recommendation for Florence Roche and Swallow Union and it is unlikely he will declare any at the middle school. Currently, it looks like the net loss at the high school is 16 and there may be a few seats in the junior and senior classes. The names go into a pool and those who have siblings anywhere in the school system are selected by lottery if there are more students than available seats. It is advantageous to the district to bring students in as they receive additional revenue but there are no guarantees they will be declaring any open seats. He does have to send a letter to the Commissioner of Education, informing him the committee voted to declare vacant seats in specific grades.

Since Dr. Genovese should have stable numbers by next Wednesday, it was agreed a tentative school committee meeting will be scheduled for 6:30 p.m. at the Town Hall on September 9th and it can be cancelled

if the numbers do not work out.

DISCUSSIONS

Policies - First Readings

Dr. Funch highlighted the changes to the policies.

BEDH - Public Participation at School Committee Meetings - The policy addresses how the public's wishes, opinions and ideas can be heard by the committee.

BEDH-E - Rules for Questions and Comments from the Public - This is a new exhibit and is printed on the back of the agenda.

BBA - School Committee Member Authority - Legal references were added and minor wording changes were made.

BDA - School Committee Organizational Meeting - This was written to reflect the actual process they have used.

EEAAA - Assignment of Students to Destinations Other Than Their Homes - Members received a new handout on this policy. The major change to the policy is to provide convenience transportation in a fair way. Line 19 will be amended to read: "A. There is an existing route *with capacity* that allows for this drop off to occur". The bus company and principal determine if a bus has capacity.

Parents need to make their own arrangements when their child is going home with a friend. J. Sjoberg said it is not abnormal to have a situation when a child needs to be somewhere, the parent cannot be home and the child needs to go to someone's home. A. Manugian said she is also concerned about half days when working parents can potentially be left in the lurch. Dr. Genovese said accommodations would be made for emergency situations whenever possible.

A. Manugian asked if the committee or the bus company has a policy on who an elementary child can be left off the bus to. Dr. Genovese said they want to see an adult there for kindergarten children and if not, they are brought back to the school but there is no requirement for someone to meet an elementary school child. Parents should have contingency plans in place.

It was agreed this policy needs more discussion by the subcommittee.

KHB - Advertising in the Schools - The subcommittee feels suspended Policy KHB should be deleted once Policy KGD is adopted. KHB is not in the MASC index.

Policies - Second Readings

Dr. Funch reviewed the changes to the following policies that were made at the first reading on August 19th.

BDE - Subcommittees of the School Committee - The word "Superintendent" will be removed from line 26 and the word "either" will be added after the word "which" in line 27.

Policy BDFB - Screening Committee - J. Sjoberg would like this policy held until they have input from their consultant.

BEDB - Meeting Agenda - No comments

BEDB-E-1 - Agenda Content - No comments

BEDB-E-2 - 2009-2010 Agenda Format - The chairman's report will be after the superintendent's report. It was noted tonight's agenda needs to follow the correct order under Reports.

KGD - Advertising, Sponsorships, Partnerships and Commercial Services - Line 107 will reflect that it is the chair's responsibility to review the MOAs, MOUs and contracts every three years.

KGD-E - Advertising, Sponsorships, Partnerships and Commercial Services - Sample Policy Applications - No comments

REPORTS

Policy Subcommittee - Dr. Funch reported they will be meeting more frequently. Their next meeting is at 6:30 p.m. on September 14, 2009 at Prescott.

Budget & Finance Subcommittee - A. Manugian reported they will be meeting at Prescott at 9:00 a.m. on September 11, 2009.

Personnel and Negotiations - J. Sjoberg reported he is the chair, Dr. Funch is the vice-chair and E. Dichter is the secretary. They discussed the superintendent search process but they decided they cannot do very much until a consultant is chosen. He noted there will be a lot of contract negotiations in 2010.

They are meeting at Prescott on September 21st and September 28th at 7:00 p.m. and these will be posted as school committee meetings since there will be a quorum of school committee members. P&N would like to have the other two consultants make their presentations at the September 16th school committee meeting.

Communication Advisory Committee - E. Dichter reported they have not met. They are moving their meeting day to Monday and the next meeting will likely be scheduled for September 21st, following the Personnel & Negotiations meeting.

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

Tarbell Committee - Dr. Funch reported they will be meeting at 8:00 a.m. at the Groton Town Hall on September 17th.

