

**RUTLAND PUBLIC SCHOOL
REGULAR MEETING OF THE BOARD OF SCHOOL COMMISSIONERS
DEC. 16, 2008**

School Board Members Present:

Peter Mello
Christopher Book
Wayne Cooke
Richard Courcelle
Roberta Dress
Peter Fagan
Collin Fingon
Peter Forshay
Gina Fucci
Cindy Kilic-Murray
Nicholas Ouelette

Member Absent

Karen Gartner

Also Present:

Superintendent Mary Moran
Assistant Superintendent Rob Bliss
Wil Cunningham
Peter Folaros
Peter Amons
Ellie McGarry
Ted Guilmette
Bob Johnson
Patricia Aigner
Lyle Jepson

Motion by Forshay/Fagan to convene to executive session at 6:15 pm for the purpose of discussing personnel matters, the premature release of information regarding those subjects which would place the Board at a substantial disadvantage. Unanimously passed by those in attendance.

**EXECUTIVE
SESSION**

**PUBLIC
SESSION**

The Board came out of executive session at 6:45 pm.

ROLL CALL

The meeting was called to order at 7:00 pm followed by the Pledge of Allegiance. Chair Mello noted the absence of Commissioner Gartner.

**MOTION:
MINUTES
12/9/08
MEETING**

Motion by Book/Forshay to accept the minutes of the Dec 9, 2008 regular school board meeting as written. Motion passed unanimously by all those in attendance.

**WRITTEN
COMMUN-
ICATION**

Written Communication - None

**ORAL
COMMUN-
ICATION**

Oral Communication - None

Education Report - Mr. Mello said he has decided to postpone the Board's book discussion until the spring, when the financial matters are concluded. Board members have a list of assigned chapters and will be informed when it will be discussed.

**EDUCATION
REPORT**

Stafford Technical Center Budget Ratification - The budget was presented last week.

**STC
BUDGET
RATIFICA-
TION**

Motion by Fagan/Fingon to accept the FY09 Vermont State Equipment Grant in support of equipment purchases at Stafford Technical Center in the amount of \$35,132.58. Passed unanimously by all those in attendance.

**MOTION:
STC STATE
EQUIPMENT
GRANT**

Motion by Fagan/Cooke to accept the federal Carl D. Perkins Grant for FY10 for use in support of the operation of Stafford Technical Center with an anticipated award amount of \$325,404.00. Passed unanimously by all those in attendance.

**MOTION:
STC
PERKINS
GRANT**

Motion to Fagan/Forshay to accept the FY10 Stafford Technical Center budget as presented by the Regional Advisory Board with a projected assessment figure of \$3,614.00 for each full time student. This figure may be reduced proportionately to any increases in state funding.

**MOTION:
ACCEPT
FY10 STC
BUDGET**

Commissioner Cooke asked why the approval is written as a tuition number instead of the entire budget figure. Mr. Jepson said sometimes more state aid than anticipated is received; in that case, money is sent back to the sending towns. That is happening this year. Mr. Mello asked if the Regional Advisory Board approved the budget amount or the assessment figure. Mr. Jepson said they approved the budget, which is \$4,084,133. Mr. Cooke asked why the board is not approving that number. Mr. Jepson said this is the way it has always been done since he has been here. It all adds up to a certain amount. Mr. Cooke said the number would depend on the number of students. Ms. Moran said it is based on six semester averaging. Mr. Cooke said this will be a part of the total budget and asked how it will be listed. Ms. Moran said it is listed as part of the entire budget in all of its accounts. Rutland High School also pays tuition for the 55 students attending STC. Mr. Amons said it gets voted as a budget figure of +\$4 million, the actual amount sitting in the total budget right now. Mr. Cooke said the whole +\$4 million is in the total budget, not just the \$3614 9 (assessment figure) x 55 students. Ms. Moran said there is also tuition revenue which offsets this. Mr. Cooke asked if the 1.7% increase is expenditure budget FY09 to expenditure budget FY10 and Mr. Jepson said it is. Commissioner Dress said with the economy the way it is, she cannot support any increase at all and will vote no.

**VOTE ON
MOTION**

Motion passed with two no votes (Dress, Fagan).

**FY10
BUDGET
DISCUS-
SION**

FY10 Budget Discussion - Ms. Moran said that Mr. Bliss and Mr. Amons will present a general overview of grants. They have provided a summary of the narrative and back up details. Mr. Bliss said the grant revenue sources are not generated through local tax dollars. They mostly come from the federal government granted to the state in block forms and then granted to the school district. There are also some small foundation grants. This revenue totals \$6.2 million which is used to support student programs. State and local grants support many programs, including afterschool funding. Mr. Bliss explained the Medicaid, Early Essential Education, Title and other competitive grants which the district receives and reviewed how the money is spent.

