

## GROTON-DUNSTABLE REGIONAL SCHOOL COMMITTEE

High School Library  
Business Meeting Minutes  
May 6, 2009  
(Approved 5/27/09)

### **PRESENT:**

Mr. Peter Carson  
Ms Berta Erickson  
Mr. Jim Frey  
Dr. Paul Funch, Chair  
Mr. Chuck McKinney, Vice-Chair (Arrived at 7:09 p.m.)  
Mr. Frank O'Connell  
Mr. Jon Sjoberg, Secretary (Arrived at 7:10 p.m.)

### **ADMINISTRATION:**

Dr. Alan Genovese, Superintendent  
Timothy Sheehan, Director of Business and Finance  
Ms Camilla Huston, Director of Pupil Services

### **STUDENT REPRESENTATIVES:**

Rafael Glod and Brittany Bowes (Left at 9:35 p.m.)

**STAFF, PRESS, OTHERS:** C. Beckert-Long, Groton Herald; P. Comtois, Groton Landmark; C. Jones, J. Gould, D. Mancini, M. Branco, S. Marcus-Cohen, See attached sign in sheet

### **CALL TO ORDER:**

The GDRSC Meeting was called to order at 7:05 p.m. by the chair, P. Funch

### **ANNOUNCEMENTS/SPOTLIGHT**

Rafael and Brittany read prepared announcements and a copy is attached to these minutes.

F. O'Connell announced he attended the Special Olympics on Friday and saw many students compete. He is amazed at the staff's dedication and said it was nice to see Principal Silverman and D. Twomey in attendance.

Dr. Funch announced there will be two events coming up to increase public awareness on Lyme disease. The first will be held at the Main Street Café on May 19<sup>th</sup> from 9:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m. and on May 30<sup>th</sup> there will be a screening of the documentary film *Under Our Skin* at the Lawrence Academy.

Dr. Genovese thanked the student representatives for recognizing their classmates for their achievements. He recognized Ms Karen Gartland for co-authoring the book Math For All.

Dr. Genovese announced a letter has gone home to parents about the swine flu. He noted should there be a confirmed case, they would likely just close the affected school and not the district. Students would be given projects to do so their learning time is not interrupted.

Dr. Genovese recognized Frank O'Connell for his dedication to the district and Dr. Funch recognized Chuck McKinney. They were presented with a certificate of appreciation and a Groton-Dunstable baseball cap. F. O'Connell served on the school committee for 7 years and Chuck McKinney served for 6 years.

### **PRESENTATIONS/DISCUSSION**

#### **Florence Roche Garden Project**

T. Doggett explained the committee, comprised of staff, parents, community members and Groton Local, would like to establish gardens around the school property. The gardens would include butterfly gardens, herb gardens and flower and vegetable gardens that will be used to enhance the curriculum and learning experience, as well as to beautify the landscape. The children will be planting the raised beds where the soil is

clean. Slides of the garden locations were shown. GDEF has awarded a \$1500 grant.

### **Boutwell/ECC Placement**

C. Huston explained Mr. Hoyt, Boutwell Early Childhood Director, was approached by the North Middlesex Regional School District to see if he could provide services for a cognitively and physically challenged child. After working collaboratively with the NMRSD staff, it was agreed this is a viable possibility. Members have a copy of an agreement that has been drawn up by Mr. Hoyt, in concert with the child's parents and Attorney Greenspan. It is intended that the child will attend the program for 2 years and will return to the NMRSD when he reaches kindergarten age. North Middlesex will retain physical responsibility for the child and provide transportation. The \$40,000 placement cost that will be received by Groton-Dunstable covers the cost of a paraprofessional and generates a little revenue. It will be made clear that should the agreement be broken, Groton-Dunstable will not be obligated to maintain the costs for the paraprofessional.

### **PPS Report - Camilla Huston, Director of Pupil Personnel Services**

C. Huston explained the Department of Pupil Personnel Services (PPS) includes the early childhood program at Boutwell, special education, guidance and the nurses in the district. She highlighted the programs and activities and noted a lot of great things are happening.

