

MINUTES
WOONSOCKET PARENT ADVISORY COUNCIL
MONDAY, MARCH 22, 2010
7:00 P.M. TO 9:00 P.M.

Woonsocket Area Career & Technical Center
400 Aylsworth Avenue
Multimedia Room 303

Delegate/Guest Introductions

Attendees:

Cindy Stepanian(PAC Co-Chair/Globe Delegate), Denise Auclair(PAC Co-Chair/Harris Delegate), Tony Gabrielle(WHS PTO Vice President), Vimala Phongsavanh(Neighbor Works/School Committee), Jennie Kithes (WHS parent), Tara Dubois (WHS Delegate), Rob Desrosiers(Elementary Principal Delegate/Globe Park School), Kimberly Blais(Sec. to Dir. of Instr. and Admin.), Ron Celio(Principal, Fifth Ave School), Rick Ferguson(Asst. Principal WMS Admin Delegate/VP Principal- Hamlet), Daniel Lebron(ESL Parent Program Outreach Worker), Theresa DeLeon(Community Member), David Trenouth(Leo Savoie parent), Lorraine Pennington(ELL Pre-School Family Outreach Teacher), Donna Houle(School Success Coalition Team Leader/RIPIN Rep), Steven Boss(WHS Assistant Principal), Evelyn Mack-Loggins(Fairmount Delegate/Community Member), Stephanie Roberts(Harris TIME Teacher/Elementary Teacher Delegate), Karen Belcher(Pothier School parent), Meka Hamilton(Pothier PTO Member), Glen Gendron(Pothier School parent), Linda Majewski (School Committee Member), Dr. Robert Gerardi(Superintendent of Schools), Sue Rochefort(WHS PTO President), Linda Filomeno(Dir. of Literacy & Professional Dev.)

Introduction: Welcome all new attendees. This is the last PAC meeting for the school year. PAC meetings are usually held in September, November, January, and March. If any issues/concerns come up after March, contact PAC via email and usually a special meeting will be called to address the issue/concern to make parents aware.

For the Record:

Not in attendance. Paul Dube (Leo Savoie delegate), Brenda Galvin (SELAC delegate), Shannon Gamache (Leo Savoie delegate) and Amy Thibault (Bernon Heights, Alt. Delegate)

Denise Auclair: (PAC Co-Chair/Harris Elementary Delegate)

One concern for the district is ½ day kindergarten. Will daycare be taking the place of the other ½ day? How will this be structured? Will it be teachers from our districts who we know will have the skills especially when it comes to special education children? Another concern is the Caruolo Action. As a parent, if the Caruolo Action is not needed or we do not make it, our children will have lost out on all day kindergarten, sports, music, etc. since we are going to basic education.

Harris school – Books and Beyond Baseball Park Race challenge. Mr. Pickett, Harris Principal is challenging the staff and students to read one million pages over a ten-week period. When they meet this goal, they will be attending a Paw Sox Game and the principal will also have a special prize for them.

Tony Gabriele: (WHS PTO Vice President) Parent of WHS Student.

Fair Funding Formula – Our State Representative Chris Fierra has been appointed to the State Finance Committee which is a good thing for the fair funding formula. Uniform Policy – Looking forward to a positive outcome for the first passage this coming Wednesday meeting.

Vimala Phongsavanh: (NeighborWorks Blackstone River Valley Education Coordinator and School Committee Member), Blackstone Valley's Great American Cleanup – various cleanups through April and May. (Fliers were passed out). RiverzEdge will be cooperating with us by painting old tires, etc. Also, YMCA is doing a lot of new things. (Fliers were passed out)

Dr. Gerardi and Vimala attended a Statewide Roll-Out Event (formerly sustainable communities). Vimala passed an informational packet around the room and highlighted events that the PAC may be involved with along with the School Committee and School Department. Senator Reed was present and some of the kids met him.

Jennie Kithes: (Secretary WHS PTO) Parent of WHS Students. No comment.

Tara Dubois: (WHS Delegate) Parent of WHS Students. No comment.

Rob Desrosiers: (Elementary Principal Delegate, Globe Park School), March 30th - Parent Teacher Conferences.

Kimberly Blais: (Secretary to the Director of Instr. and Admin.) Parent of a Globe Park Student. No comment.

