

TOWN OF PROVINCETOWN

SCHOOL COMMITTEE

Meeting Minutes of February 23, 1999

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Members Present: Lois Borgesi (Chair), Frank Wills, William Rogers.

Members Absent: Adrienne Duncan (with excuse).

Others Present: Dr. Susan Fleming (Superintendent), Michael Marino (PHS Principal), William Rokicki (VMES Principal/Director of Student Services), parents and staff.

REGULAR SESSION

Chair Lois Borgesi convened the Regular Session at 7:04 PM. Three members of the School Committee were present and one

VISITORS' STATEMENTS

Jessica Waugh spoke about the voluntary donation insert that had been sent out with the Motor Vehicle Excise Tax bill, asking who kept track of the donations, how much had been received and where did the money go.

Paul Ferrick spoke about the 0% increase budget, asking if cuts were to come from other personnel.

Jody Brown read a statement about being a parent and learning from her children the lesson of not giving up and that she wanted the School Committee to reconsider the 0% increase budget.

MINUTES

- January 27, 1999 - Postponed.

COMMUNICATIONS

Dr. Fleming presented the following:

- That she had sent a copy of the School's articles for the April 5, 1999 Town Meeting;
- The Monthly Financial Statement, dated 2/26/1999;

Lois Borgesi and Dr. Fleming initiated a discussion about responding to the letter from the Selectmen concerning the

letter sent home to parents of VMES students on the budget issue. Lois Borgesi reviewed the response received from Town Counsel, which said that such a letter was only illegal if the issue was a ballot question. Lois Borgesi also reread portions of the letter from the Selectmen. Dr. Fleming said that the intentions of those involved had been good and that all the kids had eventually gotten stickers. Mr. Rokicki had followed up with a letter of explanation. Dr. Fleming affirmed that they want to encourage parent participation without rewarding one side or the other. Frank Wills commented that the whole thing was a learning experience and that using stickers was the biggest mistake. Lois Borgesi read from the Selectmen's letter the question of whether school paper or a school copier had been used. Ms Nelson responded from the audience that it had been a mix of personal and school paper. She said that she felt insulted that the Selectmen should be asking volunteer parents about paper, that she was not given a set of rules when she first volunteered. She maintained that the Council and PTA should have access to paper and a copier. Lois Borgesi responded by saying that the School Committee was trying to gather information so as to be able to make a decision. She disclosed that she, too, is a member of the PTA and was a previous member of the VMES School Council. Ms Nelson asked how they would feel if challenged about the use of school resources. Frank Wills suggested moving on to the rest of the Selectmen's letter. Lois Borgesi read the rest of the Selectmen's letter and also read Mr. Rokicki's letter.

Dr. Fleming commented that there have been other schools cited for trying to influence ballot questions. She said they needed to investigate and inform the Selectmen that no law had been broken, although the action had been inappropriate. Paul Ferrick said that they had not received a legal opinion that the original letter was not illegal, so it was really a matter of opinion whether it was offensive or not and that there was not really anything to discuss. Jessica Waegh said she felt it was a communication problem and suggested drawing up a flow chart of all school organizations with their various distinct jurisdictions.

William Rogers said he was pleased with the parents' interest, that it was unfortunate that Mr. Rokicki and others did not understand the School Committee budget vote. He maintained that they are not beholden to the Selectmen and do not need to answer the Selectmen's questions. Frank Wills said he agreed on a gut level with William Rogers, but felt a brief answer would suffice.

William Rogers moved to ask the Selectmen why they are extorting money from property owners for septic systems. There was no second to this motion.

Lois Borgesi said she agreed with Frank Wills, that a brief answer with a summary response was the way to go. Paul Ferrick said that the School Council also felt that no response was required. Ms Nelson asked if the Selectmen had received any complaints. Lois Borgesi read from the Selectmen's letter and said she could not determine if there had been any complaints.

Frank Wills commented that he could not make a motion, because there was no one present to second. Lois Borgesi said that the letter had been addressed to her and William Rogers asked if it had been sent to her as Chair of the School Committee. Lois Borgesi said that it had been sent to her as Chair. She asked for a motion to make no response to the Selectmen's letter. Frank Wills said that he would not second such a motion.

Paul Ferrick said that if a response was sent, that he wanted it noted that the VMES Council was opposed. Lois Borgesi said that she wanted everyone to continue working cooperatively and that she felt a response was therefore justified. An unidentified member of the audience asked if the Selectmen wouldn't learn about the controversy from reading the newspaper and noted that two reporters were present. Lois Borgesi said that was true, but it was not the way the School Committee should do business. Frank Wills said he wished a copy of Robert's Rules were available to help determine if a motion was necessary or to answer the question of when only three School Committee members were present, could the Chair second a motion. Lois Borgesi said she was following the tradition of the School Committee Chair by not making or seconding motions. An unidentified audience member asked if they could not find a compromise. William Rogers stated again that he felt no response was necessary. Lois Borgesi stated that she would look into the issue and, if possible, would write a letter of response. The unidentified audience member asked that a copy of the response be provided, if one was sent.