The Early Childhood Center has 50 students on IEP's (Individual Educational Programs) and 3 made sufficient progress to come off their IEP's. Twenty-one children will transition to kindergarten. The program provides services for a wide range of students including those with multiple learning and physical challenges and she noted it is a happy place.

Swallow Union has 68 students with IEP's, 22 of them new students with the re-districting and new children moving into the district. The Partner Program, with the New England Center for Children (NECC), provides in-home programming for 6 children with autism spectrum disorder. Three students who have extreme difficulty communicating use augmentative communication devices, such as a device with pictures, which help them speak.

Florence Roche has 72 students with IEP's and welcomed 3 new sped teachers. The R+ program was started this year which is designed to help students on the autism spectrum and has been quite successful.

The middle school has the largest number of students with IEP's (122). The Student Support Center was successfully launched and provides services on the autism spectrum. The STEP program provides services for children with significant challenges and nine of the students will be moving on to the high school. Co-teaching has been implemented for a second year, with plans to expand next year, and small group settings are offered for students who need extensive modifications to the curriculum. Paraprofessionals support students in general education classes.

There are 75 students with IEP's at the high school and the Sped staff uses a collaborative approach to meet their needs. The goal is to help students reach independence and parent involvement and participation in the Team process is essential. C. Huston noted that all the 10<sup>th</sup> grade special ed students who took MCAS passed. The Life Skills Program continues to provide for students with more complex needs and will become the P.A.V.E. (Providing Academic and Vocational Experiences) Program next year. Two teachers will be working in the program and will provide a range of offerings from academics through vocational preparedness. J. Frey asked if there is an effort to join forces with MEC. C. Huston said there is no effort underway but there could be as the program develops because the MEC program has established links with employers in the area.

The Guidance Department focused on three major areas for improvement this year: professional development, the development of a 504 manual to help clarify the process of identification, evaluation of students and implementation of 504 plans, and transition planning for smooth building to building transitions for incoming students. With respect to guidance counselors, the ratio of 250:1 is the norm. The ratio at the high school is 300:1 and there are three counselors. Approximately 20 students in the district have a 504 plan.

Nursing trends are reflective of the current times which include having an action plan for the swine flu, dealing with stresses on families due to the economic times and an array of medical conditions that include asthma, allergies and developmental disorders. The Nurse Coordinator participated in the Essential School Health Services Grant to collaborate with other nursing leaders and Public Health advisors on a regular basis. Next year the nurses anticipate continued collaboration with the school physician and nurse practitioner and reviewing and updating the Nursing Procedure Manual.

C. Huston said they have a very positive relationship with the SpedPAC and they are a wonderful resource.

### **SpedPAC Annual Presentation - SpedPAC Officers**

M. Sweeny introduced the SpedPAC officers and acknowledged Lisa McLaughlin who created and maintains their website and newsletter.

M. Sweeny said their primary mission is to provide information and emotional support to parents of children with special needs. They encourage an atmosphere of open communication and mutual respect and work with the senior administration for planning and developing SPED initiatives. Outreach programs include their website [www.gdspedpac.org](http://www.gdspedpac.org), parent roundtables, parent liaisons, a Yahoo! discussion group and a lecture series.

They opened their Parent Resource Center at Prescott on February 24<sup>th</sup> and here parents can find a resource library, computer access and a child activity center. A parent questionnaire was distributed and they had an 20% response rate with the majority being satisfied or highly satisfied with the services their child is receiving. Other accomplishments for this year include facilitating the parent/school partnership, advocating for students needs and broadened outreach. Looking forward, their efforts will focus on raising disability awareness, exploring student workshops, reviewing the District Curriculum Accommodation Plan (DCAP) and expanding the education resource libraries.

B. Erickson finds the SpedPAC to be a professional group unto themselves and attributes the huge improvement in special education to Dr. Genovese and his hiring of the last two directors. J. Frey asked if they feel more people will move into the district to take advantage of the great programs. M. Sweeny said this is something to watch. They try to help with early intervention for struggling readers so a child does not end up on an IEP at a later time and they try to help build partnerships at a very early stage through communication and collaboration to possibly minimize legal ramifications when a parent is unhappy.

