

**Portsmouth School Board
Portsmouth, New Hampshire**

Minutes of the November 25, 2003 Meeting

A meeting of the Portsmouth School Board was held on Tuesday, November 25, 2003 in the indoor playroom at the Community Campus.

Attendance

PRESENT: Mr. Kent LaPage (Chair), Mr. John Lyons, Jr. (Vice-Chair), Mr. Raimond Bowles, Mrs. Roseann Vozella Clark, 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)

Non-Public Session

Prior to the regular meeting, the School Board met in a non-public session in the Board Room at Little Harbour School. This non-public session was held in accordance with RSA 91-A:3 II. (c).

Tour of Community Campus

Mr. Daniel Hoefle, Chair of the Foundation for Seacoast Health, gave a history of the Foundation’s beginnings and how the Community Campus came about. Ms. Liz Kennedy, Campus Development Coordinator for the Foundation for Seacoast Health, and Mr. Hoefle provided a tour of the Community Campus and a brief overview of some of the agencies housed there.

Call to Order

Chair LaPage called the regular meeting to order at 7:28 p.m. He apologized for the delay in beginning the meeting and explained the Board had just held two non-public hearings dealing with student matters. He thanked Liz Kennedy and Dan Hoefle, representing The Foundation for Seacoast Health, for hosting this evening’s meeting.

The Chair called for a moment of silent reflection and asked people, as Thanksgiving is upon us, to remember those who are less fortunate; the families and agencies served by the Community Campus; and members of our military serving our Country.

SECRETARY'S REPORT

Minutes Approved

The Chair called for approval of the minutes of the November 10, 2003 meeting. Mr. Lyons moved, seconded by Mr. Hayward, the minutes be accepted as written. The motion was unanimously approved.

PUBLIC COMMENTARY SESSION

Grant for Vocational Center

Mr. Peter Bresciano, 101 O'Leary Place, Portsmouth, stated that he was approached by a taxpayer who told him about the three million dollar grant received by the School Department from the State. This person told him that if this was a grant from the State and the School Department is already receiving 36 million dollars to build the high school, the three million dollars should go back to the taxpayers. Mr. Bresciano said he is not knowledgeable about the grant, but he suspects the money is just not given to the taxpayers. He asked if there could be an explanation of this grant.

The Chair declared he usually does not allow responses or interaction during the public commentary session, but that he would make an exception to clear up any misunderstanding. Mr. LaPage said the grant money cannot go back to the taxpayers. He said the three million dollars is for the Vocational Technical Center. He asked the Business Administrator to explain.

Mr. Torrey explained the State of New Hampshire has been funding the building and renovation of the 20 plus regional vocational centers for the past 30 – 32 years. These funds come from the State's capital budget, and not the operating budget. He said the plan is to fund two centers bi-annually and look to encourage the renovation of these centers by providing funding at the 75% level. This funding is done in the order in which the centers came on line, and Portsmouth is fourth in line. He said it is coincidental that these funds have come along at the time the high school is being reconstructed and renovated. He said renovations to the vocational areas will qualify for 75% reimbursement as opposed to 55% through State building aid.

Mr. Torrey said that when the high school renovations and construction were in the planning stages, the vocational areas received a low priority because they were the newest section of the building. He said they are currently assessing that if there is additional funding that would not cost the taxpayers any more, is there a way to enhance the project or to build. He said costs incurred with the vocational areas can be paid when the project is done; they do not have to live out the life of the bond. He said that any plans for

renovation and building will come before the Board for approval, and would then be sent to the City Council. The Chair stated the Board will be hearing more about this in the next three months.

***Comments re:
Responses to Bomb
Threats***

Mrs. Robin Bianci, Neals Lane, New Castle, stated she believes there have been inconsistencies in dealing with the recent bomb threats at the high school and she hopes the Board will address that. Mrs. Bianci said she has talked with both Drs. Tracy and Cushing about the manner in which the lockdown and last week's bomb threat was handled. She said parents have many questions. She also voiced concern for the homes, apartment buildings, and churches that are near the school building. Mrs. Bianci said she wants to know the reasons for different responses to the recent threats, and how the responses are determined. She has told her son that he is not to remain in school should there be another lockdown; he is to evacuate the building. She questioned why the students were allowed to remain within 30 to 50 feet of the school building. She requested there be an open dialogue with parents in the spirit of communication.

***School Safety
Dialogue Session
Scheduled***

The Chair stated the Board will not address this topic this evening except to state that the School Board will, along with the Central Office and High School administration, host a dialogue session in Cafeteria A at Portsmouth High School on Wednesday, December third, from 5:00 – 6:30 p.m. He said many of the things addressed by Mrs. Bianci will be brought up at that time.

RECOGNITION OF STAFF/STUDENTS

There were no staff nor student reports to come before the Board.

