

## GROTON-DUNSTABLE REGIONAL SCHOOL COMMITTEE

High School Library  
Business Meeting Minutes  
March 18, 2009  
(Approved 4/1/09)

### **PRESENT:**

Mr. Peter Carson  
Ms Berta Erickson  
Mr. Jim Frey  
Dr. Paul Funch, Chair  
Mr. Chuck McKinney, Vice-Chair  
Mr. Frank O'Connell  
Mr. Jon Sjoberg, Secretary

### **ADMINISTRATION:**

Dr. Alan Genovese, Superintendent  
Timothy Sheehan, Director of Business and Finance

### **STUDENT REPRESENTATIVE:**

Rafael Glod (Left at 8:15 p.m.)

**STAFF, PRESS, OTHERS:** C. Beckert-Long, Groton Herald; P. Comtois, Groton Landmark; C. Case, P. Lang, L. Pozerski, D. Diggins, G. Hoglund, R. Goguen

### **CALL TO ORDER:**

The GDRSC Meeting was called to order at 6:10 p.m. and the Committee voted to adjourn to executive session under M.G.L. Chapter 39, Section 23B-3. The meeting reconvened in open session at 7:04 p.m., with no plans to return to executive session, and was called to order by the chair, P. Funch.

### **ANNOUNCEMENTS/SPOTLIGHT**

#### **Staff Recognition**

**Carol Case** - Dr. Genovese presented Ms Case a certificate in recognition of receiving a Picturing America award sponsored by the National Endowment for the Humanities. The award is given to teachers who bring masterpieces of American art into classrooms and libraries to foster a deeper appreciation of our country's history and character through the study and understanding of art. Ms Case said the grant was to give libraries and/or school districts twenty large double sided posters of historical events and art images from American artists and these will be displayed throughout the district.

**Phyllis Lang** - Dr. Genovese recognized Ms Lang, RN, NCSN, for receiving the Muriel C. Furlong Award for Making a Difference and presented her with a certificate. The award is sponsored by the Food Allergy and Anaphylactic Network and is given to individuals whose efforts make the world safer for those with food allergies. Ms Lang thanked the school allergy support team who initiated this, as well as the district for all their support.

**Fourth Grade Students/Staff** - Principal Goguen explained the fourth grade students wrote poetry, created their own books and sold them to their families. The money was donated to the Boston Children's Hospital and was used to purchase books for their library. She requested the teachers and students be invited to a June school committee meeting to share their poetry.

R. Goguen announced fourth grade student Athena McCann won the Will McDonough Writing Contest and she will be honored Monday evening at the Celtics game. A copy of her work was distributed.

Dr. Genovese noted many of the district's fourth grade MCAS open-response questions were selected as exemplary work at the state level.

Rafael Glod read prepared announcements and a copy is attached to these minutes. He also announced the Gold Key Award from Scholastic Art and Writing Awards of 2009 was presented to Rachel Lofgren for poetry and to Laura Fitzpatrick for her writing portfolio. They will be entered into the national round of judging for national medals and college scholarships at the end of the month.

### **PRESENTATIONS/DISCUSSION**

#### **Energy Conservation/Service Consolidation - P. Funch**

Dr. Funch provided highlights from a meeting he attended where consolidation initiatives in Andover were discussed. The school and the town consolidated out of frustration with the school district using money budgeted for maintenance for education programs. Having all the town's buildings and grounds, with the exception of the cemetery, under the control of the facilities department has turned out to be an effective program. Other cost saving initiatives include a group health insurance plan, exploring shared food service management services with another town, sharing copy center resources with other districts and a town-wide energy conservation program.

Suggestions for energy conservation were reviewed and include preventative maintenance and operating procedures. He noted the district all ready does a number of these things. B. Erickson said Think Tank Committee member Gary Hoglund has looked into many of Andover's energy accomplishments. T. Sheehan will be sharing the district's energy consumption data with him tomorrow. Dr. Funch noted converting ten of Andover's school buildings to natural gas realized a significant savings with natural gas being at its lowest price in two years.

