

**Portsmouth School Board  
Portsmouth, New Hampshire**

**Minutes of the October 28, 2003 Meeting**

A meeting of the Portsmouth School Board was held on Tuesday, October 28, 2003 in the cafeteria at the Mary C. Dondero Elementary School.

***Attendance***

**PRESENT:** Mr. Kent F. LaPage (Chair), Mr. John Lyons, Jr. (Vice-Chair), Mr. Raimond Bowles, Mrs. Nancy Novelline Clayburgh, Mrs. Nansi Craig, Mr. Clay Hayward, Mr. Carvel Tefft, Mr. Charles Vaughn

**PARTICIPATING:** Dr. Lyonel B. Tracy (Superintendent of Schools), Dr. Robert J. Lister (Assistant Superintendent), Mr. W. Peter Torrey (Business Administrator), Mr. Adam Irish (Student Representative), Diane O'Leary McGee (Employee Representative)

***Call to Order***

Chair LaPage called the meeting to order at 7:08 p.m. He called for a moment of silent reflection and asked the Board to remember the father of Joe DeStefano and Roni Healy Whall, Mr. Joseph A. DeStefano, who recently passed away. He also asked that people keep in mind those who live in the San Diego, California area as the wild fires sweep through that area. He said the parents of High School Principal Forrest Ransdell are living through that right now, and Forrest is waiting for word from them to fly out and give them assistance. Mr. Bowles said his youngest daughter lives in the San Diego area. She called him to say that she is fine and that she and her friend are working as volunteers to assist people who have been displaced by the fire. Mrs. Jill LeMay, Principal of Dondero School, led the Pledge of Allegiance.

**SECRETARY'S REPORT**

***Minutes Approved***

The Chair called for approval of the minutes of the October 14, 2003 meeting. Mr. Vaughn moved the minutes be approved; Mr. Hayward seconded the motion. The motion was unanimously approved.

***1957 High School  
Dedication Program***

The Chair circulated a copy of the High School dedication program from September 4, 1957, and asked Board members to give some thought towards the new building that will be completed in March 2004.

***LunchMenus***

The Chair referred to the elementary and secondary lunch menus that were in the packets.

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**PUBLIC COMMENTARY SESSION**

***Comments About  
Flag Flying at  
Sherburne School***

Mr. James Melfi, 406 Greenside Avenue, Portsmouth, stated his concern with the way the American flag is being flown at the Sherburne School. Mr. Melfi said there are only two positions in which the American flag should be flown: all the way to the top, and at half-mast. The flag at Sherburne School has flown for a couple of years a number of feet from the top. The problem is the rope needs to be replaced. Mr. Melfi said he has addressed this issue with the current and past Principal at PASS (Portsmouth Alternative Secondary School). He said the Portsmouth Schools, which talk about showing and having respect for the students, teachers and school property, are showing disrespect for the American flag and all the brave people that have defended it and this Country. Mr. Melfi said he hopes the Board will do the right thing and have someone replace the rope and raise the American flag to its correct position.

***Comments on “No  
Child Left Behind”  
Legislation***

Mr. Vaughn left his seat to address the Board. Mr. Vaughn, stating that he is speaking as a citizen, distributed a copy of an article that appeared in the New York Times about a group of educators and civic leaders calling on Congress to rewrite the No Child Left Behind law. Mr. Vaughn said that Mr. Michael Sentance, Regional Director for Education Secretary Rod Paige, referred to this article at the October 16 work session. Mr. Vaughn said the article points out some of the difficulties presented by the No Child Left Behind legislation. He said the article points out that four school districts in Vermont announced they would forgo the Title 1 money for disadvantaged schools, while a lawmaker in Utah is planning to propose the entire state give up the federal aid rather than submit to the demands. Mr. Vaughn said he is troubled that the law requires schools to break down test scores by race, poverty, gender, disability and ethnicity, and judges these students by the progress of each group rather than on average scores of all students. He cautioned the Board that they, too, should be concerned about this. In closing, Mr. Vaughn said it is fortunate that the City’s tax rate has gone down to \$17.72 per thousand, and one dollar on the tax rate equates to 2.9 million dollars. He believes this gives the Board some good leeway for coming up with a decent budget this coming year.