PERSONNEL

***Request for
Sabbatical***

Dr. Lister introduced Mr. John Stokel, Middle School Principal, and Ms. Kathleen Pearce, Middle School English teacher. Mr. Stokel said that Ms. Pearce approached him over a year ago to talk about her desire to begin work on certification for library science in anticipation of applying for a vacancy that would be forthcoming in June 2004. Mr. Stokel said it is very difficult for someone to take two or three courses at one time and carry on their work schedule, so he suggested that she consider taking a sabbatical while completing the coursework. Mr. Stokel said he envisions the library and media center being a focal point of the Middle School.

Ms. Pearce outlined her goals and objectives for the sabbatical, as well as the areas of focus and possible internship sites.

Sabbatical Request (con't.) Mr. Tefft commended Ms. Pearce on the quality of her proposal. The Chair suggested that Ms. Pearce add one more goal; that being to meet with the Middle School Feasibility Committee on an ongoing basis or when their discussions will focus on the library/media centers.

Sabbatical Approved Mr. Lyons moved the Board approve the sabbatical application by Kathleen Pearce for a half-year sabbatical, beginning in January 2004. Mr. Bowles seconded the motion. The motion was unanimously approved.

COMMITTEE REPORTS

Joint Building Committee

Joint Building Committee – The Chair reviewed the preliminary minutes of the November 19, 2003 Joint Building Committee meeting. Mr. Torrey said the Board has been aware for several weeks now that the State has awarded three million dollars for the renovation/building in the vocational technical center. The Joint Building Committee has discussed this, and has voted an amount not to exceed \$10,000 to begin architectural work with the technical center staff and the need for test borings in order for Team Design to develop a report. Mr. Torrey said this project would be presented to the Board for concept approval, and then forwarded to the City Council for funding approval. There was considerable discussion concerning potential renovations and construction to the vocational technical center. Mr. Vaughn asked if this would be changing the footprint of the original construction project. Mr. LaPage said there is no change at this time. Mr. Tefft stated this money would have come along even if the high school project was not ongoing. He said they were still working the process as they would receive fund to enhance the vocational technical center. He said this happened to coincide with the high school construction project.

Discussion of Funding for Vocational Center

Dr. Tracy said the Joint Building Committee has functioned commendably in this whole project. He said the two Co-Chairs have enlisted a lot of different perspectives and have allowed everybody to give input. The Superintendent suggested the School Board empower the Superintendent and Business Administrator to edit the educational specifications for the vocational technical center and to give the proper narrative to complement the one that has driven the high school building project.

Discussion of

Mrs. Craig suggested the three Board members serving on the Joint Building Committee form a sub-committee to review this topic. The Chair replied the vocational center staff is currently meeting with a committee to formulate plans and that Pam MacArtney, Career/Technical/Vocational Director, has been working on this since

***Funding for
Vocational Center
(con't.)***

the day the funds were approved. Mrs. Craig asked if consideration has been given to the two business department positions that were removed from the budget last spring. Dr. Tracy said the administration is in the process of examining all of the reductions made last year to see what they are doing well, not so well, and what they are doing about it. He said they will be responding to that area.

Mr. Lyons said the State funding and the fact that our turn came up while we are building the high school is a big deal for the City of Portsmouth. He cited the City would only be responsible for 25% of the costs if we do it right. The matching costs would only have to happen once, and it would save the taxpayers a lot of money.

Mr. Bowles commended the notetaker of the Joint Building Committee's minutes (Mrs. Virginia Kelleher), and said, because of the minutes, he is able to follow along with the Committee's business.

Mr. Vaughn expressed concern with the heating problem addressed in number three. Mr. LaPage said this is referring to the temporary heating that is in place to allow the workers to continue their work during the cold weather.

***Superintendent
Empowered to
Develop Narrative
for Vocational
Center Planning***

Mr. Vaughn moved the Board allow the Superintendent the ability to put the narrative together (for the vocational technical center) and come back before the Board. Mrs. Clayburgh seconded the motion. Mrs. Craig requested the Board be provided with the evolution of that plan leading up to a proposal. Dr. Tracy said the technical career people are using the same process as the Middle School Feasibility Committee. After further discussion, the motion was unanimously approved.

***New Auditorium
Seats***

Mrs. Clayburgh said the new auditorium seats are very comfortable, and the auditorium is magnificent; it is something of which the community can be proud. She thanked Mr. Tefft for connecting them with the people at the Hussey Seating Company and for working with them to ensure a good deal for the high school. Mrs. Clayburgh commended the cast of "The Music Man" for putting on a wonderful production.

***Cast of "The Music
Man"***

***Gratitude to Mr.
Tefft and Mr. St.
Laurent for Their
Efforts While
Serving on JBC***

The Chair thanked Mr. Tefft and Councilor St. Laurent for saving the City an extraordinary amount of money during the high school construction process. He reminded the Board that the original cost of the project was \$42,000,000, and the project is being completed for approximately \$36,000,000.

