

**ENFIELD BOARD OF EDUCATION
SPECIAL MEETING MINUTES
February 17, 2010**

A special meeting of the Enfield Board of Education was held at the Board Conference Room, located at 27 Shaker Road, Enfield, CT on February 17, 2010. The meeting was called to order by Chairman Stokes at 7:00 PM.

1. **CALL TO ORDER** The meeting was called to order at 7:00 PM by Chairman Stokes
2. **PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE** Chairman Stokes
3. **FIRE EVACUATION ANNOUNCEMENT** Chairman Stokes
4. **ROLL CALL**

MEMBERS PRESENT Judy Apruzzese-Desroches, Vincent Grady, Joyce Hall, Charles Johnson III, Peter Jonaitis, Thomas Sirard, Gregory Stokes, Donna Szewczak,

MEMBERS ABSENT Stacey Thurston

ALSO PRESENT Dr. John Gallacher, Superintendent of Schools; Tony Torre, Assistant Superintendent of Schools; Chris Chemerka, Business Manager

5. **BUDGET WORKSHOP #5**

Chairman Stokes opened the meeting by stating that both caucuses have met and discussed different options and that both he and Mrs. Apruzzese-Desroches have kept the communications open and shared ideas in regards to this budget. If the Board cannot finish the proposed budget tonight then we could set another workshop later. Chairman Stokes stated that he has listened to both negative and positive community response. The Board is in agreement that systemic changes need to be made. The economy is not going to improve as reports have suggested by State Rep Kathy Tallarita until the year 2013. The State's deficit and our town dealing with a crunch is a reality of our economic times. The Board can face this economic downswing as a problem or a challenge with opportunity. His biggest concern is the unbalanced class sizes and the need to focus on redistricting and balancing classes for better education. Kindergarten through grade 3 should have no more than 22 to 23 students and grades 4-6 should be in the range of 25 to 26 students. In response to the blogs that the Board just wants to close a school, it is his opinion, if redistricting proves that we can close a school and balance class size than we have done a world of good for our students.

Chairman Stokes reviewed with the Board the discussions and concerns that the Republican caucus has come up with as follows:

- In the secondary schools there are classes that are not full, duplication of classes, class loads and class sizes. No class should have less than 22 students in attendance with the exception of some core classes such as remedial reading;
- Sister schools or regional schools (3 or more) to help balance out class size;
- Sports participation not fully attended;
- Middle School, Consumer Sciences eliminated, the pros and cons of that action;
- Timeline constraints - we need to submit this budget by February 26th. After that, we can continue to fine tune our line items;

- Assure the community that the Town Council is not driving us. We are very aware of the reality of our economic times and have had lengthy discussion with both our town and state leaders.

Mr. Jonaitis commented on the secondary class sizes. When looking over the class schedules, there are several classes with very low attendance. He feels that class size should start at 18 and up. When you look at a teacher's estimated value of \$75,000 per teacher that averages out to \$15,000 per class offered a year. He asked if Enfield was willing to pay \$15,000 per class when there are only 4 students in attendance. He feels this is a major cost effective measure that must be addressed.

Chairman Stokes asked Dr. Gallacher if he could come up with an estimate of what our cost savings would be if we redistrict and balance class size. He also asked if that is something that could be accomplished between now and May 1st.

Dr. Gallacher stated there were many variables to consider. He does not see the redistribution of class size being accomplished by May.

Mr. Jonaitis stated that the simplest way would be to consider the regional school concept such as pooling Enfield Street, Stowe and Parkman schools together and redistributing the students to balance the class size while placing as many students as possible within walking distance of their schools.

Mrs. Apruzzese-Desroches asked if the out of home district students that attend different day care centers would be given consideration or are we going to start with everyone in their home school?

Chairman Stokes stated that he also supports full day kindergarten but unless we start making systemic changes, it could be ten years before we are able to enact it. If the State makes it mandatory in the next 5 years, we would not be ready to react without starting the systemic changes now.

Ms. Hall stated her reduction concerns in the enrollment decline. Even though we are down 200 students from last year, they are disbursed out across all grades. The number of students counted is the number of public education students sitting in classrooms in grades K-12.