The Chair declared the public commentary session closed.

## **RECOGNITION OF STAFF/STUDENTS**

### ***FRIENDS Project***

Dr. Lister reported that he and Mrs. Clayburgh want the Board to know the FRIENDS Project is “alive and well” and doing some great things in the community. The FRIENDS Board is involved in fund raising. He said the Project’s director, Heidi Chase, has been active in pursuing grants and other funds for this program. Mrs. Clayburgh said that one of the most difficult parts of being the parent of a disabled child is to see the lack of friendships for that child. Her son participates in the FRIENDS Project and truly enjoys the activities. She commended three high school students who were “ski buddies” last year so that three disabled students could participate in the Middle School’s Ski Club. Mrs. Clayburgh thanked the School Department for being the agent under which this program operates. She said they do a lot of fund raising as the full amount of money is raised from outside sources. Mr. Tefft asked who people should contact if they want to make a donation to this program. Dr. Lister said they should contact Heidi Chase.

Dr. Tracy said the agenda lists a trip request from the high school, but that Mr. Ransdell is still in the process of reviewing the information. After he meets with the Superintendent, the item will be placed back on the agenda for approval.

### ***Middle School Eighth Grade Trip to Quebec***

Mr. John Stokel, Middle School Principal, and Jennie Cook, French teacher, were present to request permission for eighth grade French students to travel to Quebec City, Quebec, Canada in January 2004. Mr. Stokel said they would like to utilize Jumpstreet Tours, the same group that the high school will be using, for this tour. He said they have been successful in using this tour group in the past. They are proposing the students leave the morning of Friday, January 16, 2004 and return on Monday, January 19. This trip will not only provide eighth grade French students with an opportunity to practice speaking French in a real-life setting; it will also give them a deeper understanding of the history, language, and culture of French-speaking Canadians. Mr. Stokel said they estimate 30 – 34 students will participate, with four chaperones. The cost per student is expected to be \$408 per student. Mr. Stokel said one of the reasons they prefer to travel with Jumpstreet Tours is because the tour company provides staff that monitors the hotel hallways during the evenings and nights. The students would not be allowed to be on their own. Ms. Cook would have student information with her at all times so that parents could be contacted. She will stay in contact with Mr. Stokel; notifying him when they arrive in Quebec, when they leave for home; and when they are within ten to 15 minutes of arriving at the Middle School so that he can welcome them back.

Mr. Vaughn moved the School Board approve the eighth grade trip to

***Middle School  
Eighth Grade Trip  
to Quebec (con't.)***

Quebec. Mr. Hayward seconded the motion. Mr. Hayward asked if any of the chaperones would be awake during the night, as he is concerned some eighth graders may try to explore the City on their own. Ms. Cook said she spoke with a colleague from another district who took students to Quebec and was told the minute a door opens, a security person from Jumpstart Tours is at the door to tell the student they may only leave their room to talk to a chaperone. Mr. Lyons asked if there is a means for money to be available if there is a student who cannot afford to go. Mr. Stokel said they would work with that family; nobody will be left behind for financial reasons.

Dr. Tracy commended Mr. Stokel and Ms. Cook for the detailed manner in which they presented this request. He said that he met with them both, and was presented a detailed plan. The Superintendent said they have tried to think of every possible precaution, and that is not taken for granted and is greatly appreciated. Dr. Tracy said this request certainly has his recommendation.

***Trip Approved***

The motion to approve the trip was unanimously approved.

***Grade 3 NHEIAP  
Test Results***

The three elementary schools principals, Jill LeMay (Dondero), Constance Carmody (New Franklin) and Robin Burdick (Little Harbour) presented a report of the third grade NHEIAP (New Hampshire Educational Improvement Assessment Program) test results.

Mrs. LeMay presented results of the English Language Arts test. The percentage of Portsmouth students scoring basic and above was 78%, and she said this has been consistent over the last three years. The percentage of students scoring novice and basic remained at 39% for the second year in a row. The percentage of students scoring proficient and advanced dropped to 5% this year. She said there is some variation among the schools, but the difference is that the children are different from the class the year before. Mrs. LeMay said the goal is to get the children out of the basic category and into the proficient category. She said that 32 children scored novice last year. Of this number, over half of these children are coded special education. One was an ESL (English As A Second Language) student. She said they then took a look at the 32 students to see how many had been in Portsmouth schools since kindergarten, first or second grade, or joined the class in third grade. Over half of the students had been in the Portsmouth schools since kindergarten; nine percent came in the first grade; 22% came in the second grade; and 16% came in grade three.