### **Safe School Assessment Report**

Members received a copy of the Safe Schools Assessment Report. Dr. Genovese explained the administrative actions being implemented are focused on ensuring their schools achieve a high degree of safety for all students. Efforts include an annual review of safety plans with the police and fire chiefs in both towns, security systems in all schools, IS100 and IS700 NIMS training of all school level administrators and handbook revisions.

**Middle School** - Assistant Principal D. Mancini reviewed what types of incidents are required to be reported to the DESE (Department of Elementary and Secondary Education) and these include incidents involving drugs or violence on school property and any resulting suspension or expulsion, suspensions of more than 10 consecutive days for activities not drug or violence related and suspensions of 10 or less days of special education students for activities that are not drug or violence related. The reported incidents were reviewed and Assistant Principal M. Branco explained they have had a very clear focus during the past two years on their no tolerance policies and immediate consequences when it comes to inappropriate behavior. With 918 students in the middle school, the number of reportable incidents is low.

A behavior referral form (the "blue slip") is used when a teacher is unable to change a child's behavior. Referred behaviors, that are age typical, may include teasing, bullying, harassment, cheating, non-violent physical behaviors and insubordination. Seventy-one students have had one referral, 15 have had 2 referrals and 9 students have had three or more referrals. M. Branco noted the staff wants to handle issues in their classroom and they have great techniques to deal with problems. Consequences to date were reviewed and

66 students have received a written warning. Other consequences include detention, loss of a social privilege, in school suspension and out of school suspension. Suspensions are used as a last resort.

An assembly is held at the beginning of the school year where the student handbook and behavior expectations are discussed. With the small percentage of students who are having a difficult time following the rules, behavior plans are put in place to meet an individual student's needs. M. Branco said they have worked hard to let parents know there is an expected partnership between them and the school. The decreasing number of repeat offenders is a good indication they are using the right interventions.

B. Erickson said the atmosphere at the middle school is that it is strict but fair and is shown in the results. Dr. Funch agreed and added it is also supportive.

**High School** - Assistant Principal Chris Jones explained they reviewed the past five years of trends to make sure they were on the right track. As of April 29<sup>th</sup>, the overall discipline incidents are the lowest in five years. There has been a dramatic decrease in students cutting class, drug and alcohol policy violations, fighting and leaving school grounds. It was clarified the graphs being shown do not reflect all the incidents that occur but with all numbers being equal, there is a downward slope from five years ago to now.

J. Frey does not feel the data bears the assertion that there is a dramatic decrease in drug and alcohol incidents and feels what happened in the prior years is dramatic to the point where he would be incredulous of the number in 2005-2006. He said the trend is going in the right direction however.

Punitive consequences (detentions) are down and restorative consequences are up. This means a student works the issue out with the teacher. There has been an overall decrease in detentions and suspensions as well as a decrease in the number of repeat offenses. So far this year, 9% of the student body has received a detention and 4% has received a suspension. While in-school suspension programs are successful, the high school does not have a space or a person to watch the student.

While detention is the most used punishment, other consequences are used and these include community service, peer mediation and student/teacher agreed reparation. Interventions used prior to a suspension include the same consequences in addition to, among other things, meeting with the school psychologist, school social worker, the drug and alcohol counselor or having behavior intervention or modification plans. The interventions used after a student is suspended were reviewed and include those used prior to a suspension as well as mandated counseling sessions, mandated academic and social requirements upon re-entry and frequent check-ins with the administration. It was pointed out two students have been suspended three or more times this year.

In summary, C. Jones said all minor offenses are trending down or remaining constant and all major offenses are trending down due to clearer, consistent policy coupled with information and enforcement. Discipline systems that are student driven and created and administratively supported are successful. They continue to try to have ongoing efforts of outreach and inclusion of parents and students as partners in the process, consistent communication, clarification of expectations and transparency of the process.

J. Frey said there are good signs coming from this report but the high school does not necessarily have the "firm but fair" reputation the middle school has and the trust and perception is not there yet because of the high profile situations this year and this needs to be worked on. J. Gould believes it comes down to changing the culture of the school and enforcing the handbook. He said holding the kids accountable makes them raise the bar. C. McKinney thinks things are getting more fair and more consistent.

