

## GROTON-DUNSTABLE REGIONAL SCHOOL COMMITTEE

High School Library  
Business Meeting Minutes  
**February 6, 2008**  
(Approved as amended February 27, 2008)

### **PRESENT:**

Ms Cindy Barrett, Chair  
Dr. Forrest Buzan, Vice-Chair  
Peter Carson  
Ms Berta Erickson  
Dr. Paul Funch  
Mr. Chuck McKinney  
Mr. Frank O'Connell

### **ADMINISTRATION:**

Dr. Alan Genovese, Superintendent  
Timothy Sheehan, Director of Business and Finance  
Dr. Susan Rubel, Director of Curriculum/Staff Development

### **STUDENT REPRESENTATIVES:**

Rafael Glod  
Kayleigh O'Brien

**STAFF, PRESS, OTHERS:** H. Sato, Lowell Sun; P. Comtois, Groton Landmark; R. Hoyt, B. Lavin, P. Myerson, R. Goguen, S. Marcus-Cohen, Dr. Argenziano, F. Dillon, D. Twomey, M. Brisson, J. Degen  
See attached sign-in sheet

### **CALL TO ORDER:**

The GDRSC Meeting was called to order at 6:00 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 7:02 p.m., with no plans to return to executive session, and was called to order by the by the chair, C. Barrett.

### **ANNOUNCEMENTS**

C. Barrett reviewed the rules for the Committee's public comments period.

Due to tonight's lengthy agenda, not all of the prepared announcements were read. A copy of the announcements is attached to these minutes and will be included in the school newsletters.

F. Buzan announced the Discovery Museums will have a Free to Explore weekend for Groton on March 1<sup>st</sup> and March 2<sup>nd</sup>. Groton residents will receive free admission, with proof of residency, to both buildings and discounts will be available for gift shop items and annual membership.

Dr. Genovese announced they have had a number of incidents at the middle school and high school in the last month and protocols have not been followed to everyone's satisfaction. He, the principals of the middle school and high school and the chiefs of police met recently to review the Memorandum of Understanding and talked about the "lessons learned" and agreed on how they will move forward with protocols.

K. Flanagan announced the opening of GDEF's tenth grant cycle and stated they have funded almost \$177,000 in grants. Applications must be postmarked by March 1<sup>st</sup> and must contain the appropriate Groton Dunstable administrative signatures. Approved grants will be announced the week of April 14<sup>th</sup>.

C. Barrett announced she would like to schedule an additional school committee meeting next Wednesday

night for further discussion on the possible future plan for Prescott, possible redistricting, the possible football program and the FY09 budget.

### **MINUTES**

C. MCKINNEY MOVED TO ACCEPT THE BUSINESS MEETING MINUTES OF JANUARY 16, 2008.

SECONDED BY P. CARSON

**SO VOTED IN FAVOR UNANIMOUSLY**

### **QUESTIONS/COMMENTS**

J. Degen stated the committee has not elaborated on the incidents which have occurred although he is very familiar with them. He is very concerned about the bomb threat at the middle school on January 11<sup>th</sup> and while that incident happened prior to 11:00 a.m., it was not reported to the police until 2:40 p.m. He is concerned that the police were not notified right away and does not feel waiting to meet with the chiefs of police four weeks later is appropriate. He also feels investigating things internally was not appropriate. Dr. Genovese said there was an investigation done at the school and there were conversations with the police chief the same day but there was a lag in time. School officials handled the incident quickly and appropriately and were able to determine who was responsible. He does not take issue with Mr. Degen's point. He stated he cannot elaborate on the other incidents since information shared between the district and the police is confidential. Mr. Degen requested there be better communication and that the issues be kept in the forefront.

A. Zimmon read an open letter to the school committee from a group of concerned parents regarding the meetings held by Dr. Genovese to discuss the possibility of taking Prescott offline . A copy is attached to these minutes.

### **PRESENTATIONS/DISCUSSION**

#### **Tim Savoy - Music Field Trip**

T. Savoy stated he likes to take the band and chorus chamber choir to a competition every year where they get the chance to be adjudicated by musicians. The Music Honor Society chooses a destination every year and this year they voted unanimously to go the Baltimore Capital Musicfest.