Dr. Gallacher distributed the student enrollment count as of January 11, 2010 and the Enfield Enrollment Projected to 2018 report by Peter M. Prowda PhD.

Several Board members commented on the decline of 800 students since 1998 without closing a school.

Mrs. Apruzzese-Desroches stated that it is obvious balancing class size is important and should be addressed now. Her concern in redistricting is the harm it could cause if it is done too quickly without a plan in place and knowing the full impact. Mrs. Apruzzese-Desroches referred to the old demographic study and pointed out that there was no savings in just closing a school and redistributing the students. With redistricting first, there was some savings, but nothing close to the \$1.6 million we are looking for now.

Chris Chemerka stated that the bussing software should be available by July of this year. We are in the process of making arrangements with the vendor at this time.

Mr. Johnson stated that the software will help immensely with our redistricting plans.

Mr. Sirard stated that there are no more options. The dollars are not there to support our education system as it once did. There are too many "boutique" courses being offered that have only 12 students to a classroom. Change must be made. There will be a lot of resistance but it must be done. We do not have the funding or the enrollment numbers any longer to support our current education system.

Mr. Grady pointed out that many of the smaller classes are necessary for our college bound students. We should be fighting for students to get the most out of their education. We should be submitting a

budget that is well rounded for all the students, not submitting a budget bowing to the budget the Town Council wants.

Mr. Sirard stated that if we remove the special education costs from the budget and look at the balance of students who are receiving the most it is the AP students that get the dollars while the students in the middle are stuck. We need to do what is best for all of our students. If a student needs a course for college, then go to the community college and take the course. Let the parents pay for the cost, not the taxpayer.

Chairman Stokes stated that the easy way out is to submit our 3.64% budget and wait for the cuts. We need to work on the systemic changes now. We need to submit the budget based on a 0 -1% or \$675,000 increase. Systemic change begins now with this budget.

Mrs. Apruzzese-Desroches stated that she knows what a 3.64% budget looks like and not what a 0-1% budget would look like. She will not support what she does not know. We need to fight for what we need. We can still do the systemic changes that have been discussed for the last 4 years, but we need to do it right for the long haul.

Mr. Jonaitis commented that the principals need to concentrate on scheduling the 4 core courses first and students need to fill their schedule with these courses before taking any non-core classes. That should cut way back on the number of the same classes being offered.

Mrs. Szewczak stated that the problem is that private sector has stayed flat for the past two years and the public sector has grown and grown with no concept of the reality of the economics. The board never completes anything. She has been hearing forever about these changes but former boards never moved forward on the all those discussions. She questions if every salary earner is carrying their load. We cannot take care of every situation.

Mr. Sirard stated that students will be forced to make decisions on their classes. The first priority of the board is to educate the students in reading, writing and math.

Dr. Gallacher stated that he would bring in the principals to discuss scheduling. It is very complicated and you need to see the whole picture. If you cherry pick at eliminating classes, there would not be the savings that you expect because the teacher whose class is eliminated will still be teaching 4 other sections in a day.

Ms. Hall stated that we have been cutting courses for a number of years. We need to really assess what our needs are. We need to support the academic students who can achieve the higher echelon college path. We have been successful with that endeavor. We also need to support our Vo-Ed curriculum as well as the academic curriculum to support that very important non-exportable job market.

Mr. Johnson stated we need to make sure students are getting their core courses in to graduate, and then we can offer the "boutique" classes. He stated he is a huge supporter of the arts, but everything must be on the table during these budget discussions.

Mrs. Apruzzese-Desroches questioned what is meant by the reference "boutique" classes.

Mr. Sirard stated that in reference to "boutique" classes, he has reviewed the syllabus which describes five different English classes that are just a little different in description but meaning the same thing. He is also surprised to see that we still offer remedial reading in the 12th grade for students who came through our system.

Ms. Hall stated that those classes are for the students who have failed to pass the CAPT and must accomplish this course in order to graduate.

Chairman Stokes stated that those types of classes are the exception to the rule and we must make sure we are providing those types of support systems to our students.