Dr. Genovese said the middle school and high school are two different animals. They are going in the right direction and the efforts of the administration are working. It is unfortunate there is a cloud over this because there may be a perception they are having incidents and things are happening at the high school that shouldn't be. He wants to change that perception tonight. There was some value to some people not liking the consequences because it got the administration to look at the policies and how to provide more clarity. He

said the majority of students remember the rules and those who forget the rules face varying consequences. Making the expectation clear and knowing the consequences results in appropriate behavior.

Dr. Funch strongly disagreed, saying they have to have clear consequences that are fair and reasonable and done in a system where people feel confident the administration is doing the right thing with their child. He said he knows many parents who are not comfortable with the way things are going and are uncomfortable with the process used. While the high school may have the right discipline and are consistent in applying it, he does not feel they are dealing with the whole problem well enough (restitution, dealing with the parents and community). B. Erickson added that what the high school is doing is the right thing.

### **Review of the 2008-2009 School Committee Goals**

Progress on the school committee's goals for 2008-2009 were reviewed.

**\*Initiate an early, progressive, deliberative budget process** - Basically this goal was met but members need to improve on deliberation within the committee and have interaction with what is happening with the Administrative Council and have the community involved in that deliberation

**\*Focus on policy compliance and review policies in the context of compliance issues** - This goal is ongoing and progress has been made

**\*Develop and approve a policy on advertising** - Many of the elements are in place and significant gains have been made

**\*Support GDRSD's Strategic Plan development by driving public engagement** - This has been an inclusive process and is a work in progress

**\*Re-establish a Communications Subcommittee** - Completed

### **Retirement of Tarbell**

C. McKinney said the committee will vote later whether to notify town officials of its intent to retire the Tarbell school at the conclusion of its lease with the town of Groton, or earlier if the town decides to do so. Not returning the building to the town immediately does pose some level of expense and/or possible liability to the district. The conclusion of the Tarbell Study Committee report, accepted by the school committee, said there is no viable use of this building for the district now, or in the foreseeable future.

### **Superintendent Evaluation**

Dr. Funch explained the evaluation instrument was unanimously approved by the school committee on November 15, 2008. He reviewed the process and said the summative evaluation goes into Dr. Genovese's personnel file. Individual evaluations are attached to the minutes of their April 29<sup>th</sup> workshop and while members had widely varying opinions, the average ratings in all areas were in the satisfactory range.

Dr. Genovese was evaluated on his five goals and six Principles of Accountability areas.

#### **Goals:**

1. Develop a strategic plan
2. Develop Financial Protocol manual
3. Develop regulations from Advertising Policy
4. Explore and implement cost savings initiatives
5. Raise levels of achievement for all students.

#### **Principles of Accountability**

- A. School committee relations
- B. Community Relations
- C. Staff and personnel relationships
- D. Business and Finance
- E. Educational Leadership
- F. Professional Attributes

Dr. Funch provided an overview of the comments as detailed in the Summative Evaluation.

Dr. Genovese appreciates their feedback and with respect to the areas that show higher results, he said he shares that with his Administrative Team, Mr. Sheehan and Dr. Rubel. He will focus on the suggested areas.

### **QUESTIONS/COMMENTS**

A woman asked if there will be a policy meeting before the handbook presentation to the school committee and P. Carson said probably not. With respect to the drug and alcohol policies, he said they met twice to go over the recommendations from the Administrative Team but the subcommittee does not have recommendations at this time. With respect to the graphs shown this evening reflecting a sharp drop in one of the year's for drug use, she said the school council was told there were outside influences that affected this as a house that was being used for drug sales was shut down. The sharp rise after that was attributed to cocaine coming in from Nashua.

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

**Policy** - P. Carson reported they have met twice and will be meeting next Tuesday to discuss implementing the feedback they heard into the advertising policy.

**Budget & Finance** - C. McKinney reported the Operations Manual needs to be written and before this happens, parameters need to be set for oversight on line item transfers. Budget and Finance recommends the 1000 level. T. Sheehan will be able to provide greater detail at a lower level when necessary.

**Communications Committee** - J. Frey reported they met this morning and have made good progress with the website. They will do a taping on Wednesday for their first cable access program to report on the strategic planning process. He will submit a written report to be passed along to the new Communications Committee members.

