

**RUTLAND PUBLIC SCHOOL
REGULAR MEETING OF THE BOARD OF SCHOOL COMMISSIONERS
JANUARY 12, 2010**

School Board Members Present:

Peter Mello
Christopher Book
Hurley Cavacas, Jr.
Wayne Cooke
Richard Courcelle
Roberta Dress
Peter Fagan
Collin Fingon
Peter Forshay
Cindy Kilic-Murray
Rob Towle
Daniel Wigmore

Also Present:

Superintendent Mary Moran
Assistant Superintendent Rob Bliss
Peter Amons
Wil Cunningham
Lyle Jepson
Ellie McGarry
Bill Olsen
Kristin Francoeur
Bob Johnson
Jay Slenker
Christy Coloutti
Kristen Hubert
Susanne Engels
Jessica Henderson
Andrea McQuade
Larry Lattanzi
Glenn Olson
Ted Guilmette
Patricia Aigner
Cathy Farman

The meeting was called to order at 6:30 pm followed by the Pledge of Allegiance. Chair Mello noted all Commissioners were present.

CALL TO ORDER

Motion by Towle / Cooke to accept the minutes of the Dec. 15, 2009 regular school board meeting as written. Motion passed unanimously.

ROLL CALL

**MOTION:
MINUTES
12/15/09
MEETING**

Written Communication - None

WRITTEN COMMUNICATION

Oral Communication - Mr. Mello acknowledged the guests in the audience. He said he believes most people are present to support or advocate for drama at RHS. He thanked those who emailed him to give him advance notice. He allocated about 20 minutes for the discussion

ORAL COMMUNICATION

Drama Program Discussion- Vicki Vest of Rutland presented a petition with over 400 signatures of people asking Board members to vote no to the proposed cut to the drama program.

DRAMA PROGRAM DISCUSSION

Nick McElvie, president of Encore Theater, said he is from Hubbardton and is a student at RHS on School Choice. He said one of the major reasons he wanted to attend RHS was because of the excellent theater program. He read a statement in support of the drama program detailing its history and growth. He said it is a well-respected program and entails other things besides acting like lighting, sound, etc. He said having drama as a curriculum choice is vital for students to explore their talents and niche.

Vicki Vest said she researched the reasoning of the proposed cut to the drama program. She said it is stated that the RHS drama courses and classes have low enrollment and that even without the budget issue, it would be considered for cutting. She said the numbers are consistent with other drama programs in schools around the state. Ms. Vest said RHS has 12 students in Intro to Drama, 9 students in the Improv class and a brand new class, Stage Craft Design, which has never been offered before, now has 6 students. She said the YES plan offers a drama curricular course which enrolls between 30-45 students each year. It is considered a drama credit.

Mary Crowley of Rutland said she cares passionately about the arts. She said there was a time when Fine Arts Survey was a mandatory class for freshman. She thinks theater is incredibly important. Ms. Crowley recommended the book, *A Whole New Mind*, by Daniel Pink. She spoke favorably about the arts and how important it is to offer it to students. Ted Whalen of Rutland City said he has been associated with theater for many years and has done sets. He said theater is rich and rewarding and that it is important for students to find their dream.

Garth Vest, a sophomore at RHS said he knows that Encore is not being cut but cutting the drama program and Cathy Archer, his favorite teacher, will change Encore. He said Cathy Archer brought Encore to Rutland 25 years ago and it is an amazing program which puts on four productions each year. He reviewed the state and regional theater festivals which Rutland has hosted and attended. He said there are a number of students who attend theater colleges and go on in the profession. Without the theater program, students would probably lose the chance. Garth explained that Encore Theater is the after-school program, not for credit, run by Cathy Archer.

Taylor Ampatiellos, an incoming freshman, said he was disappointed to hear the program would be cut. He said a lot of money is spent on sports and he asked if a lot of people are going to make a living out of sports as adults. He asked for a portion of the drama program to be saved. Sam Lucci said when he was in 6th grade, the drama program at his elementary school was suspended for a year and it was devastating. He found Encore that summer. He said he is indebted to the program and asked the Board to reconsider.

Amberly Soto said she graduated from RHS last year. She was President of Encore Theater last year. She said Encore is a family and students start in freshman year meeting the others of all ages. She said Cathy Archer and Ron Lurvey are terrific and that Cathy is like her "mom." She considers Encore students her family. She hopes for a reconsideration. She said there are so many students who went into the program and then pursued a career in theater. Amberly said she is a theater minor now.

Susan Gerretson said she has a daughter who is a student at RHS. The school board has stated they are looking for a diverse curriculum. She thinks there are ways to have more students enrolled if there were not scheduling conflicts. She said Ms. Archer and Mr. Lurvey spend hundreds of hours in productions. She said students learn public speaking, literature, leadership, and a sense of belonging. Hannah Mace of Rutland Town said she is at RHS on School Choice and chose RHS partly due to the theater program. She is in Encore and acts and does lighting. She said it is a great place, not just for theater geeks. She said the theater classes are the foundations. Encore is a great place and she has learned a lot from it.

