

GROTON-DUNSTABLE REGIONAL SCHOOL COMMITTEE  
Business Meeting Minutes  
High School Library  
December 17, 2008 – 7:00 PM

P. Funch called the meeting to order at 7:00 P.M.

**Think Tank Presentation**

B. Erickson introduced Think Tank members J. Prager of Groton and K. Welch of Dunstable.

J. Prager presented the Think Tank list of initiatives and ideas.

At this point the Think Tank felt they needed the input of the school committee before moving forward on any of the ideas.

Presented revenue generation ideas and cost saving ideas. See presentation.

B. Erickson asked J. Prager to expand on the computer equipment from industry and other ways that industry could be involved. J. Prager mentioned a few ways local industry could be involved.

B. Erickson mentioned “click-through” could be done with GDEF as the charity.

J. Frey asked about “click-through” revenue. Potential revenue is unclear at this point.

B. Erickson asked for questions about the ideas.

C. McKinney asked the administration for input on which ideas could be problematic for the school district to consider. The example of fundraising being an area that could be tricky and best left to GDEF was given.

B. Erickson welcomed G. Hoagland and B. St.Jean from the Think Tank.

Dr. Genovese mentioned implementing many of the ideas will have to do with capacity. Do we have the capacity to do these?

- Endowments: Doable
- Donations: Doable.
- Fundraising: The issue is there are a lot of organizations doing this and would we want to be competing with these organizations? Maybe a coordinated effort.
- Partnerships: Policy sub-committee has been working on defining these guidelines. Issues around logos on the GDRSD website.
- Engage industry: Need to put together a plan before engaging business.  
G. Hoagland said it is hard to identify a good, defined project to bring before a business. How do we get that?  
Summary: Engaging industry is doable but have to identify 1-2 clear opportunities
- Seeking equipment : Doable, need real specific guidelines on minimum specifications of what we are looking for. Problem is people donate computers that won't run the software we have.
- Increase fees: Administrative Council will take under advisement. C. McKinney asked Dr. Genovese to look at this now.
- Discussion on the website idea in presentation. Whose website? Maybe doable.
- Discussion on click-through and how to work it into the new advertisement policy. P. Carson and J. Frey believe there is a way to make this work within the current policy.
- Develop a system to sell items. Doable. All of these require structured parameters and guidelines.
- Grant writing: Has merit, but the person who writes it has to be really well prepared and skilled.

Dr. Rubel added many grants are targeted for more needy districts, so we often don't qualify unless we partner with other districts.

GROTON-DUNSTABLE REGIONAL SCHOOL COMMITTEE  
Business Meeting Minutes  
High School Library  
December 17, 2008 – 7:00 PM

C. McKinney would like information on the last time we had a “grant audit” to see if there isn’t some set of grants that we have overlooked.

K. Welch mentioned that administrating grants can potentially be a full time job.

Dr. Rubel mentioned that we want grants that add to things we are already going to do and not add-ons. Need grant co-ordination.

C. McKinney asked what mechanisms the administration needs to put in place to facilitate HS web-development classes to set up leverage online revenue opportunities.

Dr. G mentioned he would like to learn from schools already doing this.

G. Hoagland asked if there are any impediments to the district receiving the money directly. Need legal counsel’s opinion on this.

G. Hoagland mentioned he liked C. McKinney’s idea of tying fundraising into curriculum. Dr. G mentioned GDRSD could set it up as a revolving account.

### Cost Savings ideas

- Further Regionalization: Big push from the state. The SC could investigate this. The state puts money aside to help. One approach is to share central office, but otherwise the districts are autonomous.  
P. Carson asked if we can make deals with other districts to share AP courses.  
Dr. G mentioned they could do online courses and that some districts do this.
- Better utilize special education vans: Actually utilized pretty well so looking for alternate uses may not be a worthwhile effort.  
C. McKinney mentioned that smaller teams could use the vans. Dr. G. said that they do, or should, use these vans when they are available.
- Outsourcing some functions: Typically these jobs are community folks and are dependable. Dr. G mentioned that he knows of a few districts that tried it but did not enjoy the results. J. Prager mentioned they were thinking more of bringing specialty products and sharing the revenue. Dr. G. and staff will look into it.
- Collaborative: We already do that with fuel oil but not food or paper products.  
Dr. Funch asked if we participated in state contracts. T. Sheehan mentioned we look at those but we often do better without using them.  
C. McKinney asked if we were still looking at doing a collaborative on copiers.  
T. Sheehan is still in the process of doing this but current contract does not end until 2011.
- Energy Audit: We should be going on this shortly.  
F. O’Connell mentioned that some companies offer incentives to look to switch between oil and gas.  
T. Sheehan mentioned over the last few years oil has been cheaper. T. Sheehan will look into it if F. O’Connell sends the information.  
Dr. G is looking for someone to drive an energy audit of the schools.  
P. Carson wondering if this wasn’t something the sustainability committee was looking into
- Incentives for cost-cutting: Organize and implement
- 4 day school: Current guidelines say you must go 180 days. Issues around 3-day weekend and parents. Issues on continuity of education. Would not pursue this yet.
- Mutual cost savings: These conversations are ongoing but maybe not enough. Perhaps some ideas can be brought to towns as ideas to look into.  
Jay Prager mentioned that “regionalizing” some public services is being looked into by some towns. This can make sense for some services given the cost of these services.

