

PORTSMOUTH SCHOOL BOARD MEETING AGENDA FOR FEBRUARY 10, 2009

COUNCIL CHAMBERS, CITY HALL

PORTSMOUTH, NH

DATE: TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 10, 2009

TIME: 7:00PM [or thereafter]

CALL TO ORDER

Dr. Shuldman called the meeting to order at 7:18 p.m. and explained that the evening would begin with a public hearing, be followed by a regularly scheduled board meeting and end in a public budget work session.

ROLL CALL

Present: DR. MITCHELL SHULDMAN (CHAIR), SHERRI HAM-GARRITY (VICE CHAIR), REBECCA EMERSON, DEXTER LEGG, PATRICK ELLIS, KENT LAPAGE, ANN WALKER, LESLIE STEVENS, LISA SWEET, DR. ROBERT J. LISTER (SUPERINTENDENT), STEVE ZADRAVEC (ASSISTANT SUPERINTENDENT), ANN MAYER (SAU 50 REPRESENTATIVE), STEPHEN BARTLETT (BUSINESS ADMINISTRATOR), LINDA BRIOLAT (EMPLOYEE REPRESENTATIVE), AND ABIGAIL ROCKEFELLER (STUDENT REPRESENTATIVE).

Absent:

I. INVOCATION

II. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Chair Shuldman invited the public to join in the pledge of allegiance.

Vice Chair Garrity requested that Section VI (Recognition of Staff and students) be moved before the public hearing in consideration of students who were performing. Unanimously approved.

III. Public Hearing

Business Administrator, Steve Bartlett, began the public hearing portion of the night with a brief PowerPoint, which can be viewed, attached to the end of the minutes.

The following community members addressed the Portsmouth School Board with their concerns during the public hearing:

Monica Sylla – 323 Union Street. - Ms. Sylla stated that she believes class size is critical and requested the board not increase class sizes again.

Andrea Ardito – 171 Park Street –Ms. Ardito wants the Portsmouth community to be known for community members that care, take care of each other and as a community that “gets it”. Ms. Ardito believes the community should invest in children because we were once invested in.

Scott McKee – 151 Lafayette Road – Mr. McKee has a child at Little Harbour School and was instrumental in implementing a program at Little Harbour that supports teachers with valuable time and resources, freeing up teachers to better focus on large class sizes and students with special needs. Mr. McKee stated that parents are aware the school is slipping, due to budget cuts, and are willing to step in and fill that gap. Little Harbour has 105 active parents and 313 volunteers. This equals 3 ½ full time staff positions per year. However, Mr. McKee believes that past cuts have impacted the Portsmouth school system negatively and Portsmouth is quickly approaching a tipping point.

Emmy Adams – 6 Nixon Park – Ms. Adams modeled a WAVE t-shirt and stated the motto represents a grass roots effort to support education. WAVE represents “We All Value Education”. Ms. Adams moved to Portsmouth FOR the school system and its small class sizes but now feels that, as a city, Portsmouth is losing sight of its direction.

Tanja Gravelle – 20 Woodward Drive - Ms. Gravelle believes that the Portsmouth educational system is already depleted. The district has lost teachers, and now vital programs are being cut. She urged school board members to please be wary of every cut.

Amy Leahy – 260 Aldrich Road - Ms. Leahy expressed concern for Dondero students that are now in classrooms with too many students for the teacher to maintain a healthy environment conducive to learning. She is concerned that a struggling child will not have adequate assistance and that a child that “gets it” will be left alone, unchallenged. Teachers are overwhelmed and are assigned “difficult students” in increasing numbers because they can “handle” the challenging ones. Rumors are floating around the school that elementary school nurses could be cut to half days and she is concerned that even safety of our children is coming at a price.

Sally Zwick -229 FW Hartford Drive – Ms. Welch stated that her daughter’s classroom at Dondero has increased in size from 17 to 23 students. 16 are boys and her daughter is very shy. Her daughter is discouraged with school due to the chaos in her classroom during math, which had left her behind due to her shyness and inability to break through the chaos. How is a teacher supposed to give each student a personalized education without proper support? Our teachers are running at full throttle and failing because we have set them up to fail.