Dr. Funch asked the student/chaperone ratio and was advised it is 1:15. There will be four boys or girls to a room and chaperones will be in separate rooms. B. Erickson asked if the security guards will be CORI checked according to Massachusetts standards and was told yes. C. Barrett pointed out that students are only allowed to carry epi-pens and asked that the form be updated. She also suggested that they use the same parent consent form as last year. Dr. Funch asked that all the groups use the same forms when recommending a trip and Dr. Genovese said the packets will be updated.

C. MCKINNEY MOVED TO SUSPEND THE RULES TO ADVANCE FOR IMMEDIATE CONSIDERATION THE APPROVAL OF THE MUSIC FIELD TRIP. SECONDED BY F. O'CONNELL

**SO VOTED IN FAVOR UNANIMOUSLY**

C. MCKINNEY MOVED THE SCHOOL COMMITTEE APPROVE THE MUSIC FIELD TRIP FROM MAY 1, 2008 THROUGH MAY 4, 2008 AS OUTLINED IN THEIR PACKET. SECONDED BY P. CARSON

**SO VOTED IN FAVOR UNANIMOUSLY**

#### **EQA - Dr. Agenziano**

Dr. Agenziano, Deputy of EQA, explained the Office of Educational Quality and Accountability was created through the legislature in 2001. They will get a new name after the appointment of a Secretary of Education in about four weeks, they will be free of the Board of Education and the Commission of Education and remain independent.

Dr. Agenziano reviewed the six standards and the findings and stated the district received a satisfactory score in all the standards. This score means the district is doing the job to the best of their ability and they should be applauded for their quality report. Less than 1% receive an excellent rating and it is usually given when

something is modeled state-wide.

F. O'Connell asked if anyone is listening to the concerns about funding cuts. Dr. Agenziano said the governor's advisor stated at an EMAC board meeting that the governor is convinced Massachusetts taxpayers will "step up" and pay for what is needed. A gentleman asked if any district has received an excellent in financial management and Dr. Agenziano believes the previous superintendent in Plymouth created an outstanding model. He stated the district's finances are fine but resources are dwindling and agrees it is a difficult situation.

A gentleman asked if input is taken from the community when the audit is done. Dr. Agenziano said it is not so much what they hear; they ask for documents and the data is analyzed against their indicators and if they don't find the data, they ask questions. The team that comes out does interviews and visits classrooms.

C. Barrett said parents from the individual school councils would have met with the EQA team.

The 28 page condensed report will be made available to the public once it is received.

### **Football - Dan Twomey**

Athletic Director Dan Twomey provided an overview on the history of the program and the goals are to continue to offer the best possible co-curricular opportunities to students at Groton Dunstable, to build high school and community spirit and to be cost efficient. The plan for 2008 is to offer a varsity and JV team and a fall football cheerleading team that will be funded outside the school operating budget through user fees, a Booster Club donation and the GDRHS Football Club. He stated there is a grass roots movement for football in the town and this is an alternative way of decreasing the cost of the program to the district.

He reviewed the historical timeline, stating they started their first year co-op program with Ayer in 1996 and have been with them to the present. The school committee requested a plan for the implementation of football in 2002 and a plan for JV football was proposed in 2005. D. Twomey said he has done numerous open forums, meetings with parents and the school committee, and has talked with the Groton Dunstable Youth Football, the Mid Wach league and others since 2005 to get to this point. He stated there is an appropriate varsity schedule available, a commitment to fund the program outside the budget, the existing facilities will support the program and the Ayer/Groton Dunstable co-op has expired. Students will be able to expect to practice on the high school grounds, have the chance to play for their school and community and be a part of something special.

D. Twomey reviewed the field areas, stating the current facilities will accommodate practices and games. The existing field maintenance plan would continue and additional funds will be donated to help with maintenance expenses. He stated the locker rooms are also sufficient. A hiring committee would be organized to select the head coach and the head coach and Athletic Director would hire assistant and sub-varsity coaches.