### **QUESTIONS/COMMENTS**

None

### **REPORTS FROM SUB-COMMITTEES**

**Policy** - P. Carson reported they met last night and had a presentation and discussion with the Administrative Team about the suggestions they had for the policies regarding drugs, alcohol and weapons and this information will be reviewed at the Policy committee's April 7<sup>th</sup> meeting. The committee will meet on March 31<sup>st</sup> to work on the advertising policy and on April 14<sup>th</sup> to review other policies.

Dr. Funch reminded members they had agreed to have a public hearing on the advertising policy within a school committee meeting.

C. McKinney asked when the alcohol and drug policy went back in for review. P. Carson said they wanted to look for areas of duplication and lack of clarity. As part of Dr. Genovese's report on what they are doing and what needs to be done better, he enlisted the Administrative Team to come up with ways to make the handbook clearer. J. Frey said they had some disciplinary actions regarding drugs in the schools and this caused recognition of the fact that there were some inconsistencies between school district policy and handbooks. Dr. Genovese said in the future, the first part of the handbooks will be specific to procedures for the schools and will have common chapters which are consistent throughout the district. Rafael said the School Council received the first draft of the new high school handbook today and they will review it next week.

**Budget & Finance** - C. McKinney reported they met on March 16<sup>th</sup>. A couple of informal meetings have been taking place with the FinComs and Groton Board of Selectmen. The Groton Board of Selectmen and Groton FinCom have voted to support the assessment (2 ½% increase) for the district's FY10 budget. Conversations with Dunstable are continuing and the indication is they are not prepared to support the \$52,000 increase at this time. He said Budget and Finance is not recommending any changes to the budget. They expect to get a consensus report on state aid on April 15<sup>th</sup> and will meet at Prescott on April 17<sup>th</sup> at 6:30 p.m. to review the numbers.

They are dealing with some unanticipated special education expenses this year and discussed how they will pay for them this year, as well as next year. They also discussed methodology for covering budget shortfalls in general. Several years ago, the budget had a special education contingency line item for \$100,000. When

budgets became tight, it was agreed they would remove this line item and “self-insure” themselves for these special education costs and pay for them from E&D. A regulatory change regarding the use of E&D funds is coming and will require school committees to pre-declare any of these contingency-like funding mechanisms. The school committee will need to vote to encumber those funds from E&D proactively for expenses that may not be handled in the FY09 budget (\$50,000 to \$75,000). A line item should be added to the FY10 budget, which would increase the budget but not the assessment, by identifying \$100,000 of E&D designated for special education contingencies. If it is not used, it goes back into E&D at the end of the year. C. McKinney noted that if they do not encumber the money proactively, the only way they could take the money out of E&D would be for the committee to vote to take the money out and the towns would have to decide whether to hold special town meetings to accept the committee’s vote within 45 days. If the towns took no action, that means they accepted the committee’s regional authority to issue debt.

It was clarified an appropriation authorizes a line item in the budget and an encumbrance is earmarked for a designated purpose. Dr. Funch recommended they have a policy to document the intent and the reporting that would be used. T. Sheehan said he would create a fourth suspense account (contingency account for special education) for FY09 and this is on the system-wide page and managed by the administration. For FY10, it would be coded in the 2000’s - direct instructional services to students. If it was decided to spend the money on something else, the school committee would have to vote to approve the transfer in advance. For FY10, it was agreed the money would be put in the 9000 series and this will require a school committee vote to move it to the 2000 series.

J. Frey said they received the administration’s budget Restoration List and noted restoring the three elementary reading teachers is priority number one. Dr. Genovese said tomorrow they will be looking at reducing the budget by another \$230,000 in the event there is a budget requiring that when the “dust settles”.

Budget & Finance will also meet on April 29<sup>th</sup>.