John Bouchard – 150 FW Hartford Drive - Mr. Bouchard urged school board members to say no to a zero increase in the budget and turn around education in Portsmouth. As a community, we need to stand up and let it be known what the schools cannot do without. Mr. Bouchard feels that it is time for class size to be addressed. The growth rate has increased too fast for children to learn in Portsmouth. Mr. Bouchard encouraged every board member to visit the classrooms and talk to parents and teachers.

Marcy Baer – 302 McKinley Road. – Ms. Baer stated she couldn’t support a 0% budget increase. Unfortunately, Ms. Baer has watched her daughter’s classroom almost double in size and programs be cut that would assist her teachers. Short-term gains are not long-term solutions. Too many kids equal too much noise. She urged school board members to set class sizes at a manageable level for teachers.

Ethel Wolper – 544 Middle Road – Ms. Wolper stated she moved here because she liked the community. For the past four or five years Portsmouth has seen growth, yet the city continues to cut from the school budget. Ms. Wolper encouraged board members to vote against a zero increase.

Miles Gross - Santos – A 4th grader at Dondero asked board members to consider combining buses to conserve fuel and cost. Carlos stated that his bus only picks up ten kids.

Tim Dolan – 95 Monroe Street – Mr. Dolan believes that education should be the top line of Portsmouth’s budget and the city’s top priority. Members of City Council need to be made aware of the community’s wishes. Companies move to a community factoring in the community’s school system. Future workers will be graduating from Portsmouth’s educational system and, if we are to expect a high level of workforce in the future, we need to invest heavily in education now. At a minimum, Mr. Dolan believes we should provide the same amount of services, if not increase them.

Erica Taylor – 205 Odiorne Point Road – Ms. Taylor is a mother of three at Little Harbour School and the PTA president. Commitment of the community in Portsmouth was the reason why the Taylor family decided to move here. Small class size and student teacher ratio was important criteria. Volunteer hours and the fund raising level is extremely generous but still cannot put a teacher in a classroom and is not sustainable. During hard economic times, volunteers will not be able to sustain their giving and the school should not base its budget on the ability of parents to supplement the budget.

Ann Wheeler -110 Ash Street – Ms. Wheeler believes that quality education is good for the whole community. Portsmouth should focus on creating life long learners and keeping class sizes reasonable. Ms. Wheeler requested the school board put forth a school budget that meets the needs of our students, not just the bottom line. Show students we appreciate them and they are not just a tax burden to the community.

Carol McGinty – 300 Spinney Road – Ms. McGinty, after looking around, realizes that the majority of parents are from the elementary level and stated that the city of Portsmouth is slowly chipping away at the very foundation of its children's education. As a mother of a previous elementary student, Ms. McGinty is now seeing results of educational cuts in her own child who is now attending the middle school and is unprepared. Class sizes are ever increasing and teacher resources are ever dwindling.

Diane Agrodnia - Dorow– 570 Dennett Street – Every child should have the same chances as Ms. Dorow's children did. Any opportunity the school board can give kids in a community to stay safe, that is the foundation of a community. If a community loses its foundation, the community itself is lost. Lets give our kids a reason to want to come back and start families of their own.

Christina McKittrick -116 Dennett Street – Ms. McKittrick believes that parents and teachers do a great job at New Franklin School. PTA members have raised about \$5,000.00 so far and typically try to reach a \$15,000.00 goal. The school has approximately seventy-five parent volunteers who volunteer both in the school and at school sponsored events such as environmental camp. In order for some programs to occur, parents are being counted on financially and physically. Ms. McKittrick believes that principals, teachers and now parents have been stretched too thin. Classroom size is an issue that needs to be addressed. We don't have space for children any more and the disruption is overwhelming.

Kristine Wade – 1380 Woodbury Avenue – Ms. Wade encouraged the board to look across the board for cuts. If electives are cut at the high school, students will be simply dispersed to other classes.