Mrs. LeMay said the principals also look at other risk factors, and talk with the students' teachers this year to find out how the students

**Grade 3 NHEIAP  
Test Results (con't.)**

are doing currently.

Mrs. Robin Burdick, Principal of Little Harbour School, said she was most pleased to present the math scores. She reported that 89% of the students scored basic and above. She said that is a very strong score, especially compared to the State average of 79%. The percentage of students scoring proficient was 33, and the percentage of students scoring advanced was 22. The percentage increase for advanced increased from six percent two years ago to 22% last year. Similarly, the State's average for advanced increased from six percent two years ago to 15% last year. The nine students scoring advanced came from the three elementary schools. Mrs. Burdick said the staff has worked incredibly hard with these students. Mrs. Burdick credited Dr. Diane Law, Title 1 Director, who emphasized to the principals that they should not focus on just the students who scored basic or novice; they should also look for those students who were two points shy of the next category and provide support for them to move them along.

The Principals answered questions from the Board concerning the English Language Arts and math results. When asked if the elimination of the math/science coordinator position had an impact, they stated it is too early to tell. The three Principals are working together to figure out how to divide the work, and Dr. Lister has assisted through the Curriculum Council. Mrs. Burdick said the loss of all positions reduced because of the budget crisis has been felt, but people are working together. Mrs. LeMay reminded the Board that the District is at the beginning of the school year in which the cuts were made, so it is too early to make a determination.

Mrs. Constance Carmody, Principal of the New Franklin Elementary School, said the principals believe the most important part of the testing is what will be done with the results. She said they are spending time analyzing the results; looking for areas of strength and areas of weakness. She said they review the questions that receive the most number of wrong answers to determine why the kids missed the question. She said in some cases, it is a bad question; other times the question is poorly worded or is something the students have not yet studied. Mrs. Carmody said the principals believe this is not a third grade project; it starts with kindergarten. Kindergarten through grade two is laying the foundation for the kids, while third grade can enrich them to achieve on the test. Mrs. Carmody said they use the test results to plan a child specific education for each child. The third and fourth grade teachers review the test results for each child. Some children test well; others do not. The third grade teachers can determine whether the test results are indicative of a child's overall performance. Services are provided for the students that did not test well, while they also make sure that the children who tested well do not fluctuate, and that they are being challenged in school.

***Grade 3 NHEIAP  
Test Results (con't.)***

Mrs. Carmody said the three elementary schools have the same opportunities to provide assistance to the kids that need support. She said some children enter the school district "late," into their third grade year. She said the test results help the teachers to learn more about those children in order to develop the best plan for them. And, the results are considered when developing staff development training. She said the three elementary principals work well together and are doing their best to make meaningful decisions based on the test results.

The Principals answered questions from Board members, and there was discussion of the "No Child Left Behind" legislation and how it will affect testing. Dr. Tracy said the Superintendents learned last week that the State Legislature has given the State Department of Education one dollar for the entire NHEIAP testing for grades three, six, and ten. The Commissioner of Education needs to determine where the funds will come from for this testing; there has been some speculation it will be taken from Catastrophic Aid funds. They were told it has been decided to eliminate the social studies, science, and writing tests. Dr. Tracy said he proposed to the Southeastern Superintendents to devise a writing assessment to be given to their tenth graders as it is extremely important that they do not lose the writing assessment. A sub-committee has been formed to write the test and score the responses.

***Recess***

The Chair thanked the elementary principals for their report and declared a recess at 8:43 p.m. The meeting was reconvened at 8:56 p.m.

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**PERSONNEL**

***Professional  
Nomination***

Dr. Lister presented the nomination of James Gorman to the position of reading specialist at Portsmouth High School and Portsmouth Middle School. Mr. Vaughn moved, seconded by Mrs. Clayburgh, the nomination be approved. The motion was unanimously approved.