There were questions and discussion about revenues and how they can be used:

- Is the EEE money for two teachers? Yes, two teachers plus benefits.
- Is Tapestry self-sustaining? Much of it is paid for from grant funds. The school districts support it with a small amount of Title money.
- What is the future of Title II funds? They are on a downtrend. Title V used to be very helpful and was the only Title grant with flexibility but it was discontinued.
- What is the benefit to the district of the Asian Studies program. GRASP offers professional development opportunities in the summer and during the year and there has been some student enrichment. Regional supervisory unions support GRASP with small amounts of money from their Title funds. These funds have also been pared back.
- The overall grants are projected at 1% higher for FY10 than they were for FY09. What is that indicative of? The federal grants will be level-funded at best. We have been diligent in writing grants but they are getting more and more competitive.
- Is the Medicaid funding separated out for EEE and K-12? No, Medicaid is one pot.

There is no separation between EEE versus K-12. We draw down the money by paying for special educators providing the services.

- The grants represent \$6.2 million worth of services and programs for Rutland City which do not have a direct tax impact on the taxpayers. The state only gives advice to “level-fund.” the presentation reinforces how many programs and services, and the kinds, which are funded with these grants.
- Why do we not reduce other costs with these grant funds? We cannot supplant something we already do. We cannot use these funds, for example, to pay business office salaries. Increasingly, the federal government, through the state, is asking for more accountability, which leads to increased paperwork. We cannot take the money and offset other expenses. They are very specific on how we have to spend it. It is very personnel intensive.
- If we lose some grants, what happens to some of the programs? It would be evaluated but most likely we would have to cut programs. Based upon the specificity of the grant, we may not be able to pick it up locally. For the most part, it would cut programs.
- What is the percentage of the total budget reduced by the \$6.2 million? If we ran these programs on our own, it would cost an additional 14%.
- Which offices apply for the grants? Primarily, the grant work is done by Ms. McGarry, Mr. Bliss, Mr. Amons, Ms. Moran, and Diana Pfenning in the Tapestry Program. Mr. Bliss handles grant management. There are also grants which come to Stafford.

Board members received the budget detail for background material. It details the general fund budget and all the grants.

Mr. Mello asked the Board how they would like to proceed.

- Mr. Fagan said he will set up a meeting to talk with Mr. Amons and ask his questions. He said the special budget workshop has been helpful in the past.
- Mr. Courcelle said board member discussions with Mr. Amons and budget workshops are helpful but he thinks the Board needs a public deliberation on the budget. The Board is trying to engage the public.
- Ms. Moran said we are on schedule. The Board will meet the second and fourth Tuesdays in January and budget ratification is set for the second meeting.
- Mr. Mello said the question voters ask is how it will affect their property taxes. We may or may not have a tax rate from the state before we have to approve the budget.
- Mr. Mello said he would like the administration to make specific recommendations for budget adjustments. The Board can set a target but the administration should make recommendations.
- Ms. Kilic-Murray asked, given the current financial situation, the 1.7% increase at STC and the proposed 4.9% increase in this budget, how the Board can level fund. She said while she does not feel that the proposal should be cut, it might be a good starting point to talk.
- Mr. Forshay said he would be reluctant to start with a level funded budget. In the past, the Board has asked the administration to recommend a series of spending levels and he thinks we should do the same this year. Perhaps they can recommend the cuts if the increase was lowered to 3.9%.
- Ms. Dress said the public has a right to vote on the budget this year. The Board has to justify this. She will be hard pressed to justify this increase and she thinks the budget

should be level funded.