Carl Diemer – 337 Aldrich Road – Mr. Diemer was glad to see the “pay to play” option now off the table. Booster clubs support schools and defray costs and Mr. Diemer believes that no community will pitch in more than Portsmouth. Mr. Diemer requested that board members not cut two important areas: Anything associated with special needs and fifth graders for environmental camp. Mr. Diemer believes that environmental camp provides students with an incredible experience. He asked the board to be prepared to justify the budget to City Council and if there are items that need to stay, keep them in.

Emy Adams- 6 Nixon Park – Ms. Adams stated that every day she sees amazing teachers and staff. She is also the first to admit that she expects teachers to deliver more personally to her children than she does any of her extended family but the conditions in which they are expected to teach are unacceptable. Classroom chaos is mind-boggling and Ms. Adams finds it horribly sad that we have created a classroom environment where our teachers are nothing more than glorified babysitters.

Suzanne Snow – 45 Mill Pond Way - Kids in Portsmouth need the opportunity to learn. Ms. Snow has three children that are very different and will need different opportunities. She encouraged the school board to let city council know that the investment in our students and future is more important than reaching a zero percent increase in the budget.

Gail Knowles - 235 Sherburne Road – Ms. Knowles has a daughter in the fourth grade at New Franklin Elementary. She believes that teachers are doing the best they can under their circumstances.

Trisha Edwards- 235 Willard Avenue – Ms. Edwards is an Occupational Therapist and has worked at Dondero Elementary with many staff members and students. She is also the mother of three children, one who attends Little Harbour Elementary. Special education cuts worry Ms. Edwards for the entire school system and she sees the morale of staff dwindling due to ever increasing demands and fewer resources available.

Phil Whisler- 395 Sherburne Road – Mr. Whisler has a child who is a kindergartener. If the district makes more budget cuts, they will continue and every cut made will never be returned. Mr. Whisler believes that teachers do not have the necessary tools any more to control the classroom. Classrooms need to be smaller and he posed the question “What happens if you simply say no?”

Kirsten Barton – 300 Court Street – Ms. Barton has reviewed the city’s master plan and was surprised to find out that education for our children is not mentioned. She finds that sad. She inquired if there was any way the master plan could be revised or a vision plan be created for the school system.

The public hearing portion of the meeting ended at 8:45 p.m.

IV. ACCEPTANCE OF MINUTES

1. January 20, 2009 Budget Work Session
2. January 20, 2009 Regular School Board Meeting
3. January 22, 2009 Budget Work Session
4. January 27, 2009 Budget Work Session
5. January 29, 2009 Budget Work Session
6. February 3, 2009 Budget Work Session

Motion by Ms. Walker to approve all above minutes. Second by Ms. Emerson, pending one correction on the January 20 regular board meeting. (Section eight, second by Emerson to be removed.) Unanimously approved.

V. COMMUNICATIONS

1. Thank you letter from the Salvation Army
2. February elementary lunch menu
3. Portsmouth High School Open House – Ms. Rockefeller announced that the National Honor Society would be selling books during the high school's open house.
4. Other: Portsmouth School Board members were sent an email from Patrick Ganz, an English teacher at the high school, stating concerns regarding the election procedures for the new superintendent and Mr. LaPage requested the email be entered into public record. The email was read aloud for the public. (Mr. Ganz's email can be viewed attached to the conclusion of these minutes.)
5. Other

VI. RECOGNITION/UPDATE OF STAFF AND STUDENTS

1. Read Across America Presentation – Ms. Linda Marconi was invited to the podium in order to discuss Read Across America, now in its 11th year. Sixty-five students are scheduled to participate this year. Word games will be played, read aloud events and plays have been scheduled and athletes from UNH will be in attendance. All school board members are invited to join the middle and elementary schools in celebrating reading and Dr. Seuss's birthday. Little Harbour's music teacher, Meghan McCrillis, and two fifth grade students, Helen Greeley and Katie Mattotte, sang the theme song associated with Read Across America.
2. Lisa Sweet wished to recognize a Portsmouth staff member named Yige Wang who is the ESL (English as a Secondary Language) teacher in Portsmouth. Mr. Wang has spent six summer vacations traveling to Tibet and chronicling his journey in a book that is now available at River Run Bookstore. Ms. Sweet commends his work and highly recommends the book.
3. Request for leave of absence – Deborah Twombly. Motion to accept the request for leave of absence by Ms. Emerson. Ms. Walker seconds. Unanimously approved.
4. Other