The GDRHS Football Club would pledge to generate the necessary funds for three years, above the gate receipts and user fees, with the goal of having roughly \$50,000 before the start of year one on July 1, 2008. Funds would be placed in a separate revolving account and all purchases would be made through the athletic department.

Year by year cost estimates were reviewed and it was noted the operating costs by year four would be \$35,000 to \$40,000 and it would cost the district about \$10,000 to \$15,000 after user fees and gate revenues. If no funding is available at that time, there would be a new user fee structure, a restructure of offered programs or no football program. D. Twomey stated the bleachers, portable sound system and scoreboard are all sufficient. The program would be covered under the current insurance plan. They want to offer a program that is right for the students and the community and any student interested in participating in the football program will have the opportunity.

F. Buzan asked for the specific donation amount and the source. D. Twomey said there is an outside group of people going through the umbrella of the Booster Club or the umbrella of a 501C3. They have had discussions with the administration and fundraising would be in line with district policies. The amount will differ depending on the number of participants. C. Barrett said the committee needs to consider a structure for receiving the

donations to fund the program.

P. Carson asked if there has been discussion about funding artificial turf using Groton's EPA funds and D. Twomey said there was an exploratory thing but nothing formal. He stated it would be nice to have but it is not necessary to offer the program. P. Carson feels right field is worn down from practicing and D. Twomey said he does not know the age of the picture that was shown but there has not been much practice on that area for any sport.

Dr. Funch asked if there is a contract with the football league and D. Twomey said they have discussed an agreement. Dr. Funch would like to see a commitment on both sides if they were to commit to this for three years. He asked if there are any commercial sources of the funding and if it would be cash or equipment. D. Twomey said both and Dr. Funch would want to see policy KCD, Public Gifts to the Schools, included in any contract. He asked how much of Mr. Twomey's time would be spent on the budget and running the program and D. Twomey said he does not know. Dr. Funch asked the anticipated loss of user fees from students who play another sport and would now play football. D. Twomey feels it would be minimal since there usually is not a crossover from other sports.

B. Erickson asked who would make up the hiring committee and D. Twomey said himself, another coach, a teacher, parents and sometimes a student, and noted it is a lengthy process. She asked how the fourth year costs compare to existing sports programs and D. Twomey feels it would be about the same. T. Sheehan said about 45% of the athletic budget overall comes from the operating budget and is almost exclusively dedicated to salaries.

K. O'Brien said students would like the opportunity to support a football team. R. Glod agrees but feels the football players have ties to their teammates in Ayer.

F. O'Connell thanked Mr. Twomey and the community for making something possible that otherwise wouldn't happen. He said they need to go into this with their eyes "wide open". He stated there is a \$10,000 line item in the budget for the football program that supports the students that go to Ayer and understands that money would go to support this program. D. Twomey said it would go toward the general budget and would not be used for football. T. Sheehan clarified there is no line item in the FY08 operating budget for the \$10,000 payment to Ayer as user fees pay that fee. If they have less than 40 students participating, there is a net outflow of money to Ayer over and above the user fees. It was noted Ayer spends about \$30,000, budgetary-wise, for the football program.

F. Buzan asked if it is true that the kids will not be playing football in Ayer next year and D. Twomey said yes. The cooperative program was unacceptable as they wanted the players to complete their career in Ayer and Groton Dunstable would still not be able to have any kind of varsity generated program. Ayer was notified in early January and he had discussion with the high school administration team. F. Buzan asked how football fits into the district's overall educational vision. Dr. Genovese said they want to be a comprehensive high school and offer as many opportunities as they can in the district. He said they need to open pathways for people to partner with the district.

Whether it is fair or not, P. Carson feels some people will not vote for an override because they added football and asked if it is more important to push the football program through rather than making sure they have adequate classroom space and guidance counselors. He feels the school committee should have been involved in this from the beginning and feels he has no choice but to vote no on accepting the money and is frustrated and angry.

C. McKinney said it is false to say the committee's priorities are confused and noted this is about supporting a

group that wants to fund an athletic program and discussion has been ongoing for years. He thinks it is a straightforward decision.