Mr. Sirard reiterated that he is not using the remedial class as an example of what to cut. He furthered stated that at some point we have to look at what we can afford to provide and that is the bottom line. He would love to give a student a resume to get into Harvard because of the courses we have offered, but at some point we have to say we can't do that anymore. If it is that important to a student and a Rhoades Scholarship is on the line then at some point the parent has to step up to the plate and say they will foot the bill. This is public education and we can't be everything to all people. We need to watch the students in the middle as well.

Mr. Jonaitis stated that back in the 1970's when students were attending ½ day sessions because the schools were overflowing, we did not offer the array of courses we have now and still 84% of the graduating population went into some form of higher education.

EHS Principal, Tom Duffy, clarified that those English classes are actually required courses for grades 11 and 12. It is easier to split them into ½ semester courses to assist the students with scheduling and meet their requirements. There is a fifth class that is offered for students who intend to specialize in writing and or literature.

Dr. Gallacher distributed an elementary school reconfiguration study brochure from Harrall-Michalowski Association (HMA) Company. This group specializes in elementary school reconfiguration and this brochure outlines their approach to this type of study. The suggested timeline for this study to be implemented would be for September 2011 if you are talking about including all 9 elementary schools. The study is for elementary schools only.

Chairman Stokes stated that we can introduce this study in tiers working through a process of elementary schools and then secondary levels.

The Board took a short recess at 8:10 PM.

The Board reconvened at 8:22 PM.

Chairman Stokes asked the Board for final comments before giving Dr. Gallacher direction.

Mrs. Apruzzese-Desroches asked her peers if the Superintendent's proposed budget at this point is acceptable to everyone. The Board agrees that everything offered in the proposed budget is accepted and is the starting point of tonight's further deliberations to reduce the budget.

Mrs. Apruzzese-Desroches stated that she did not like last year's process of submitting a budget when we did not know where the cuts would come from. She can see what we are losing with this proposed budget. While it is hard to approve the cuts, she understands all the reasoning behind each cut. She will not support a \$1.6 further reduction without seeing that level of detail and the repercussions it will have on our educational system.

Mr. Grady agreed with Mrs. Apruzzese-Desroches.

Ms. Hall stated she would like to move forward with the HMA elementary school reconfiguration study. She stated that September 2011 is a realistic goal. Her question would be where to come up with the \$75,000 it will cost to support the study.

Dr. Gallacher stated that HMA would require a lot of prep work on our part before they can begin their study. We might look at closing a school, but after the study begins, and depending on many variables such as transportation costs and square footage, the study might point us to a different building altogether. We would also need to go out to bid on a package such as this.

Ms. Hall asked if we could have this study ready to propose to the public this September. Dr. Gallacher answered yes if the board began working immediately on this.

Mr. Grady asked if the funding would come out of this year's budget.

Ms. Chemerka stated that this year's budget is currently in a deficit and so it will depend on where we stand with excess cost this year.

Mr. Sirard stated that he plans to ask the Board to make an official request to the Town for a portion of the excess cost funds to cover our budget deficit only and then since there should still be excess cost funds left, with the permission of the Board, he would also ask the Town to also cover the cost of the RFP.

Mr. Jonaitis stated that the Board has to decide how to attack this problem. As he sees it there are 3 options to choose from. First, we as a Board could work together with the Central Office and keep coming up with ideas until something concrete forms, secondly, we could hire an outside agency to come in and do the study and adopt as much as we possibly can. Our third choice is we could have the Principals work with the central office and spread the \$1.5 million cut among the different levels. For example, the 2 high schools would be responsible for \$750,000 in cuts between them, the middle schools would be responsible for \$375,000 and the nine elementary schools would be responsible for the remaining \$375,000. All three levels would have the autonomy to choose how they would rearrange their schedules to accommodate these cuts.

Mr. Johnson stated we have had demographic studies done in the past. He asked if this study would get involved with projections out several years or can we focus on the immediate 3 years. Dr. Gallacher replied that we would have to blend the demographics with the reconfiguration to make sure it will last for 10 years. You would not want to come back in 3 years and do this all over again.