VII. PUBLIC COMMENTARY SESSION

1. Diane Agrodnia Dorow - 570 Dennett Street – Ms. Dorow provided information regarding statistics regarding alcohol related fatalities surrounding graduation and requested the board financially support Celebration Graduation 2009, which provides a safe environment for students to celebrate the end of their high school career. Celebration Graduation occurs on the evening of graduation and is an alternative to private parties where alcohol is frequently consumed. Dr. Lister has always made it a priority to spend the entire night with the graduating class.

Due to the Jarvis center and Bowl-A-Rama needing to be booked for the evening, the sooner the committee could have a date, the better they will be able to plan and secure the appropriate arenas for the evening. A motion from Dexter Legg was made to make a donation of \$500 to Celebration Graduation. Seconded by Ms. Walker. Unanimously approved.

2. Kristine Wade – 1380 Woodbury Avenue – Ms. Wade is the volunteer coordinator for Celebration Graduation and if anyone would like to participate, personally sponsor or volunteer, she asks they email her at kwade@portsmouth.k12.nh.us.

VIII. FINANCIAL

1. January Financials – will be presented next meeting.
2. Approval of PHS Boys Lacrosse Booster Club – Motion to approve by Mr. Legg. Seconded by Ms. Walker. Unanimously approved.
3. Other – A list of gross wages for the calendar year 2008 for school department employees will be presented to local newspapers. Mr. LaPage requested it be clear that this list includes retirement funds in some of the individuals' salaries. Mr. Bartlett stated yes; the figures listed are gross wages, including sick leave buyouts and unused vacation time for some individuals.

IX. AGENDA

1. Abigail Rockefeller survey results – Ms. Rockefeller met with Pat Laska (Director of School Nutrition), Jeff Collins (Principal of Portsmouth High School) and Dr. Lister. Ms. Rockefeller referred to the survey, stating that 196 students responded. The survey's purpose was to assess: how students perceived lunch, how lunch could be more profitable, what students do during their lunch and how many travel off campus during lunch.

Dr. Lister asked if there were any results that Ms. Rockefeller would like to highlight for the board. Survey results seemed to vary in age.

- Lower grades seem to purchase more food from the cafeteria.
- Many students choose to purchase food and sit in their teacher's classrooms.
- Only forty-four students currently have off campus privileges during lunch time.
- Survey results show the largest item purchased off campus is coffee. Students also frequent Savario's Pizza and Fresh Market for sushi or a salad.

Ms. Emerson inquired how long the lunch period was. All students are on the same schedule, lunch duration of forty minutes.

Some other results highlighted were as follows:

- 116 of the students that responded say they study during lunch.
- An overwhelming amount of students requested soups be made available.
- Electronic account funds are not being utilized.
- Students would like to see more dietary needs for specific necessary diets.
- Quality of food was ranked low and students stated they would be willing to pay more for better quality choices.

Ms. Emerson questioned the lunch lines and the use of funds on credit stating that at New Franklin all students have funds deposited onto a card. Ms. Laska stated that New Franklin is the only school fully automated and perhaps if all elementary schools were fully automated, students at the middle and high schools would choose this option more frequently. Ms. Emerson also wondered if there was a way to better

incorporate local and seasonal foods into the lunch program. Ms. Laska stated that she is working with Dr. Lister and Mr. Collins on better merchandising.

Mr. LaPage asked Ms. Rockefeller if she had any discussions or any input from faculty members. Ms. Rockefeller did not collect any results from staff members but believes there is a lot of interest from staff in creating a survey.

Ms. Laska stated she is willing to meet with students to discuss healthy choices. She believes students are much more health conscious and this has proven a challenge for the school food system as far as providing choices within the financial constraints of the USDA Child Nutrition program.