Dr. Fleming presented the following:

- VMES Newsletter dated February 10, 1999;
- That there was to be a meeting on Fiscal Realities on February 25, 1999. Frank Wills reported on the Fiscal

Realities meeting of February 18, 1999, that the Town Manager had announced the School Committee 0% increase budget.;

- That the current school nurse was leaving and that the position had been advertised as a temporary nurse at 60%, but that there were no candidates so far;
- The current copy of the PHS Foghorn;
- That a letter had been received from the VMES School Council asking about the \$9,300 cut and asking that the Council be allowed to make recommendations in the future. Dr. Fleming reminded those present that line item changes could be made at any time;
- The current copy of City and Town.

EDUCATION UPDATE

SPED UPDATE

Mr. Rokicki explained the report he had prepared and distributed. Among many points, he said that SPED at Provincetown was strong and read the goals of the program. He also explained several statistics and reviewed the report section on status. After going over the section on Conclusions/Recommendations, Mr. Rokicki affirmed the program is committed to maintaining a high level of service.

Frank Wills said he wanted to know about the process in general terms, from the determination of where a child is to be best served - locally, on-Cape or off-Cape. Mr. Rokicki explained the process, saying that the children are evaluated and an IEP is developed by a team. The law stipulates that they must determine the least restrictive environment. Parents can accept or reject any part of the IEP. Mr. Rokicki then reviewed the appeal process. Frank Wills suggested postponing the discussion to allow School Committee members to frame questions, especially about the limits of the various entities involved and about participation in collaborative programs. Dr. Fleming said that almost none of the schools on the Outer Cape are participating in collaborative programs because of the distances involved. William Rogers said that the report was good in theory, but asked what is really happening? Lois Borgesi suggested that members take the time to read the report and to put together specific questions. She said she had been looking for a continuation of Mr. Rokicki's previous report, especially concerning any compliance issues. William Rogers said that he also wanted to hear from Mr. Marino about the situation at the High School. Dr. Fleming said that they needed to report on SPED at a school level basis.

Other - None.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

FY 2000 Budget/Public Education - Dr. Fleming referred to the new budget pages and said that changes have been made to reflect the 0% increase budget. She then responded to Mr Ferrick's question during Visitors' Statements concerning staffing cuts and said that two staffing cuts have remained. Mr Ferrick asked if the VMES cutback is in the number of hours worked and Dr. Fleming responded with details about the TA's hour reductions. Mr Ferrick then expressed concern about whether there is actually an entire staff person who is being cut and Dr. Fleming answered that no one person was being cut, that no one who is working now will lose their job, unless Mr. Rokicki decides otherwise over the summer. Or if a TA is attached to a specific student and that student leaves the district.

Ms Nelson asked about the \$8,000 cut from Early Learning and Dr. Fleming replied that all staffing in Early Learning will come back. She then explained the details of the line-item funding sources and affirmed that there were no real cuts. Peggy Sheehan said she was not clear about the High School TA's, whether they are part of the SPED program and Dr. Fleming said, yes, High School TA's in SPED.

Dr. Fleming asked for suggestions for publicizing the school budget, mentioning getting the word out to organizations like the PBG, the Chamber of Commerce, etc. Lois Borgesi said she felt they should wait until after all the financial meetings are complete.

Preliminary Report from Demographic Study - Dr. Fleming reported that the consultant will have a preliminary report ready on March 9th and that he may come to the School Committee meeting that night to explain the report. In response

to a question from the audience, Dr. Fleming explained the consultant's credentials and the work he was doing.

School Building Projects - Dr. Fleming distributed a spreadsheet printout of Long Term Planning for Capitol Projects. The printout included some notes from the demographic study consultant. She said that the High School has lots of building space per pupil and that there was a need to redesign and redefine that space. She also referred to a letter from the Selectmen requesting that the Annex be declared surplus so that it could be sold. Dr. Fleming then asked William Rogers a question about the location of the septic system and William Rogers replied that he had not found any records at Town Hall.

Mr Ferrick asked who wanted the demographic study and Dr. Fleming explained that one of the reimbursement programs required that demographic study be done. Mr Ferrick then asked who determined how many square feet per pupil was required. Dr. Fleming said that the question was whether to simply repair the buildings or whether it was more cost effective to redesign them. The State would not approve a building addition if there were too few kids in a very large space. She said that the Department of Education has set standards for the space-per-pupil requirements. Mr. Ferrick then asked if the standard were state law or simply a Department of Education rule. Dr. Fleming said she believed the standard was like a Building Code and was determined by the Legislature. Mr. Ferrick said that the rules should be determined by MCAS scores. Dr. Fleming said that the State has decided to fund underachieving schools for two years, but if there is no improvement, they will first replace school principals and then staff. These are extreme measures being contemplated. Frank Wills commented that the space-per-pupil standard was probably meant to prevent school overcrowding. Dr. Fleming said that Provincetown is way over the space requirement in both school buildings.