GROTON-DUNSTABLE REGIONAL SCHOOL COMMITTEE  
Business Meeting Minutes  
High School Library  
December 17, 2008 – 7:00 PM

G. Hoagland asked for guidance on top 5 or some number for what to spend time researching.  
J. Frey mentioned increasing fees, click-through were good incentives, energy audit ideas good.  
F. O'Connell agreed generating revenue was a good idea. On cost savings, look at energy audit, incentives, and cost savings.  
C. McKinney agreed with J. Frey and O'Connell that cost savings are the big ticket items. Perhaps not thinking big enough on the revenue opportunities. Perhaps can generate more than a couple of thousand dollars.  
Dr. Funch agreed on previous points but wants to keep in mind we all need to look for ways to participate. Need to look for higher pay-off items, for example in curriculum, using technology to help use teachers more effectively.  
J. Sjoberg wanted to focus on revenue but these are long term.  
P. Carson concerned about fees. Also liked the way technology can feed into the curriculum for AP courses. Energy audit is also a good idea.

B. Erickson thanked the Think Tank for coming in.

J. Prager asked "what is the plan for moving ahead?"

- Increase fees - Administration is looking into this.
- Internet presence - C. McKinney is planning on looking into
- Grant writing - Dr. Rubel will look into opportunities here.
- Regionalization should be another process. If the committee has an interest, it should be an agenda item. The Think Tank could look into what efforts could be done.
- Energy audit is owned by T. Sheehan
- Administration is working on incentives.

### **School Choice**

Projections from 8th-9th grades were approximately 20 less than we thought. S. Cohen felt GDRSD could open 5 seats in ninth grade. Superintendent recommended GDRSD open the 5 seats.

Dr. Funch mentioned that once people are accepted, they go through the school through graduation. He is concerned with what happens if school's size grows. He also questioned why such a large number left the district.

Dr. G. mentioned they could be going to private schools or charter schools. They usually lose about 15 students.

J. Frey asked if this is a request to open half way through the year. Dr. Genovese answered "Yes".

J. Sjoberg asked what the cost impact would be if a student with an IEP was selected from the lottery. The GDRSD would inherit the cost of implementing the IEP, but still would be reimbursed at the 5k level. Dr. Genovese mentioned that if costs exceeded the circuit breaker threshold some further state reimbursement would be received. J. Frey indicated that this reimbursement will likely, in the new state budget, be reduced to 72 percent of costs.

F. O'Connell asked if half the year means half the revenue. Yes. F. O'Connell concerned with what happens if children come back into the district. This may not be the right time with cuts pending next year.

### **Strategic Plan**

SC presented with a document that demonstrated the administration listened to concerns at the last Strategic Plan presentation. See school committee question/issues sheet.

J. Frey mentioned that we were looking for other ways to get the word out to the community.

GROTON-DUNSTABLE REGIONAL SCHOOL COMMITTEE  
Business Meeting Minutes  
High School Library  
December 17, 2008 – 7:00 PM

B. Erickson did look into putting some promotion on the community access tables. Communication advisory committee ideas are documented in advisory subcommittee meeting minutes.

B. Erickson thought maybe the focus groups could report on their progress. Dr. Genovese and J. Frey agree this is a good idea to do after most of the focus groups have been done and could be used to promote public forums.

J. Frey wanted to cover an article in the Lowell Sun that merged the Strategic Plan process and the budgeting process and left the impression that the focus groups were for the budgeting process. The focus groups are for the Strategic Plan, not the budgeting.

### **K-12 Challenge**

Issue that the slides are in 2007 slide presentation, but we only have 2003 power-point available. P. Carson, Dr. Funch, J. Frey and Dr. G attended a briefing by S. Panagiotakos and had hoped to present some portion of it tonight.

The summary is that the presentation was “somber”. There have already been large cuts and largely, to date, education has been spared but it will get a cut. The estimate was about 10 percent cut in education, instead of the normal range near 3 percent increase.

Will add the presentation to the next agenda.

### **Policy JK-E-1**

Actually this is a policy number on student discipline. Dr. Funch would like to discuss this policy and start a conversation on this policy.

The issue surrounds two sets of parents voicing concerns about the punishment received for position in the high school. This, and similar issues, raise concern to Dr. Funch.

First issue is that the HS handbook and policy both indicate that suspensions can be appealed to the school committee. The school committee has no authority over this and therefore these manuals need to be updated.