Mr. Johnson thought that another viable option would be to warehouse one of our buildings for the next 3 or 4 years until we are on an economic upswing and then possibly bring it back into the mix. It would help us out with the economic constraints we are under right now. He asked if there is any possibility the reconfiguration could be completed by July so we can implement it for September.

Dr. Gallacher stated he would rather have MHA come to a board meeting to answer questions in regard to when to implement the results of this study.

Chairman Stokes stated that there are 2 issues to resolve in the next week. The first would be to get a proposed budget to the Town and then begin our talks to reconfigure our school districts and start that process. He stated he would like to have the Superintendent to take us down to 1% and he knows the Board will be divided on several of the cuts but we will have time between now and May to tweak the cuts. We have a regular meeting on the 23rd to vote on the proposed budget.

Dr. Gallacher stated that if we are waiting until the 23rd to focus on budget setting, he would like to remove discussion of graduation from that meeting because the budget will take up the entire meeting.

Mrs. Apruzzese-Desroches stated that she agrees with Dr. Gallacher but possibly make the motion to rescind the original vote at the next meeting so that the community knows our intentions that the graduation location option is still on the table. We could discuss locations at the following meeting in March.

Dr. Gallacher said that the \$1.5 million additional reduction equates to approximately 30 more teaching positions on top of the 21 certified staff that is already in the proposed budget. The board will be looking at some draconian cuts on Tuesday.

Chairman Stokes stated that we have the next 2 months to work on it and hopefully we can tweak the cuts somewhat.

Ms. Hall announced that the Education Committee at the Legislature had their first meeting today. Of interest to us would be a bill that is being proposed that would have the State support all SPED costs. She recommends that the board support that concept if they have a hearing on it. The other thing that did not show up on the bills but she hopes someone will propose, is to eliminate that In-house Suspension proposal that is extended until next July. There will also be a meeting of M.O.R.E., which has to do with the management of regional efficiencies, relative to education this Friday at 3:30 PM in room 310 of the State Capitol. They are looking for information from our RESC's which includes CREC that we belong to.

Mrs. Szewczak asked if the 1% budget will be specific. Dr. Gallacher answered yes. Mrs. Szewczak stated that after we see the horrific cuts to the budget, we may be forced into doing something for September of this year.

Mr. Grady proposed that the Board submit the 3.4% proposed budget knowing that the town will cut it anyway but at least it will give us the time to do things right. This will give the Business Manager time to submit the proposed budget to the town in a timely fashion as opposed to the last minute.

Mrs. Apruzzese-Desroches agrees with Mr. Grady. There will not be enough time on Tuesday night to review the additional proposed cuts by the Superintendent, digest the information, get community feedback and vote on it in the same night.

Mrs. Szewczak stated she does not want to have the Town Council do our job for us. We already know what kind of budget they are expecting from us.

Chairman Stokes stated that by consensus of the majority of the Board Dr. Gallacher is given direction to cut the budget to reflect a 1% increase of last year's budget.

6. EXECUTIVE SESSION FOR MATTER(S) RELATED TO PENDING CLAIMS & LITIGATION – DOCUMENT PROTECTED BY ATTORNEY-CLIENT PRIVILEGE

Dr. Gallacher and Mr. Torre joined the Board in Executive Session. At 8:58 PM Mr. Sirard moved, seconded by Mrs. Szewczak to end Executive Session and return to public session. All ayes, motion passed. No other action was taken by the Board members while in Executive Session.

7. ACTION, IF ANY, ON ITEM #6

Mrs. Szewczak moved, seconded by Mr. Grady, that the Enfield Board of Education approves the adjusted invoice payable to Shatz, Schwartz and Fentin, P.C. in the amount of \$206,769.39 to be taken from the estate. A vote by **roll call 8-0-0**, motion passes.

8. ADJOURNMENT

Ms. Hall moved, seconded by Mr. Grady to adjourn the Special Meeting of February 17, 2010. A vote by **show of hands 8-0-0**, motion passes.

Meeting stood adjourned at 9:02 PM.

Joyce Hall
Secretary
Enfield Board of Education

Respectfully Submitted,

Patricia West
Recording Secretary