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**COMMITTEE REPORTS**

***Joint Building  
Committee Report***

The Chair reported the Joint Building Committee met two weeks ago and reviewed a number of items. He said they are on schedule to move into the new building in March, and parts of the old building that have been renovated are already being used. There was discussion of the furniture bids, and today a number of vendors brought in their furniture for display. Mr. LaPage said they are fortunate in that very little of the old furnishings from the old building will need to be brought into the new building. The Chair

***Joint Building  
Committee Report  
(con't.)***

stated the old furniture will be offered to the other schools. He said the Board will need to make a decision about a dedication ceremony; whether to have one in March when the new section is ready, or to wait and have one ceremony when the project is complete. Mrs. Clayburgh reported on the fund raiser that will be held for the auditorium chairs on November 30 in the new auditorium. The High School Principal, Forrest Ransdell, has offered to take people on a tour of the new wing.

The Chair reiterated the Board needs to act on the dedication ceremony. He suggested it might be appropriate to have two ceremonies; one when the new wing is occupied, and the other when the entire project is completed. He asked the administration to begin composing a list of people to be invited. Mrs. McGee requested the ceremony not be held on March second, as that will be "Read Across America Day." Mr. Lyons suggested the first ceremony be a celebration of the students moving into the new building, and focus more on the students. The second celebration, to be held in 2005, can be for the people in the building. Mrs. Craig suggested the Chair appoint a sub-committee to determine the ceremonies. She also suggested that Mr. Irish be a member of that sub-committee. The Chair stated he would allow any number of Board members to serve on this committee.

***Middle School  
Feasibility Comm.***

Mr. Torrey reported the Middle School Feasibility Committee will meet tomorrow, October 29, at 5:30 p.m. at the Middle School.

***Athletic Committee***

Mrs. Craig reported the Athletic Committee will meet on Monday, November third. She asked that Board members who have concerns contact her.

***Meeting with  
Representative for  
Ice Arena***

The Chair reported that he and Mr. Torrey met with City Manager John Bohenko and representatives who are interested in building the ice rink on site at the High School. He said they need to complete the required paperwork for City Attorney Robert Sullivan, and do a site evaluation. He said this will be going on for the next two months, and that any proposals or recommendations will come before the full Board for approval.

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**NEW BUSINESS**

***Flag at Sherburne  
School***

The Chair, referring to comments made by Mr. Melfi about the flag at the Sherburne School, said he knows of no Board member that knew of that situation. He said he has gone to the school, but has not observed as well as he should have. Mr. LaPage said the Board, especially with two teachers serving the military in Iraq, would never do or say anything with malice towards this Country. He asked the

**Flag at Sherburne School (con't.)** administration, along with veterans Charles Vaughn and Raimond Bowles, to make sure the flags at the schools are properly displayed. Mr. Lyons suggested that when the new rope is installed and the flag is ready to be flown at Sherburne, that Mr. Melfi be invited to attend. The Chair stated he wants the flagpole to be ready by Veterans' Day, November 11.

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### **CONTINUING BUSINESS**

**NHSBA Delegate Assembly** Mr. Bowles stated that he is not able to attend the New Hampshire School Boards Association Delegate Assembly on November 15. Mr. Tefft was appointed to be the Board's Delegate. Mr. Hayward volunteered to attend as the Alternate.

The Board discussed the proposed resolutions for 2004 and took the following action.

**Votes on NHSBA Resolutions** On a motion by Mr. Tefft, seconded by Mrs. Craig, the Board voted seven to one to abstain from voting on number five (Mr. Bowles, Mrs. Clayburgh, Mrs. Craig, Mr. Hayward, Mr. Lyons, Mr. Tefft and Mr. LaPage voted for the motion; Mr. Vaughn voted against the motion).

Mr. Tefft moved, seconded by Mr. Lyons, the Board does not support number six of the proposed resolutions. In a roll call vote, the motion failed in a 5-2-1 vote (Mr. Lyons and Mr. Tefft voted for the motion; Mr. Bowles, Mrs. Clayburgh, Mrs. Craig, Mr. Hayward and Mr. Vaughn voted against the motion; the Chair abstained from voting).

Mr. Vaughn moved, seconded by Mrs. Craig, that number three be tabled until the next meeting for clarification. The motion was unanimously approved.