Ron Celio: (Principal, Fifth Avenue), attended the NRI event today as well. Parent Teacher Conference at the end of this month.

Rick Ferguson: (Asst. Principal WMS Hamlet), New Anti-Bullying Program at WMS called Stop it Now.

Daniel Lebron: (ESL Parent Program Outreach Worker), Here as a translator. No comment.

Theresa DeLeon: (ESL Community Member), Parent of a Pre-K Student. Concerns about ½ day kindergarten.

David Trenouth: (Community Member), Parent of a Leo Savoie Student. Here to observe.

Lorraine Pennington: (ELL Pre-School Family Outreach Teacher), I identify children who have ELL needs and they have to meet certain criteria. I work with them at their homes and build a relationship with the parents. Also here has translator if needed.

Donna Houle: (School Success Coalition Team Leader/ RIPIN Rep), Families Matters Conference at WHS on Saturday, November 6th. Conference to discuss ADHD, IEPs, sensory regulations, abuse prevention, coping with stress, technology, etc. Working with CCF to arrange child care. Working with Linda Filomeno on staffing. And, working on bussing and lunches.

WMS students – When a parent/guardian needs to speak to their child's teacher, they no longer have to go through the Guidance Department. You can call the VillaNova School at 235-6125 and when it prompts you for an extension, press 4 and the child's classroom number and leave a message directly for the teacher. You can call the Hamlet School at 235-6110 and when it prompts you for an extension press 3 and the child's classroom number and leave a message directly for the teacher.

Steven Boss: (Assistant Principal WHS), First time meeting. Looking forward to working with PAC.

Evelyn Mack-Loggins: (Fairmont Delegate/Community Member), Parent of an Elementary and High School Student. Would like Dr. Gerardi and School Committee Members to look at the model Providence has for Parent Centers. Would like a space in one of the schools specific for a parent center.

Stephanie Roberts: (Harris TIME Teacher), having a lot of success with parent programs this year. Trained 40 parents on how to be a parent volunteer. Recently, the food pantry completely taken over by our parents.

One concern is that we have been unsuccessful in getting a light in the parking lot across the street for over 5 years. Especially since nursing home is gone.

Dr. Gerardi to look into this issue.

Karen Belcher: (Pothier parent), Parent of a Pre-K Student at Pothier. Concerns about ½ day kindergarten. Reviewed a lot of the GLEs on the RIDE website and not sure if special education students will get what they need at ½ day. Will there be enough time to teach these kids what they need for success in 1st grade? If not, they will get frustrated. Instead of parents paying for daycare that the school might provide, could the cost be put towards a full day kindergarten?

Meeka Hamilton: (PTO Member, Pothier), Parent of a Pothier Student. Concerns about ½ day kindergarten. A voice for Pothier since Kindergarten is a big issue of there.

Glenn Gendron: (Pothier parent), Parent of a Pothier Student. Concerns about ½ day kindergarten.

Linda Majewski: (School Committee Member), Parent of a WHS Student. Half-day kindergarten – one of the worst decisions that the School Committee had to make. Worked in early intervention education for 25 years, worked with kids with specials needs. Have seen the GLEs and sat on the committees when they did the Crest documents. Budget this year - deficit of \$3.6 Million. Need to get below the State cap of 4.5%. We are at 6.6%. Need to cut our budget to get below that cap under State law: we could not petition the City for any more money than that. When we looked at our budget, the only area that we were able to make cuts that were not required by law, by contract or by State and Federal negotiations contract requirements was in the area that is not part of the basic education plan which is full day kindergarten. Full day Kindergarten is not mandated. Most of our Title I monies, at the elementary levels was used to cover the cost of kindergarten teachers. Basically, we are taking \$3 Million to cover teacher salaries for full day kindergarten. With the elimination of full day kindergarten and bringing it ½ day, we were able to get below the cap of 4.5%, we were able to spread out our Title I monies, and we were able to cut the budget by \$996,000. Even though we made all these cuts and are below the State law of 4.5%, we are still looking at a \$3.2 Million deficit at this point, which means we will be asking the City for the full complement of 4.5%.

The City has level funded education for 9 out of 12 years. We never received more of 1.9%. Knowing that we will not get the 4.5%, it will force us into a Caruolo action because as municipality we cannot run on a deficit. Parents paying for full day kindergarten – it is against the law because every parent/student is entitled to a free and appropriate public education. We are not allowed to charge fees for sports or extra curricula activities.