**Communications Committee** - J. Frey reported they have been discussing changes to the district website. The changes made in the process for accepting and distributing public comments seem to be working well. The middle school will be using the website for distributing their newsletter starting this year. They are looking at putting together some programming highlighting things going on at the schools. He and Dr. Genovese participated in **Around Town** last Thursday evening.

Dr. Funch asked if the public comments can be made available for others to see and this will be discussed at their next meeting.

**Think Tank Committee** - B. Erickson reported they met on March 5<sup>th</sup> and each person reported on their respective topic. A report will be given to the school committee in May. Their next meeting is at 7:00 p.m. on April 2<sup>nd</sup> at MSN.

With respect to energy savings, G. Hoglund said they are benchmarking the district’s buildings. Energy Star has a portfolio manager that compares the buildings to a national database to see which buildings are doing well and which are not. He is lining up people in the energy auditing field and with thermo-imaging cameras to go through a building as a pilot to look for areas that would impact energy usage.

**Retirement of Facilities** - C. McKinney reported they are willing to make a report to the Groton Board of Selectmen after the committee determines what they want to do with Tarbell.

**Report of the Director of Business & Finance** - T. Sheehan reported the administration is hosting a meeting on Friday with neighboring districts on collaborative planning for special education transportation and they expect 15 to 20 participants.

An eight month FY09 budget report was presented to Budget and Finance on Monday. The second quarter report presented in January identified a number of areas running shortfalls totaling about \$612,000. A

preliminary recovery plan has identified about \$600,000 in possible funding sources to cover these. The overall spending for the first eight months of the year was up 2.3% and the operating budget is up 3% as compared to last year. The spending increases are less than what was in the budget and the initiatives put in place are starting to take hold.

He looked at special education, transportation and collaboratives, which caused concern in December, and those estimates are holding steady. The administration has identified about \$687,000 in potential shortfalls and \$689,000 in potential funding but there are still a lot of uncertainties. The largest one is \$150,000 in pending special education cases. It is hoped the shortfalls can be covered within the existing budget but he noted there are always "unknowns".

J. Sjoberg asked if the committee will vote on the transfers en masse. T. Sheehan said he has been making these transfers on his own but he can provide the committee with a report. P. Carson feels, philosophically, they should be voting on the changes. F. O'Connell clarified every penny is identifiable in reports.

**Report of the Chair** - No report

**Report of the Superintendent** - Dr. Genovese reported a memo went out to parents regarding students having school on Good Friday and not having school on March 21<sup>st</sup> or March 28<sup>th</sup> as previously planned since they did not use two additional snow days before March 1<sup>st</sup>. The changes to the 2009-2010 school calendar were highlighted and include having school on September 4<sup>th</sup>. This will be the first day of school for Pre-K/Kindergarten. For September through January, curriculum half days will be on Thursdays and on Wednesdays from February through June.

B. Erickson said she would like to return to executive session and asked the mechanism for doing so. She was advised she will need to make a motion.

#### **ACTION ITEMS**

##### **Non Consent Action Items**

None

##### **VOTE: Consent Action Items**

F. O'CONNELL MOVED TO APPROVE THE BUSINESS MEETING MINUTES OF FEBRUARY 25, 2009, THE BUDGET HEARING MINUTES OF FEBRUARY 25, 2009 AND THE BUSINESS MEETING MINUTES OF MARCH 4, 2009. SECONDED BY J. FREY

**SO VOTED IN FAVOR UNANIMOUSLY**

##### **ADJOURNMENT**

B. ERICKSON MOVED TO RECONVENE TO EXECUTIVE SESSION FOR DISCUSSION UNDER M.G.L. CHAPTER 39, SECTION 23B-3 AT 9:35 P.M. SECONDED BY C. MCKINNEY

So voted by roll call

**In Favor:** B. Erickson, P. Carson, J. Sjoberg, P. Funch, F. O'Connell, J. Frey

**Opposed:** C. McKinney

The committee will not be returning to open session.

Respectfully submitted,

Susan H. Smith  
Recording Secretary  
With attachment