Bio-Fuels update –Mr. Bartlett reported that the school district's tractor runs on bio diesel and the school system, making every effort, as contracts are renewed, to renegotiate for bio diesel fuels. Special Education requires a large amount of off site parking and is concerned about traveling to areas where bio diesel may not be readily available. Ms. Emerson requested Barclay Jackson from Green Start come and make a presentation to the board on bio diesel options available. Mr. LaPage requested that Simply Green appear before the board to present bio-fuel options as well.

Ms. Sweet inquired if there were other bus companies using bio diesels. Mr. Bartlett stated bus company choices, in general, are shrinking. Mr. Bartlett believes the only hesitation from First Student is the bus company needs to make sure they have a steady quality product. Presently, the district is negotiating a two-year extension with the First Student bus company.

Mr. Ellis would like to see if a possible solution would be for the bus company to refuel at the city's pumps and bill the city for the cost of fuel.

2. Nomination of Little Harbour Elementary Principal by Superintendent – Motion to accept Charlie Grossman as the principal, beginning July 1, 2009, by Mr. LaPage. Seconded by Ms. Walker. Unanimously approved.
3. Reminder – March 14, 2009 School Board Retreat. The School Board will meet from 9:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. at the Portsmouth High School in the principal conference room.
4. Chair Shuldman stated that the School Board would be voting on the new Superintendent on Thursday, February 12, 2009.
5. Other

X. COMMITTEE REPORTS

1. Policy – The committee met on February 3rd and continues to address the instruction portion of the policy handbook.
2. Ms. Stevens announced that the School Board's newsletter is now available on the city website and will be in the next community newsletter. Hard copies will also be available in all schools, city hall and the public library.
3. Ms. Emerson invited the public to the next Safe Routes To School meeting scheduled for Wednesday, February 18, 2009 at Portsmouth Middle School.
4. Other

XI. NEXT AGENDA ITEMS (March 10, 2009 Council Chambers)

1. Teacher Contracts
2. Retirements
3. Vote on tentative agreements: Paraprofessional, custodial supervisors, clerical and administration
4. Middle School Update

ADJOURNMENT - At 9:50 p.m., voted to adjourn.

Respectfully submitted by:

Dr. Robert J. Lister
Superintendent of Schools

FY 2010 Major Cost Increases

- **Salaries and Benefits**
 - (New and tentative Collective Bargaining Agreements)
- **Health Insurance Premiums**
 - Up 11.45% or \$569,409.00
- **Retirement**
 - Teacher contribution up from 8.74% to 9.09% (change of 4%)
 - Employer contribution up from 5.80% to 6.96% (change of 20%)

Portsmouth School Department General Fund

FY	Budget	COLA Adjustment	Total
2009	\$34,955,754	\$550,000	\$35,505,754
2010	\$36,645,593	(\$459,608)	\$36,185,985
Reduction needed to achieve 0% increase in FY 2010 budget:			\$680,231

Attachment B

From: Patrick Ganz [mailto:pganz@portsmouth.k12.nh.us]

Sent: Tuesday, February 10, 2009 11:34 AM

To: Ann Walker; Dexter Legg; Kent LaPage; Leslie Stevens; Lisa Sweet; Mitch Shuldman; Patrick Ellis; Rebecca Emerson; Sheri Garrity

Subject: Superintendent Selection

Dear members of the Portsmouth School Board:

I am writing regarding the search for Portsmouth's new superintendent. As a Portsmouth High School English teacher of ten years and a property owner in SAU 50 (Greenland), I am deeply invested in this important decision.

After listening to the candidates speak two weeks ago, I and a number of other dedicated educators found ourselves deeply disappointed in the presentations offered by all three individuals. I am confident this was the overwhelming consensus, and I understand these sentiments were vociferously expressed in our feedback forms.

Yet I have learned that the Board is planning on moving forward with nominating one of the three candidates rather than re-opening the search.

We all share a vital goal – excellent leadership for our school district. I firmly believe that none of these three candidates is a sound match for our needs.

I sincerely hope the voices of the committed educators of Portsmouth and those whose tax dollars fund the city's schools will be heard as you prepare to make this critical decision.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Patrick Ganz