Good news – we increased our book budget. We have not had a book budget over \$30,000 in the last three years. We have done our parent portal. We have cut capital improvement budget over the last two years. We have received waivers for a couple of our buildings for fire codes but now we have to finish those fire code mandates this year. When we put money back in our capital improvements, they are reimbursed in our budget for the next year. We are reimbursed 81% of what we spend in capital improvements this year. Cut bussing by \$500,000.

Uniform policy up for 1st passage with the School Committee on April 14th. When an agenda item is up for 1st passage every School Committee member will vote yes in order to discuss the item. We will send to PAC to send out. When an agenda item is up for 2nd passage, this is when the final vote occurs. This uniform policy is actually called “Readiness to Learn” policy which means we can put other policies under this umbrella. There could be incentives for students to wear uniforms. Example: HS students could win Prom tickets, Elementary/dinner with principal or family member.

Karen Belcher asked if there is any way to squeeze in more time for ½ day kindergarten. Rather than 2 ¾ hours day maybe have a 4-hour day? With low test scores, can not read, teachers will want more money since they will be doing more in first grade. What about special needs?

Linda Majewski replied that the whole time the children are in school, it will be total instructional time.

Dr. Robert Gerardi (Superintendent of Schools), On all day kindergarten – acknowledged parent concerns. It has been reduced to a 2 ¾ hours, which the state law indicates. With the state cap and being leveled funded by the city, we had to make every cut necessary. Basically, what it comes down to, the community has not funded education in Woonsocket properly. A study done about 2 years, two-thirds of the State did not have full day kindergarten. Even though we have had limited funds for past years, the School Committee made it a priority in the past to offer full day kindergarten. Commissioner is talking about reform, how we are going to improve things, and how things are going to get better. However, when she says this she also says that we are to use the same amount of money we have and reorganize the way we use Title funds, federal funds. By taking the funds out of full day kindergarten it helped us to fund another mandate by the state.

Offer ½ day kindergarten for a cost – we cannot do this because we are bound by RI Title 16 laws. We cannot charge parents for a free and appropriate education. We may offer before and after daycare.

After speaking with lawyers from RIDE, there is this one law (not in Title 16) that says we might have the authority to charge a low cost for daycare. At the last School Committee meeting, they authorized me to write a letter to the Commissioner requesting to review the law and to advise us whether or not we can do this. Once we hear from the Commissioner, we need to investigate this process. We cannot use teachers because it will not be cost effective and also the teachers would need to be certified by the state as a certified licensed daycare professional. License daycare with tools would be better then before and after daycare

Budget needs to be passed by March 1st.

Linda Majewski said we will not know what we are appropriated by the city until June and we will not know what we get from the state until July.

Special Needs Children – With students who need those type of special services, they will get above the two and three quarters hours. Any child with an IEP will have an IEP meeting to see how their kindergarten experience occurs.

Parent Centers – Most of building principals have tried to provide space. Still working on this. The new middle schools have a selected place, which is dedicated to parents.

Harris parking lot light – I will talk with Facilities Director and look into this.

Cindy Stepanian (PAC Co-Chair/Globe Delegate), Globe had a great success fundraiser at Chuck E Cheese. Spring Book Fair this week. Next PTA meeting is April 15th. Poetry night coming up.

Caruolo Act – After we get this Caruolo Act to follow through and the fair funding, is there any possibility to put full day kindergarten back in?

Linda Majewski replied that as you may have seen in the paper, the fair funding gives us \$4M over five years. This really doesn't resolve our issues and still not enough money.

½ day kindergarten - will half go in the morning and half will go in the afternoon?

Dr. Gerardi replied yes, since we will only need ½ the teachers then we will only need ½ the classroom therefore, we can devote a classroom to all day daycare. Example: Children who attend am kindergarten will have daycare before the start of am kindergarten and after school.

Daycare – Will this be an outside agency or hire best qualified people? I think it would be easier for an outside agency.

Dr. Gerardi said it would be easier to hire an outside agency but then it wouldn't solve the cost for parents and that is why we are going to run the program.

Sue Rochefort (WHS PTO President) Parent of a WHS Student. Parent Teacher meeting last Thursday. Very well attended. Parent Portal – started already at WHS. Two upcoming PTO meetings – April 15th and May 13th at 6:30.