**Think Tank** - B. Erickson reported they will be meeting at 7:00 p.m. on May 14<sup>th</sup> in the MSN library.

**Report of Director of Business & Finance** - T. Sheehan distributed a copy of the FY09 Third Quarter Financial Report. A report in mid-March identified unfavorable spending trends in special education expenses and district-wide salaries, especially Unit D aides and administrators. The school committee voted to use \$75,000 from E&D as a contingency. After reviewing another month of spending trends, the administration now believes there is a strong possibility of a substantial operating budget surplus this year. The three factors that influence this change in the financial outlook include a spending rate increase that is substantially lower than the overall change in the budget, a significant increase in the year-to-date available funds not encumbered or spent and identification of known funding sources for most of the expected shortfalls. T. Sheehan noted there are still pending special education legal cases that could change things.

**Report of the Chair** - Dr. Funch acknowledged receipt of Dr. Genovese's letter of resignation at the April 15<sup>th</sup> school committee meeting.

He reported Groton's town meeting was held on April 27<sup>th</sup> and voters overwhelmingly supported the budget.

This will be his last meeting as chair and he thanked members for their support. He said he tried to serve fairly and with some humor. With Mr. McKinney and Mr. O'Connell no longer members, he noted the committee is hampered by inexperience and that it takes a long time for them to do something.

He reported they will need to put a search committee together this summer.

### **Report of the Superintendent**

**Curriculum Coordinator Update** - Dr. Genovese reported he has interviewed one applicant and will be interviewing two others. Per policy, the school committee needs to approve the salary range of \$75,000 to \$80,000.

**Safe School Assessment Report** - See earlier presentations

**Graduation Date** - The high school graduation will be held at 6:00 p.m. on June 5<sup>th</sup>.

**Donation** - Dr. Genovese reported a piano has been donated to Florence Roche.

**ACTION ITEMS**

**VOTE: Non Consent Action Items**

None

**VOTE: Consent Action Items**

J. SJOBERG MOVED TO APPROVE THE BUSINESS MEETING MINUTES OF APRIL 15, 2009.  
SECONDED BY P. CARSON

**SO VOTED IN FAVOR UNANIMOUSLY**

**VOTE: To Approve the Curriculum Coordinator Salary Range**

C. MCKINNEY MOVED THE GROTON-DUNSTABLE REGIONAL SCHOOL COMMITTEE APPROVE THE CURRICULUM COORDINATOR SALARY RANGE OF \$75,000 TO \$80,000 FOR FY10.  
SECONDED BY J. SJOBERG

So voted by roll call

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

**Opposed:** P. Funch

**VOTE: To Approve Boutwell/ECC Placement Agreement**

C. MCKINNEY MOVED THE GROTON-DUNSTABLE REGIONAL SCHOOL COMMITTEE APPROVE THE BOUTWELL/ECC PLACEMENT AGREEMENT WITH THE NORTH MIDDLESEX REGIONAL SCHOOL DISTRICT. SECONDED BY F. O'CONNELL

**SO VOTED IN FAVOR UNANIMOUSLY**

**VOTE: To Retire Tarbell Facility (if appropriate)**

C. MCKINNEY MOVED THAT THE SCHOOL COMMITTEE RETIRE THE TARBELL SCHOOL AND INITIATE DISCUSSIONS WITH THE TOWN OF GROTON ON HOW TO BEST TERMINATE THE EXISTING LEASE AGREEMENT ON THAT FACILITY. SECONDED BY P. CARSON

**SO VOTED IN FAVOR UNANIMOUSLY BY ROLL CALL**

**VOTE: To Accept Piano Donation**

C. MCKINNEY MOVED THE SCHOOL COMMITTEE ACCEPT THE DONATION OF A PIANO FOR FLORENCE ROCHE. SECONDED BY J. FREY

**SO VOTED IN FAVOR UNANIMOUSLY**

**ADJOURNMENT**

F. O'CONNELL MOVED TO ADJOURN AT 11:48 P.M. SECONDED BY C. MCKINNEY

**SO VOTED IN FAVOR UNANIMOUSLY**

Respectfully submitted,

Susan H. Smith  
Recording Secretary

With attachments