Mrs. Craig moved the Board support recommendations 15 through 19. Mr. Lyons seconded the motion. The motion was unanimously approved.

Mr. Vaughn moved the Board does not support number 20; Mr. Lyons seconded the motion. After discussion, Mr. Vaughn withdrew his motion and Mr. Lyons withdrew his second.

Mr. Lyons moved the Board allow its Delegate, Mr. Tefft, to indicate the Board is in support of the principle of the resolution, and to provide the Delegate with power to vote yea or nay based on discussion and what is proposed and to support resolutions 20, 21, 22, 24, 25, 26, and 27. Mr. Bowles seconded the motion. The motion was unanimously approved.



**Resolutions (con't.)** On a motion by Mr. Vaughn, seconded by Mr. Lyons, the Board unanimously voted to support resolution 28.

**Request for Joint Budget Committee to Meet** Mr. Bowles cited the new City tax rate and stated it is urgent that the Board call for an early start of the Joint Budget Committee in order for guidelines to be established for the 2005 budget process. Mr. Bowles said the City will see a savings in fiscal year 2005, and he believes the Board should revisit some of the budget cuts made last spring. The Chair requested the Business Administrator sign his name to a letter to be sent to the City Manager asking when the Joint Budget Committee will be meeting.

**First Readings of Policies Approved** Mrs. Craig, referring to a packet of policies, requested the Board approve first readings on all. The recommendations are: to eliminate the following policies from Section VI (General Policy Statement, Attendance, Attendance Records, Non-Residents, Class Assignment, and Graduation for Handicapped Students); to review and approve the policy for Admission and Attendance of Non-Resident Students; and revise and approve Graduation Requirements (Section III), and Admission; Attendance; and School Assignments from Section VI. .

The Chair stated the Board just received this information in its folder tonight. Mr. Vaughn stated the Board could still vote first reading, and bring it back to the next meeting. Mr. Vaughn moved the Board approve first readings of these policies; Mr. Bowles seconded the motion. The motion was unanimously approved.

**School Board Retreat** Dr. Lister reminded the Board that its retreat is scheduled for Saturday, December 6, 2003. The Chair stated the location could either be the same as last year, or the Board could go outside of the City for an overnight. Mr. Vaughn stated the Board should stay in Portsmouth. Mr. Lyons stated he will be unable to attend the retreat as he will be in London, England.

**FY 2005 Budget Process** Dr. Tracy stated that last year the Board and administrators spent a lot of time working on the budget process. He said the administration used a systems approach, and adjustments were made and reductions were made. Reorganizations occurred as a result. He said the Board had a narrative to work from, which included rationale for reductions. The Superintendent said he feels a little uncomfortable when he hears Board members publicly declaring, in advance of the budget process, their desires to reinstate certain programs, as this could interfere with an open and honest budget process that fits a philosophy. He said the Board has negotiated salary schedules with its employees that will take up a significant sum of money for next year. The Superintendent said he is glad the Board negotiated these salary increases, as they were necessary. However, he stated that as the budget process begins, a significant amount will be for salaries for the people who

(Approved by the Portsmouth School Board 11-10-03.)

***FY 2005 Budget  
Process (con't.)***

deliver instruction to our kids. He said that until the Board hears from the administration as to how the budget will play out, how can they state to the public that they want to re-instate the positions that were cut last year?

Mrs. Clayburgh said one of the questions asked to the candidates was which program would they want to restore. Mr. Bowles said he would want to review if there is a chance for some of those positions to come back and that he has not identified any program in any specific way. Mr. Vaughn said he is supportive of the Superintendent and the budget process, but that, as a Board member, he is only one vote and he will speak in support of a program or position.

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**FINANCIAL**

***September 2003  
Financial Report***

The September 2003 financial report was again presented to the Board. There were no questions for the Business Administrator.

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**NEXT AGENDA**

***Next Meeting on  
Monday***

The Chair reminded the Board its next meeting will be on Monday, November 10, 2003 in Council Chambers at City Hall.

***Adjournment***

There was no other business to come before the Board. Mr. Vaughn moved, seconded by Mr. Hayward, the Board adjourn its meeting. The meeting was adjourned at 10:47 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Lyonel B. Tracy, Ed.D.  
Executive Secretary