Director of Business & Finance - Dr. Genovese reported the building project at the Union Building is done and they are completing the paperwork. Installation of the LCD's at the middle school is underway.

After going through purchase orders, Dr. Genovese said he will be meeting with the Budget and Finance subcommittee next Friday to discuss how the system will be set up for KVS for the coming year to reflect proper spending from the proper category. The school committee would see the transfers and he noted any changes will not change the bottom line.

Superintendent - With respect to the new guidance counselor position, Dr. Genovese said they expect the second round of ARRA money in late October or early November. They can have a guidance counselor position for special education and charge the money directly to the ARRA funds.

Dr. Genovese reported he has spoken with about 14 potential candidates for the position of Interim Director of Business and Finance. He distributed a resume for Clare Jeannotte and stated he would like P&N to meet with her. She would work 2 ½ days a week and her focus would be to monitor the FY10 budget and develop the FY11 budget. She could work some additional hours if necessary. She was advised she could apply for the full time position. It was agreed P&N will set a meeting date prior to the next school committee meeting. Dr. Funch stated the committee needs to authorize P&N to enter into negotiations with Ms Jeannotte.

Members received a copy of the letter sent to parents/guardians regarding steps that need to be taken to reduce the spread of the flu in the district. The letter is also available on the website.

It was clarified trained volunteers will be supporting the elementary school libraries.

Dr. Genovese said he appreciated Mr. Sjoberg's contribution at the August 31st staff meeting.

Chairman - No report

ACTION ITEMS

Consent Action Items

Vote to Approve Business Meeting Minutes of August 19, 2009

P. CARSON MOVED TO APPROVE THE BUSINESS MEETING MINUTES OF AUGUST 19, 2009.

SECONDED BY J. SJOBERG

SO VOTED IN FAVOR UNANIMOUSLY

Other Action Items

Vote to Approve Policy BEDF - Voting Method

P. FUNCH MOVED THE SCHOOL COMMITTEE APPROVE THE AMENDMENTS TO POLICY BEDF -

VOTING METHOD. SECONDED BY P. CARSON

SO VOTED IN FAVOR UNANIMOUSLY

Vote to Approve Policy BEDF-E - Disclosure By Elected School Committee Member

P. FUNCH MOVED THE SCHOOL COMMITTEE APPROVE THE NEW EXHIBIT BEDF-E - DISCLOSURE BY ELECTED SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEMBER. SECONDED BY P. CARSON

SO VOTED IN FAVOR UNANIMOUSLY

Vote to Approve Policy BEDF-R - Commission Advisory 05-05

P. FUNCH MOVED THE SCHOOL COMMITTEE APPROVE POLICY BEDF-R - COMMISSION ADVISORY 05-05. SECONDED BY P. CARSON

SO VOTED IN FAVOR UNANIMOUSLY

Members were reminded to put all approved policies into their policy manual. The website versions and the master copy will also be updated.

Vote to Authorize P&N to Enter Negotiations

P. FUNCH MOVED THE SCHOOL COMMITTEE AUTHORIZE PERSONNEL AND NEGOTIATIONS TO ENTER INTO NEGOTIATIONS WITH THE CANDIDATE FOR THE INTERIM DIRECTOR OF BUDGET AND FINANCE POSITION. SECONDED BY P. CARSON

SO VOTED IN FAVOR UNANIMOUSLY

NEW BUSINESS

B. Erickson said it is nice to have potable water at the high school. Dr. Genovese advised they had a lightning struck a couple of weeks ago and Mr. Byrnes has been trying to get the well pump to work. Someone has been brought in since a lot of the circuitry was blown and now they have to struggle to make sure they can get water to the building.

Dr. Genovese said Groton wanted to dig up the middle school parking lot in order to bring in a cable for televising town meetings but they were told no. They are not able to get anything through the pipe that goes from the manhole to the building and they are figuring out the best way to handle this.

Dr. Genovese distributed a copy of a letter from the New England Association of Schools and Colleges, Inc. advising the high school's decennial evaluation has been scheduled for March 13, 2011 through March 16, 2011.

ADJOURNMENT

P. CARSON MOVED TO ADJOURN AT 10:00 P.M. SECONDED BY B. ERICKSON

SO VOTED IN FAVOR UNANIMOUSLY

Respectfully submitted,

Susan H. Smith
Recording Secretary