Given the facts available to him, Dr. Funch concluded the discipline prescribed was excessive.

B. Erickson and C. McKinney expressed concerns about the manner in which this was being handled.

P. Carson mentioned that the table in the handbook indicates 5+ minimum for a first offense, while in one case in question long term suspension was prescribed for the first offense.

Dr. Genovese mentioned that the school committee should focus on detailing the law and giving guidance.

Dr. Funch mentioned discretion may have been misapplied.

C. McKinney re-asserted that it is inappropriate for the school committee to consider individual cases. The school committee should stay out of the appeals process and if the school committee wants to, they can modify the policies and handbooks.

P. Carson mentioned that the school committee could abstract the specifics of the case to be an example. As a theoretical case, we can discuss this to see if we were following policies.

B. Erickson moved to table the discussion. Motion carried unanimously.

### **Policy Sub-committee**

Policy did not meet due to scheduling conflict with presentation. Policy would like to invite a representative from the police department to discuss the policy. Dr. Genovese will send copies of policies to police to review.

### **Budget and Finance Sub-committee**

B&F met last night and will meet tomorrow night with town officials.

### **Communications Advisory Committee**

Spent time talking about promoting the Strategic Plan. They are also reviewing rules for public comment and the web-site to have a page for school committee and creating a FAQ. They will also take a broader look at the district pages. The next meeting is January 8<sup>th</sup>, 9:00 a.m. at Prescott.

### **Retirement of Tarbell**

Nothing to report. Will hold the draft open through the first of the year, work on incorporating the information and vote in February to accept the report.

Dr. G. asked if the Retirement of Facilities committee would have a recommendation on use of the building.

C. McKinney expressed that he did not feel this was part of the original charter.

Dr. Funch re-iterated that public input is still welcome.

### **Director of Business & Finance**

Reviewed report presented to B&F subcommittee. Report indicated potential problems in:

SPED private tuition

SPED transportation

SPED aides

Administrator salaries (particularly moving principles from .5 to 1.0 FTE)

Now that these preliminary reports are more solid, there does appear to be issues related to a significant increase with the number of students requiring IEPs.

Over-budget in SPED area by approximately 400k

We ran a deficit of 100k for FY08 however, this year's budget was done before we had that information.

Transportation costs (vans, paying parents to transport out-of-district students and contract to transport students). Last year's contract for transportation was a portion of the deficit and this appears to be the same.

Staffing appears to have a deficit of approximately 400k. Included upgrading principals to 1 FTE and more paraprofessionals to work with the SPED population.

- 44 positions were staff members who left the district
- 25 transfers of Prescott teachers
- 31 new staff hired as replacements
- 9-10 positions left unfilled.

Looking at plan to deal with this year's shortfall and how it will impact 2010.

Last few years had + 6 percent increase in Chapter 70 aid. Next year 10 percent decrease in expected Chapter 70 aid equates to about \$1.2 million for GDRSD.

\$1.2 million equals about 20 teachers at 50k or 50 aides at 25k or any combination there-of.

New elevator/vertical chair lift has been installed and should be inspected tomorrow.

Signet Electronics has been working on minor issues with security systems installed this fall.

### **Report of the Chair**

Nothing to report.

### **Report of the Superintendent**

Will reschedule the Strategic Plan meeting with the clergy.

Staff came back to work even though they had lost electricity.

GROTON-DUNSTABLE REGIONAL SCHOOL COMMITTEE  
Business Meeting Minutes  
High School Library  
December 17, 2008 – 7:00 PM

Jeannie Mitchell stepped up to the plate to communicate with Dr. Genovese and S. Byrnes and out of district to get the message out about school closures and should get special recognition.

Learned about running a shelter out of the school.

Running a shelter in the HS and MS was a volunteered service in order to help the communities.

We had the opportunity to help.

The decision to not have school on Monday was made with consultation of the police chiefs and fire chiefs.

We have 5 days built into the schedule.

**Action Items**

Consent was disbanded

F. O'Connell moved that the Business meeting minutes from December 3, 2008 be accepted.

P. Carson seconded. The vote was 6 in favor, C. McKinney abstained. **MOTION passes 6:0:1.**

F. O'Connell moved that the GDRSD open three school choice positions in the ninth grade.

P. Carson seconded.

C. McKinney mentioned he will vote against because it seems like a bad time to take this chance.

Roll call vote

J. Frey voted yes; P. Carson voted no, F. O'Connell voted no; C. McKinney voted no; B. Erickson voted no; P. Funch voted no; J. Sjoberg voted no. **MOTION fails 1:6:0.**

J. Frey made a **MOTION** to adjourn at 9:00 P.M. and B. Erickson **SECONDED** that motion.

**MOTION passes 7:0:0**

Respectfully Submitted,  
Jon Sjoberg