Christy Starinskas read something written by Vicki Vest about the significant impact of the theater program on students. She read a list of former RHS students who had been involved in the theater program who are working in jobs having to do with their drama knowledge and there are a number of current students pursuing related theater fields. She said students deserve the right to find a niche that is not found elsewhere. She asked the Board to vote against cutting drama at RHS.

Ruthellen Weston, a RHS parent, said the economy was worse last year and it was the first time the voters voted on the budget. It passed by a big margin. She asked not to cut too much. She said the salaries of upper management need to be reduced. She said they do a good job but the amounts they make are staggering to the average taxpayer. The salaries will remain high and no jobs need to be cut. She said the Board has argued in the past that salaries need to be high to retain good people. Ms. Weston said there are no other jobs to lure people away now. She advocated for keeping the drama program at RHS, which affects more than just these students. She said scholarship grantors and colleges make decisions about students based upon a total array of offerings. She said we cannot afford to jeopardize our students' futures.

Allie Gillingham from Chittenden said she graduated from RHS in 2008. She said Encore gave her a family and place to go. She stayed at school every day until 7 pm and it was the one thing she looked forward to. She got through the academics and looked forward to a way to express her creativity. She said she came from a small school with 12 students and no drama or music and she was welcomed at the RHS drama program. She said Cathy Archer and Ron Lurvey were like a second set of parents to her. She said the program taught team-building skills. She said the theater students with only two adults create magnificent results which so many people enjoy. Please do not cut the drama program.

Discussion on this item ended. Mr. Mello thanked everyone for attending and those who spoke in favor of the program. He said he does not know how the board will vote. There will be deliberation this evening and in one week. The budget must be adopted by Jan. 25. He said what was shared this evening will not go unheard although he does not think a final recommendation will be made tonight.

Tuition Rates - Mr. Amons said by January 15, school districts which accept tuition students must announce the tuition rate. He presented his recommendations which are based upon declining enrollment and increasing costs. There was discussion about the allowable tuition per the Department of Education based upon a review of allowable costs. Mr. Amons presented tuitions from other Vermont high schools. He said in FY09, our tuition was lowest in the state and he believes it will continue to be.

Motion by Forshay / Kilic-Murray to accept the tuition rates as recommended by the Chief Financial Officer:

- Secondary (7-12) of \$11,440
- Elementary of \$7,600
- Success of \$20,000

Passed unanimously.

FY11 Budget Deliberations - Mr. Mello said he believes the Board's responsibility to the citizens is to adopt a spending plan the Board can collectively defend. What do we want our students to have access to so Rutland continues to attract people? He said the Board also needs to take into account the current economic situation. Rutland is a low spending district and per pupil costs are well below the state average. He reviewed some of the Governor's recommendations to school districts regarding administrative costs and class sizes. Mr. Mello reviewed some of the projected budgets from around the state. He said even if Rutland's budget had a 0% increase, property taxes would increase 10.4%.

Mr. Amons reviewed the FY11 draft budget potential expense cuts. The list adds up to \$1.1 million in cuts but they are tiered differently than before. He reviewed the tier groups: Tier #1: Budget Adjustments and Maintenance Cuts; Tier #2: Educational Cuts; Tier #3: Education Services and Support Cuts; Tier #4: Reduce Classroom Resources. He said the cuts still equal \$1,147,000 but the tiers have changed a little.

Mr. Amons reviewed the steps used to determine the final tax rate:

Step 1: Computation of dollars needed from Education Fund.

Step 2: Compute equalized cost per pupil.

Step 3. Compute district spending adjustment

Step 4. Compute equalized tax rate.

Step 5. Compute final tax rate.

Mr. Amons said the possible FY11 tax rate is \$1.3918, which is a 10.4% increase, if the budget does not increase. If the budget increased 2.6%, the possible FY11 tax rate would be \$1.4526, which is a 15.2% increase. The handout shows the cumulative effects of the tiered cuts. If all four tiers were cut, the tax rate would be \$1.3918 (0% budget increase). Mr. Amons said since the numbers were put together, there has been some new information and he explained the favorable changes in health insurance, revenue change due to tuition rate, and increased surplus. Mr. Amons said after the board approves the budget, he submits it to the state for them to review. He reviewed how much Rutland City sends to the Education fund and how much they tap into it. He said that regarding income sensitivity, as budgets increase, caps increase. The higher caps are bad but they are not applied until one year later. He said the FY11 tax will not be as bad for the taxpayers who are eligible for income sensitivity.

Mr. Mello asked Commissioner Fagan if there is anything he has heard in the legislature about the state rate. Mr. Fagan said legislators are looking at this and to date, he has not heard anything to refute what Mr. Amons said.

Mr. Mello asked Board members to write down their thoughts about the proposed cuts. He said he promotes the premise that the administration is responsible for determining the budget, however, he thinks they should hear what Board members are thinking. He asked for the Board member thoughts to be shared and then to be reviewed by the leadership team and to be brought back to next week's meeting. He said the administration deserves to know what Board members are thinking. It is an opportunity for Board members to express individual options and choices.