Dr. Funch said they have not seen the expenses until tonight, this has been done behind the committee's back and he objects to the process. He also feels the committee should have been apprised of the discussion with Ayer that made an irreversible decision. He also does not see how football can go on the fields and not impact soccer and Lacrosse. D. Twomey said it will work as there is a section of the extra baseball field that has not been used for any practice. B. Erickson said the underlying problem in the whole theme of tonight is that they are not properly communicating all the way around and problems will keep coming back.

C. Barrett asked if they could have an extra meeting on February 13<sup>th</sup>. Dr. Funch is not available and F. Buzan said his schedule is in flux and does not believe they should schedule such important votes on an extra meeting night. C. Barrett advised Mr. Twomey the motion on this will be delayed to their February 27<sup>th</sup> meeting.

### **Prescott School**

Dr. Genovese announced a ConnectEd call will go out to elementary school parents tomorrow regarding another meeting at the PAC on Monday, February 11<sup>th</sup> at 7:00 p.m. The administrative team asked the essential question - can they utilize staff and facilities in a more efficient manor in delivering programs and services to students and save money doing so? He explained the present situation at Prescott.

Principal Lavin is retiring, the building has empty classrooms, enrollment at the elementary level is declining and there are financial limitations in supporting a significant increase in the district's budget. He noted the shared school zone needs to be updated. The elementary enrollment history and projected elementary enrollment were reviewed and G. Hognlund and D. Johnson explained the methodology the FTF used for the projection (declining birth rates and housing starts).

Prescott was built in 1927 to serve as the town high school, then housed administrative offices, a junior high school and various ranges of elementary grades. Future uses of the building might include administrative offices, a maintenance area, a conference center or a partnership with a community university or college. Dr. Genovese said closing Prescott would not be in the best interest of the district.

Principal Lavin reviewed the inefficiencies in student services (art, Spanish, music, PE, reading) with having three elementary schools as well as the efficiencies in student services with taking Prescott offline. The total savings in staff by reallocating students is estimated at \$298,329. It was noted it is likely that the impact would not be on individuals presently in the Prescott school because of the seniority system. It is estimated there would also be a potential savings of \$35,000 in utility costs.

Dr. Genovese said they explored other ideas which included moving the Early Childhood Center to Prescott, Florence Roche or the high school. He reviewed the benefits and issues of each move to those locations and stated they did not generate much of a savings mainly due to the requirements of the ECC staffing.

The benefits and issues of moving Tarbell to Prescott were also reviewed. The district leases the school buildings from the towns and Dr. Genovese would want to talk with the Groton selectmen to see if the town would sell Tarbell or have another use in mind. The possible maintenance expenditures (\$89,000) to Prescott that are in the five year plan were looked at as well as the capital improvements estimated at \$570,000. Additional factors to be considered include bussing efficiency, Prescott's debt assessment of \$17,000 that will be retired on November 15, 2015 and Swallow Union's debt assessment

Florence Roche Principal Goguen reviewed their current enrollment and said they expect to have 510 students for 2008-2009. With the modulars, the school can house 650. They have four lunch periods and the cafeteria can hold 175 students at one time. Gymnasium and playground space is also adequate for additional students. The five potential available rooms were shown.

Principal Myerson projects they will have 274 students next year. He reviewed the available space at Swallow Union for five new sections and stated they are traditional classrooms. Swallow Union's capacity is 420 due to

the septic system.

Dr. Genovese said they are one district even though they are housed in three schools and the talented staff work together. He reviewed the many programs and opportunities at the elementary schools.

A map of the current Shared Zone was shown and P. Myerson said they try to have balanced classrooms in all three schools but the process is not always efficient. A slide showing the new streets and possible changes to the Shared Zone was shown and he noted changes need to be made even if Prescott is not taken offline. He asked parents to be patient as they do the research to make the right decisions.

Dr. Genovese said there will be additional meetings with parents, the Administrative Team, the elementary principals and Groton and Dunstable town officials. There will be school committee discussion and then a decision will be made.