OLD BUSINESS:

Approval of Minutes of September 16, 2010, September 30, 2010 and November 4, 2010.

Motion to approve minutes of 9-16-10 as submitted made by Mrs. Roberts. Seconded by Sue Rochefort.

Motion to approve minutes of Special Commissioner's Meeting of 9-30-10 made by Rick Ferguson. Seconded by Evelyn MacLoggins.

Motion to approve minutes of 11-4-10 as submitted made by Denise Auclair. Seconded by Rick Ferguson.

NEW BUSINESS:

Elections (Events that PAC Co-Chairs and PAC Members attend)**(Postponed)**

Texting / Sexting Workshop at the WMS-Hamlet – Woonsocket Prevention Coalition presented and PAC sponsored this informative workshop. About 10 parents and 10 teachers were in attendance. Too bad not more attended. We need to have this at the student level from the WMS through WHS. The PAC is pushing to get this done.

Parent Portal – PAC was involved with getting parents signed up for Parent Portal that occurred at the WHS Parent/Teacher conferences. WHS is now up online. You can go online and check your child's attendance, grades, discipline, schedule, and all their teacher's email addresses. Not all teachers on line yet, please ask. Approximately 148 parents signed up. Mike Ferry will have another meeting for parents who could not attend. We will send out the dates when we receive them. WMS pretty much set to go. We are told they are waiting for extra funds for the elementary schools. This is an exciting educational tool for all.

Parent Leadership Workshop

This workshop will be held at the Fifth Avenue School. RIPIN will be presenting this workshop and PAC is sponsoring with 5th Avenue School hosting this workshop, on Intro to Parent Involvement as well as on How to run an Effective Parent meeting. Child care, a translator, etc. will be available. The workshop will be held Tuesday, April 13th from 6:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m. Cindy Stepanian passed out sheet on the parent leadership workshop to sign up now if you are interested and want information on this. If you can come, please bring a friend, bring someone who would like to get involved, go to your PTA or PTO and let them know about this workshop. Encourage people to attend.

Parent Involvement in the School

Go back to your PTAs and PTOs and let others know what is going on in the schools like the School Improvement Team meetings, parent corner areas, and volunteering in classrooms. All parents who volunteer or would like to volunteer (i.e. classroom, field trips) need to have a BCI check. They are free of charge at the police station. See Lucille at the police station.

Question: Kids who want to volunteer or need community service credits do they need a BCI check?
What if BCI check brings up minor thing that is not child related?

Dr. Gerardi to call Richard Ackerman to check statute of laws.

Presentation by Dr. Gerardi on the WHS Reform

The Commissioner has an aggressive agenda. She is using her authority in the No Child Left Behind; an accountability system. Dr. Gerardi said one of his concerns is that labeling schools, as failing based on the

snapshot of one assessment, one day and comparing different cohorts is unscientific. The scientific method is you have the control group and the problem group and you compare them and use the same cohort. In the future, the President is pushing for a growth model evaluation of schools. Another issue in the current system is determining whether a school is failing. We are following different groups of students to make sure they are succeeding (i.e. a student categorized as an ESL student - students with a second language in special programs may take 3 to 8 years to catch up with their peers). We identify these problems and we solve the problem. Commissioner set 2 levels of intervention. Level 1 school means one of the worst performing schools based on these faulty sets of data. There are four different options to turn around a school. Transformation (fires the principal and set things in motion to try to solve the school's problems). Turn around (fire all the teachers and principal. Hire back only 50% of those teachers who they think will be successful). Close the school, have a company come in like a charter school. (Charter school is not an option. It is too expensive for the town and us). The only option for us is transformation or turn around.

When we applied for the race to the top monies, we were classified as having two Level 2 schools, which is the WHS and Fifth Avenue School. If we had received the race to the top money, most of the money would have gone to both these schools to improve them. More than likely, WHS will be a Level 1 school next year. Fifth Avenue should be all set. To determine the level of intervention, they look at are the graduation and drop out rates. What I want to do is take some time and get parent input this evening. If we are going to be a Level 1 school next year, I want to be in the position were we met with the stakeholders and asked their opinions and we start negotiating with union now so we can be in a better place. I want to put something in place so we don't end up on national news like Central Falls.