Lois Borgesi asked about the possibility of the Recreation Department with the schools. Dr. Fleming said that the State will not allow them to build an addition, but that they can work within the existing building. She said they needed to research the implications and details more. William Rogers asked if the Selectmen can promote a Town Meeting article to combine the Recreation Department with the school and Lois Borgesi replied that she believed that the School Committee has the right to say no, but that they needed to investigate and determine what the parameters are. Dr. Fleming then asked if a Town Meeting article could overrule the wish of the School Committee and Lois Borgesi said she thought not. She then asked where would the money from the sale of the Annex go. They need more information and should not be pushed into action without all the facts.

Fiscal Planning/Facilities - Dr. Fleming said that they needed to start determining the future of the school system, starting now or after Town Meeting. Frank Wills said that they should start the discussion sooner than later, that they will be getting the "flavor" at the financial and fiscal meetings. He said that he feels the decision on the budget has generated support. Dr. Fleming agreed that she felt the opinion of the various boards and committees was to support a K to 12 system, so long as costs were reasonable. She reiterated that they needed to discuss redesigning the schools and that they cannot change the cost-per-pupil without changing staff, because 85% of the overall cost is in staffing. Frank Wills said they had gained a certain element of time, that the pressure has lessened. He said that they needed to respond to the tough questions, but that they should also be prepared to ask questions. Dr. Fleming said she felt they needed to work toward a unified educational vision.

Other - William Rogers asked if there had been any progress on the Fred Turner issue and Dr. Fleming replied that they may not be able to help, but that they will answer Mr. Turner in some way.

NEW BUSINESS

Truro Tuition Agreement - Lois Borgesi said that Ken Oxtoby, Chair of the Truro School Committee was scheduled to go in the hospital on March 9th and had requested that the joint meeting be on a different date. Mr Oxtoby also said that he would like the sub-committees to meet first. Lois Borgesi said that she could not be on the sub-committee due to a conflict of interest. Dr. Fleming reviewed the history of the tuition agreement. Frank Wills asked about specific figures in a letter dated October 27, 1998 and Dr. Fleming explained how the amounts had been calculated. Dr. Fleming said that she recommended continuing the Agreement as is and that she believed Truro will agree to that. Lois Borgesi said that they would have the joint meeting after the sub-committees have dealt with the majority of questions.

Provincetown School Committee Policies - 1st Readings

Frank Wills asked whether the policies being reviewed were consistent with the Student Handbook and that he did not see any obvious conflicts. Lois Borgesi reviewed the School Committee's previous practice of approving whole sections of the Policy Manual at a time. By consensus, the members agreed to review only a few policies each meeting. Dr. Fleming offered to also provide copies of the policies from the first Manual, which was put out in the mid-1970's.

Policy IA - Instructional Goals - *Frank Wills moved to approve for the first reading, William Rogers seconded and it was so voted, 3-0, 1 absent (Adrienne Duncan).*

Policy IB - Academic Freedom - *Frank Wills moved to approve for the first reading, William Rogers seconded and it was so voted, 3-0, 1 absent (Adrienne Duncan).*

Policy IC/ICA - School Year/School Calendar - *Frank Wills moved to approve for the first reading, William Rogers seconded.* Lois Borgesi asked if the 185 day, 5 hour/day schedule still in effect at the elementary school and Dr. Fleming said, yes. Lois Borgesi asked if the same schedule was in effect at the High School and Dr. Fleming again said, yes. *The Committee voted to approve the motion, 3-0, 1 absent (Adrienne Duncan).*

Policy ID - School Day - *Frank Wills moved to approve for the first reading, William Rogers seconded and it was so voted, 3-0, 1 absent (Adrienne Duncan).* Frank Wills asked about flexibility in this policy versus rigidity in Policy IC/ICA and Dr. Fleming explained the difference.

Policy IE - Organization of Instruction - *Frank Wills moved to approve with modifications for the first reading, William Rogers seconded.* After discussion, Frank Wills and William Rogers withdrew their motion to provide more time for modifications.

Other - Frank Wills commented on the issue of starting a dialogue with speakers during Visitors' Statements, saying that they could answer questions if the answers are definite facts. Lois Borgesi said that members could also respond, per the School Committee Procedures, if a majority so votes.

CLOSING STATEMENTS

Dr. Fleming responded to the question from Jessica Waugh about the voluntary donation slips sent with the tax bills saying she has researched the matter and that the funds are kept in special accounts. Dr. Fleming then asked On-Call Secretary Rachel Crosby to inquire with the Town Treasurer about the amounts currently in the funds and how the funds were administered.

Frank Wills commented on the amount given out to students at graduation and asked if there was any way to get money for programs for kids in school now.

Frank Wills made a motion to adjourn at 9:30 PM and it was so voted unanimously.