NEW BUSINESS

***Special Meeting to
Hold Dialogue
Session***

The Chair reminded the Board of the special meeting on Wednesday, December third, at 5:00 p.m. to discuss the issue of how security is handled in the schools.

***Comments Re:
Lockdown, Bomb
Threats, and School
Safety***

Mr. Irish stated he was in an advanced placement class with Ms. Pepe when the Principal got on the intercom and declared a lockdown. He said there was no flipchart in his classroom, and no one knew what to do. He said it was scary, as this was the first bomb threat for him or many of his classmates. He said a teachers' meeting was held afterward. Mr. Irish commended Mr. Ransdell, High School Principal, for making changes for how students individually leave their classes and by taking a stance that whenever there is a bomb threat the day will have to be made up. The Chair also commended Mr. Ransdell for his actions over the last few weeks.

Mr. Hayward thanked Mrs. Bianci for coming forward with her concerns. Mr. Vaughn, referring to Mr. Irish's comments, suggested the Superintendent determine if the flipcharts are available in all of the classrooms. Dr. Tracy said this has already been done and that emergency procedures are already in place. Mrs. McGee said there is a safety committee in every school and they have been meeting on a regular basis. She said that everybody has a flipchart and everybody is being educated on what is going on. Mr. Tefft said the flipchart has been available and sent home to parents so that they know what to expect.

Mrs. Clayburgh asked if the December third meeting could be tied into the High School PTSA (Parents, Teachers, Students Association) meeting. The Chair stated this subject is more in line with the Board's request of the administration. He said the PTSA could work with the Board in getting the word out to parents.

Dr. Tracy said the administration is taking this subject very seriously, and they were with the High School Principal when decisions were made. He said a lot of variables came into play. He cautioned the Board about statements that will be made that are not true or that were taken out of context. The Superintendent commended the High School Principal, Forrest Ransdell, for taking action during these events. Dr. Tracy said the bomb-sniffing dogs have been in the Middle School and High School, and the Police have stated that our schools have never been as safe as they are now. The Chair stated that every situation was different and, therefore, handled differently.

Mrs. Craig said that people have concerns, and this Board encourages them to come forward so that information may be provided to them.

To be voted by the Portsmouth School Board at its next scheduled meeting.

***Committee
Appointments***

Chair LaPage reported that he has appointed Raimond Bowles, John Lyons and Charles Vaughn to represent the School Board at the Joint Budget Committee meetings; Roseann Vozella Clark to replace Colleen Montminy on the Curriculum Council; and Ann Walker to serve on the High School Joint Building Committee after she is sworn into office in January 2004.

CONTINUING BUSINESS

***Board Retreat to Be
Held in Early
January***

The Chair reminded the Board that the date of the annual retreat has been changed to early January, 2004. The Board will be notified when the date is secured.

FINANCIAL

There was no financial business to come before the Board.

NEXT AGENDA

Next Meeting

The next meeting of the School Board will be on December 9, 2003 at the Municipal Complex. The Chair reminded the Board of the holiday dinner to be held on December 16 at the Portsmouth High School Culinary Arts Dining Room at 6:00 p.m.

Holiday Dinner

Holiday Parade

Mrs. Clayburgh reminded the Board that the holiday parade will be held on December sixth. She asked for a show of hands of who would be marching in the parade.

OTHER

***State Education
Funding***

Mr. Bowles reported that he attended a meeting of the Method of Distribution of Education Funding Aid Committee in Concord today. From this meeting, he is confident there will be no change in the State property tax rate of \$3.24 for the 2004/05 year. He said there is a possibility that Portsmouth will cease to be a donor town. Mr. Bowles said this should allow flexibility in the City budgets for 2004-05.

***Chair Elected as
NHSBA President***

***Vice-Chair
appointed to State
Board***

Mrs. Craig inquired about the Delegate Assembly. The Chair stated a report will be made at the next Board meeting. Mr. Vaughn and Mr. Hayward represented the School Board. Mrs. Clayburgh congratulated Chair LaPage for being elected President of the New Hampshire School Boards Association and Vice-Chair Lyons for being appointed to the State Board of Education. Dr. Tracy said that

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he joined Board members Vaughn and Hayward as Mr. LaPage was sworn in as NHSBA President. He said that Mr. LaPage is greatly respected by other Board members throughout the State. His comments were very well accepted and were right to the point. He said Mr. LaPage has done an outstanding job of representing Portsmouth.

ADJOURNMENT

Adjournment

There was no further business to come before the Board. The Chair entertained a motion to adjourn. Mr. Vaughn moved, seconded by Mrs. Clayburgh, the Board adjourn its meeting. The meeting was adjourned at 8:48 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Lyonel B. Tracy, Ed.D.
Executive Secretary