- Mr. Forshay said part of his proposal is the vehicle and it can be applied to any spending level.
- Mr. Cooke said he would like to see recommendations - what if 1% or 2% or 3% were cut.
- Mr. Mello said he assumes the administration is already thinking of certain types of reductions. The determining factor is accurate information on the tax rate. He said this is a level funded budget, with the exception of one position. The budget presented represents the exact same amount of programs and staff we have now. There is a difference between level-funding programming and level-funding financially.
- Mr. Fingon said there would have to be \$2.1 million in cuts to level fund the budget. It is the Board's duty to be mindful of the taxpayers. But he does not think we should cut programs just because times are tough. He does not want to jeopardize the product. People at home are tightening budgets but to cut programs would lead to the ultimate deterioration of the education we are offering and the future of our children.
- Mr. Book said if we cut programs, we take the chance on losing tuition dollars. If our program is not "the best" and as attractive as it is now, tuition students might choose to go elsewhere. The loss of tuition dollars could hurt even more. We have a vital interest in keeping our program strong and attractive.
- Ms. Fucci said it is not just the core curriculum that is attractive. There are many programs outside the core curriculum which are very important. That is the kind of foundation we are trying to build and keep alive. We have to be careful about what we are cutting.
- Mr. Amons said last year the state did not come out with the tax rate until town meeting day.
- Ms. Fucci asked if there was a way for the board to see what line items can or cannot be changed. Mr. Amons said it is all subjective – some programs or expenses are supported by grants or determined by class sizes. He thinks the most useful discussion should be on the nature of the expenses and see if they are cuttable or not, rather than going through 2500 lines.
- Mr. Forshay said we should see the administrators' recommendations in order to maintain the strength of the program. He would discourage the Board from going through the budget and making decisions on what to cut without guidance from the administration. Mr. Mello said that is part of their job and they have the perspective.
- Ms. Kilic-Murray said she is comfortable with a 4.9% increase. She said we have a wonderful public school system and she thinks we should show the public what we would lose if there were cuts.
- Mr. Mello said dollar for dollar, we are providing a bargain to the taxpayer for what they get over other school districts. We provide excellent programs for the money and we have a great school system which has been run effectively and efficiently for a long time.
- Mr. Fagan asked to look at the cuts which would lead to 3.9% and 2.9% budget increases. The City is in the lower 50% of all spending districts on a per pupil basis. We are the 61st out of 62 districts for administrative spending. It is important for people to see what the cuts would do.
- Mr. Mello asked the administration to bring back a 1% and 2% reduction and Mr. Book said he would like to see it brought down to a level-funded budget or even ½%. Board members were in concurrence.

- Mr. Forshay commended the administration for the proposal as an initial starting point with an essentially level funded budget program-wise.

FY10
BUDGET
DISC., cont.

Ms. Kilic-Murray asked if it was appropriate to ask Commissioners Dress and Fagan why they voted no on the STC budget. Mr. Mello said it is their privilege to vote as such and it is not an appropriate question. Mr. Fagan said he was not at last week's meeting when the Stafford budget was discussed, nor did he have a change to review the paperwork. That is why he voted no.

Motion by Book/Forshay to approve the Licensed and Non-licensed section of the Personnel Memorandum No. 396 dated Dec. 12, 2008, as recommended by the Superintendent of Schools.

MOTION:
PERSONNEL
MEMO #396

The appointments were reviewed by Superintendent Moran. They are attached. Motion passed by all those in attendance.

Business Report - None

BUSINESS
REPORT

Announcements

SUPERIN-
TENDENT'S
REPORT

- At Northwest and Pierpoint, students made gingerbread houses on Tuesday. Thursday is "make-it-take-it" craft day. The holiday sing-along with John Lyons is on Thursday as are the Giraffe Awards. On Friday, the Caring Canines are visiting with first graders, who will read to therapy dogs.
- The RMS Student - Faculty basketball game takes place this Friday.
- The RHS Unpredictables performed for 160 Rutland Regional Medical Center Volunteers at their annual holiday luncheon on December 8.
- A \$25,000 Workforce Renewable Training Grant has been granted to Stafford from Central Vermont Public Service Corp. STC will use the \$25,000 Workforce Renewable Training grant to teach renewable energy installation techniques to the next generation of project installers. CVPS representative Brian Keefe is collaborating with STC staff members to bring state of the art technology and training into the classroom, specifically into the Electrical / Plumbing program. The program instructor is John Bixby
- Ms. Moran distributed her holiday letter thanking the staff, Board and volunteers for all their work. She also distributed an editorial called the Principal's Perspective.
- Both STC and RHS received official notification that they are in continuing accrediting status from NEASC. There is work to be done, which will be brought to the Board after the budget work is completed.

ANNOUNCE-
MENTS

COMM.
REPORTS

Information Task Force - Ms. Fucci said Budget Buddies has been busy. They are laying the groundwork. Ms. Fucci thanked the STC students who helped produce promotional materials. She and Ann Carpenter are attending sporting activities with materials and answering questions. The Budget Buddies website is being created. Michael Ahearn has donated his services for this. They are gathering the ward captains and getting out information. The work is primarily being done now by the committee until January. The email address is live and the first one was received.

INFO. TASK
FORCE

NEW
BUSINESS

New Business - Mr. Fingon said the Memorial Golfing Tournament will be donating \$2500 to the field fund. They are looking at how to reduce the cost of participation for next year to attract more alumni.

GOLF
TOURNA-
MENT
DONATION

Old Business - None

**OLD
BUSINESS**

Motion by Fingon/Book to adjourn at 8:25 pm.

ADJOURN

Respectfully submitted

Janet Mondlak
Recording Secretary