P. Carson expressed concern about the longevity of the portable classrooms at Florence Roche. He suggested the Facilities Task Force be asked to speed up their evaluation of Florence Roche and look at those classrooms and look at the list of concerns. Dr. Genovese said they are in great shape and have been receiving the same care in the maintenance plan. He stated the Prescott staff would like a decision as quickly as possible as they want to be involved with decisions that would need to be made.

F. Buzan asked if the FTF's evaluation of Prescott shows it is time to reconsider it as a school or if this is driven by enrollment numbers. P. Carson said the FTF has not made a decision. If they were to move the Prescott students, F. Buzan asked if there would still be classrooms available in case they have more students than expected. Dr. Genovese said there is capacity to expand in the Union Building.

Dr. Funch raised several concerns that include not seeing a good accounting of cost savings, the possibility of the modulars needing new roofs and an increase in administrative staff at Florence Roche. He read from Policy FCB, Retirement of Facilities, which he feels applies. He feels it was unfair that the parents were told about taking Prescott offline when there was not enough information to make them feel comfortable with the decision. Dr. Genovese disagrees this policy applies since they are not retiring the building but noted many things in the policy are being looked at.

C. Barrett stated MASC representative Mike Gilbert has advised it is always appropriate for a superintendent to work through a plan with the administrative team and to present the plan to the school committee with a lot of options. He also said the school committee should validate the details of the plan against the district's goals, take the community's input into consideration and the school committee should approve a final plan that the committee and administration believe is educationally sound and fiscally responsible. She agrees Policy FCB is not applicable but Policy JC, Attendance Area, is applicable. They do not have Policy JCA, Assignment of Students, in their books. Since they do not have a specific policy for the situation they are in now, she stated she would like to look at past practice and distributed a motion made in April 2004 regarding the configuration of the middle school.

B. Erickson does not think Policy FCB applies and feels they should slow down since anything that is seemingly rushed into often does not give them the right answer. F. Buzan is disappointed this plan was not mentioned to the committee first and believes the superintendent should put a study together involving the neighborhoods and then his recommendation should be brought back to the committee for approval. He feels Policy FCB provides a good guide and P. Carson feels it is being followed.

Everyone agrees the community needs to be involved. It was agreed a decision cannot be made prior to the February school vacation as hoped. Dr. Genovese highlighted factors that need to be considered that include having a significant shortfall in revenue, making reductions in other areas and possibly hiring a principal. Discussion will continue at the February 27<sup>th</sup> meeting.

**QUESTIONS/COMMENTS (Advanced due to the late hour)**

L. Lathrop stated she thought it was an interesting juxtaposition to talk about declining enrollments and starting a football program that needs increasing enrollments. She does not think this is the right time to start a football program. She stated many people who do not have children in the system, but have always supported an override, have told her they do not trust the football numbers and will not support an override if football is included.

B. Breton agrees there is pressure to show they need to make some serious cuts in order to get an override but he thinks this sacrifices the quality of education by taking away classrooms dedicated to something else. He noted adding additional kids to the 25 minute lunch times will cause longer lines and even less time to eat and he does not feel safety concerns have been addressed. He stated he is in the gray zone and unless parity is offered, he does not feel it is fair.

Stating she is not speaking on behalf of any administrative staff or her colleagues, M. Brisson commended Ms Erickson for her comments recognizing that a breakdown in communication exists. She said there are clear processes in place for communication between site based personnel and the school committee. Whether it was addressing anti-Semitic text in the bathrooms, communicating budgetary needs, addressing potential threats of safety or making significant changes to the athletic program, she stated site based staff communicated effectively, efficiently and in a timely manner to those next in the communication chain. If there has been a breakdown in communication, she said it has occurred once it has left their respective buildings or the administrative council table. She encouraged the committee to look at where the breakdown is occurring and to improve the processes.

A. Kerry appreciates the budget crisis and stated she lived through the controversial fifth grade change but people knew they were going from the elementary school to the middle school. She said the Prescott change is different because these families do not know where they would go. She is confused on how they will save \$35,000 in utilities if they rent the building out and feels once they take it offline, it will be hard to bring it back.