Here are some suggestions that Central Falls suggested to institute a form of success. I would like input from you from this evening on the following suggestions:

Increase teacher common planning time by 90 minutes (spread over 5 days)

Common planning time is when talk about professional development strategies, meet parents, etc. A valuable resource. Right now we have 25 minutes 4 times a week at WHS.

Increase the school day by 25 minutes.

Implement a mandatory one-hour tutor session on all four-core subjects. WHS already has 2:30 to 5:30 homework classes. WHS already ahead with a grant and volunteer teachers.

Mandatory two week professional development for teachers during the summer.

Linda Majewski suggested some kind of curriculum for parents as well. Parents are the foundations. We need something and we need more from the parents in order to help their children as well as the schools. We should foster the Compact Policy should be a part of this.

Increase personalization with the students. Have the teachers eat lunch once a week with the students.

Accept a more rigorous third party evaluation system.

The state just recently instituted new evaluation standards for educators. Our union has voluntarily joined us on a grant to develop a new full standard evaluation standard.

Comments from the Committee - WHS Reform:

One suggestion is that the teachers do different days with the full 90 minutes, so we could have built in time for portfolios. The 30 minutes extra a day could possibly focus on portfolios or even an additional hour of tutoring.

How long a day for teachers? Some teachers put in a lot already.

Dr. Gerardi stated on the elementary level approx. 7 hours, WHS 330 min. of instruction. Hoping unions will cooperate with teachers/school system.

Stressed the importance of the Compact Policy which is basically a parent involvement policy that stays within the school which all parents have to sign is updated this year in a way on how the teachers or parents or students will actually work in the school. Example, a teacher should attend more PTA or PTO meetings. This policy will be very helpful especially during negotiations.

Committee really likes the idea of extending the school day. It would benefit the students.

Another suggestion is to have teachers to attend extra curricular activities (i.e. sport, music events) rather than lunch with students.

Dr. Gerardi, Directors, Principals of the WHS and the WACTC would like to create academies (turning the WHS into academies). One of our concerns is the drop out rate for graduation rate. Example, in the 9th grade we sometimes loose contact with the students and we do not want to loose contact. Therefore, starting a 9th grade academy just to make sure they get the foundation in math, English, science, that they need so they don't fall behind. For 10th, 11th, and 12th besides have a vocational career path maybe a student that would like to be an engineer could attend the math/science track. We would like to investigate these Talent Development high schools where they have incorporated these programs. A management organization company comes in and tells us how to organize our high school if we want to have these career paths. They create the structure to make this happen, create curriculum and the professional developments in one big package.

One concern from a PAC member is that these kids may not know what they want to do after high school and will get put on path that might prevent them from progressing. Will they be able to switch paths?

Dr. Gerardi said they would always have the necessary foundation to go to college.

You can email Dr. Gerardi rgerardi@wedmail.org with any ideas you may have on the WHS Reform. There is no deadline. Maybe within a week you could send me some of your thoughts.

WHS Stakeholder Committee on Talent Development High Schools

Dr. Gerardi needs more stakeholders because we have invited some high school administrators to do a presentation on March 31st from 1:00 to 3:00 at McFee Administration. We are going to ask the Curriculum Committee and the School Committee to attend. What I am asking if there are any parents in this group that would like to attend and come to see what this is all about so you will have input. In addition, there are a couple of schools in Brooklyn that have implemented this and we if want to see one of the schools, the stakeholders can go and look at the schools. We can do a day trip. I would like to have parent and community based representation to see these schools before we make the decision to go in that direction. Dr. Gerardi's email is rgerardi@wedmail.org or you can always email the PAC with your attendance.

Additional Questions

Linda Filomeno asked if the parent involvement policy and the compact policy fully passed. Denise Auclair said the parent involvement policy was passed with no changes but the compact had changes. The PAC has been waiting to hear from McFee Administration on whether or not principals had made changes to the Compact policy. Mark Garceau to present to principals for final approval at the next principal meeting in April. If any changes are made by the principals, we may need to have another meeting so the PAC can approve the changes. If no changes, we will leave as it is and advise the PAC via email.

Motion to adjourn by Denise Auclair. Seconded by Kimberly Blais.

Meeting adjourned at 9:12 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,
Kimberly Blais