Mr. Mello asked Mr. Olsen if continuing with the Encore Theater program will provide

sufficient theater opportunities for students. He asked if there is a direct connection between the curriculum and the after school program. Mr. Olsen said there is a connection for some students. The vast majority of the theater participation is in Encore Theater and that is what many students have asked him about. Mr. Olsen said the Encore Theater program is funded through the Activities Fund, similar to a sport. Leonard Vest, the father of a student who spoke earlier and is part of the theater program, said the fear is that if the drama program was eliminated from the curriculum, it might impact Encore Theater. He said there is a question of who will run the program. He said if the drama teacher's position is cut, it might make it more difficult for the teacher to come in and be a part of the program. The teacher might look for a job at another school. That is a consideration.

Board members discussed some of the line items in the potential expense cuts. Mr. Bliss explained the mentoring program. Board members shared their specific thoughts about the budget and they will be compiled by the administration.

PERSONNEL

Motion by Kilic-Murray / Cavacas to approve the Licensed and Non-licensed section of the Personnel Memorandum No. 416 dated Jan. 8, 2010, as recommended by the Superintendent of Schools.

MOTION:
APPROVE
PERSONNEL
MEMO #416

The appointments, long term substitute appointments, and retirements were reviewed by Superintendent Moran. They are attached.

Motion passed.

Announcements

- Ms. Moran showed off a book illustrated by Ms. Isabelle's 3rd graders. She thanked Cathy Farman and Carol Isabelle. The book is called The Backyard Birds Held a Meeting.
- Compliments to the generosity of staff for their support of the United Way campaign. There has been more than \$8600 collected, more than last year. Every school and category of employee made contributions. Special compliments to the maintenance department, which more than doubled their department-wide contribution.
- Congratulations to students who graduated from Howe Center campus in January. Mr. Bliss said there were four students and it was a nice ceremony. They are motivated students who take a different path. Congratulations to the Howe Center team and staff.
- Ms. Moran distributed the most recent Tapestry Program offerings.
- Northeast's Reading is Fundamental book distribution was held today. This is a federally funded program. Next week, grade 2 is visiting Casella Waste Management. Jan. 22 is PTC movie night with the showing of Cloudy with a Chance of Meatball.
- Northwest will hold Favorite Person Event on Jan. 22. Jan. 26 is Multi-Cultural Day. On Jan. 29, progress reports go home for K-2 students. Today was Tool Tour for kindergartners to go to STC.
- At RIS, DinoMan recently entertained the children with an interactive lesson. Today was the final and successful H1N1 clinic. Kudos to everyone involved.
- RHS Annual Open House for 8th graders is Jan. 21.

SUPERIN-
TENDENT'S
REPORT

ANNOUNCE-
MENTS

- The Unpredictables, the women's a capella choir sang the Canadian National Anthem and the Star Spangled Banner recently at the CSC Women's hockey tournament and will soon sing for the men's team.
- The Jazz Ensemble will perform on Jan.28 in the RHS Theater. They will welcome the jazzers from Rutland Town School,
- STC students from the Hospitality & Entrepreneurship, Health Careers, and Human Services Programs recently participated in The Gift of Life Marathon at the Paramount Theater. Ten students in the Forestry and Natural Resources and Public Safety Services Programs at STC recently became certified at the Awareness Level in the area of Hazardous Materials.

ANNOUNCE-
MENTS, cont.

Legislative Report - Ms. Moran commended the legislative report from VSBA. Mr. Fagan gave an update on committee reports, action, and education items being discussed and bills coming forward.

LEGISLA-
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REPORT

COMM.
REPORTS

Community Outreach Planning and Budget Buddies Schedule - Ms. Kilic - Murray described the ways Budget Buddies is informing the public about the budget and the bond vote for Stafford Technical Center. There are printed informational pieces and FAQ sheets which will be finalized as soon as the budget is ratified. Other plans include getting out information at sporting events and parent-teacher conferences, using PEG-TV, attending social clubs, and updating www.budgetbuddies.org. There is a new Fan page on Facebook for Rutland Public Schools. There will be a phone bank and lawn signs. Volunteers are needed. People needing an absentee ballot should contact city hall. Commissioner Fingon said if members of the public have questions or would like to provide input, it would be great if they would call a board member or send an email so board members know what they are thinking and what they want before the budget is finalized.

COMMUN-
ITY
OUTREACH
PLANNING
& BUDGET
BUDDIES
SCHEDULE

Mr. Fagan said the legislature heard from a consultant who is recommending that to save money, the process should be improved. He also said this year, there will be legislation that all legislators take a 5% pay cut and some are taking more.

New Business - None

NEW & OLD
BUSINESS

Old Business - None

Motion by Courcelle / Forshay at 8:49 pm, after a recess, for the board to convene to executive session for the purpose of discussing legal contractual matters, the premature release of information regarding those subjects which would place the Board at a substantial disadvantage. Unanimously passed by those in attendance.

MOTION:
EXECUTIVE
SESSION

PUBLIC
SESSION

The Board came out of executive session at 9:30 pm.

ADJOURN

Motion by Cooke/Forshay to adjourn at 9:31 pm. Passed.

Respectfully submitted

Janet Mondlak, Recording Secretary