A gentleman stated the committee is always making rushed decisions and this is wrong. He asked why they are only seeing the impact of other decisions but they were not shown any impacts on the Prescott list.

After submitting the letter from the concerned parents, E. Lazaris said she is disappointed in the lack of data in the Prescott presentation.

T. Fitzpatrick said a decision has been made to delay making a decision for two weeks to get more information, without getting parental involvement until after the decision has been made, to try to make the parents feel good and to make the transition better. He thinks people wrote the letter to get parental involvement in the decision making process and there are many people willing to participate over the next two weeks to get the right kind of data available for the next meeting.

G. Hoglund stated he does not think the capital costs have been addressed for the football program and feels they are being offered a deal with no payments until 2012. He referred to some "items on the horizon" presented by Mr. Twomey in last year's presentation (bleachers, sound system, additional field space and maintenance, field turf). Mr. Hoglund estimates these items will cost \$2.1M.

J. Amaral stated his daughter will likely be impacted by the closing of Prescott. While he feels communication needs to be dealt with, he would support closing the school if it meant preserving the good teachers.

**PRESENTATIONS/DISCUSSION (cont)****FY09 Preliminary Budget -**

T. Sheehan distributed copies of the preliminary FY09 budget and stated the format is being changed. He briefly reviewed the FY08 budget of \$34,523,673. This budget did not capture \$1,033K in expenditures or

matching revenues. This did not effect town assessments but it does understate the total cost of providing basic instructional services and complicates the analysis of budget versus actual expenditures. The adjusted total of the FY08 budget is \$35,556,628. The total FY09 budget is \$36,282,472 (\$31,755,561 operating budget and \$4,526,911 debt service), an increase of 2%. He reviewed the other format changes and budget variances between FY08 and FY 09. There is a shortfall of \$663,808 and it could go as high as \$720,000. The budget includes keeping Prescott online and realigning Prescott would save approximately \$300,000.

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

Due to the late hour, sub-committee reports were postponed.

### **ACTION ITEMS**

#### **VOTE: Music Field Trip**

See earlier vote

#### **VOTE: To Accept Money Donated for the Football Program or Equipment**

C. MCKINNEY MOVED THE SCHOOL COMMITTEE VOTE TO ACCEPT MONEY OR EQUIPMENT ON AN ONGOING BASIS FROM PRIVATE SOURCES FOR THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A FOOTBALL PROGRAM AND FALL CHEERLEADING PROGRAM FOR THE GROTON DUNSTABLE REGIONAL SCHOOL DISTRICT, MONIES TO BE PLACED IN A SEPARATE REVOLVING ACCOUNT.  
SECONDED BY F. O'CONNELL

Since they do not have a guarantee that the money needed will be raised, B. Erickson feels they have to have seed money to cover at least the first year. C. Barrett stated the program will not start if there is not enough money.

F. BUZAN MOVED TO POSTPONE THE MOTION AND DISCUSSION TO THEIR MEETING ON WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 27, 2008. SECONDED BY P. FUNCH

**In Favor:** C. McKinney, F. O'Connell, F. Buzan, C. Barrett, P. Carson, P. Funch

**Abstention:** B. Erickson

#### **VOTE: To Establish a Separate Revolving Account for Football**

C. MCKINNEY MOVED THE SCHOOL COMMITTEE VOTE TO ESTABLISH A REVOLVING FUND FOR THE PURPOSE OF ACCEPTING DONATIONS FOR FOOTBALL AND A FALL CHEERLEADING PROGRAM.  
SECONDED BY F. O'CONNELL

F. BUZAN MOVED TO POSTPONE THE VOTE AND DISCUSSION TO THEIR FEBRUARY 27, 2008 MEETING. SECONDED BY P. CARSON

**SO VOTED IN FAVOR UNANIMOUSLY**

### **ADJOURNMENT**

C. MCKINNEY MOVED TO ADJOURN AT 12:28 A.M. SECONDED BY F. O'CONNELL

**SO VOTED IN FAVOR UNANIMOUSLY**

Respectfully submitted,

Susan H. Smith  
Recording Secretary

With attachments