

Warwick Community Outreach Educational Committee
Minutes for January 6, 2016

Members Present: Karen Bachus (co-chair), Susan Baker, Sarah Callahan, Nathan Cornell (co-chair), June Marchant, Darlene Netcoh (clerk), Michael Pierce, Ed Ladouceur, Kathleen Usler

- I. Call to Order:** Nathan Cornell officially called the meeting to order at 6:17 pm.
- II. Approval of Minutes:** The committee voted to approve the minutes for the meeting of December 2, 2015.
- III. Discussion: List of Topics Addressed at Previous Meetings.** Nathan Cornell stated that the superintendent is now allowing members of the public to be on the consolidation committee, the bond issue was not discussed because Ed Ladouceur was not present, this committee voted for Mr. Cornell to work on getting students involved in creating a student council, and there was a discussion about PARCC testing.
- IV. Discussion: Proposed Exploratory Courses for Consolidation and Discussion/Action: Teacher/School Committee/City Relations**
 - A.** Michael Pierce said that he was not sure about the certification needed for teaching exploratory courses. He said that highly qualified teachers are supposed to be teaching the students.
 - B.** Superintendent Philip Thornton was in attendance at this meeting and said that there will be parent meetings to explain the exploratory courses.
 - C.** Karen Bachus said that the school committee may not have understood the exploratory classes. She thought that there would be keyboarding. She said that students should also have personal finance.
 - D.** Superintendent Thornton said that he talked to a teacher and that personal finance is huge for next year.
 - E.** Ms. Bachus said that personal finance and keyboarding should be requirements.
 - F.** Mr. Ladouceur said that because of his position on the Contractor's Registration Board he sees contractors who can't run a business and don't know how to balance a checkbook. He said that he concurs with Ms. Bachus about the importance of a personal finance class.
 - G.** Superintendent Thornton said that some schools do make this class a requirement; some call the class "consumer ed." He said that a district has to be careful about having too many requirements.
 - H.** There was discussion about the Common Core.
 - I.** Mr. Pierce said that this was the kind of discussion that should have happened before the exploratory classes were put in place. He said that a school committee member should not have questions about exploratory classes at this point.
 - J.** Superintendent Thornton said, "That's what you voted on when you voted on the middle school model."
 - K.** Darlene Netcoh said, "That's what Karen meant when she said that the committee didn't understand what they were voting on."
 - L.** Kathleen Usler said that it was a good idea for students to have choices, but parents have to sign off on the choices.

- M.** Mr. Pierce said that “the devil is in the details.” He said that there has to be certified teachers, a curriculum, and rigor. He said, “We’ve been beaten over the head with rigor. The tech. ed. people had to revise their curriculum.”
- N.** There was a discussion about the importance of talking about these issues. We can have this kind of conversation here, but school committee meetings are hostile.
- O.** Mr. Ladouceur said that as long as dictates come from on high there isn’t going to be an open exchange. He said, “I think we have an opportunity to effect change.” He said that at the city level committees accomplish a lot. They identify real problems, figure out what’s wrong, and put solutions on the table. There is a disconnect with the school committee, the district, the executive branch, and the legislative branch.
- P.** Mr. Cornell said that he hopes that this committee can get people to work together. People will feel they have a say.
- Q.** Superintendent Thornton said that one thing that he did in his last job was to have subcommittees meet before the school committee meeting. He said that it is hard to have discussions in a big meeting. He said that school committee members get a packet of information before their meetings.
- R.** June Marchant said that on behalf of the elementary schools and qualifications, she is reporting that teachers have been trying to get information from RIDE and the administration because they want to know what they have to do. These are conscientious people who are not getting any answers.
- S.** Director of Elementary Education Lynn Danbruch, who was also present at this meeting, said that teachers filled out a survey and that Steve Ruscito, Director of Secondary Education, is organizing it.
- T.** Ms. Marchant said that they never heard the result. There is frustration and angst because they need to know if they need to get certified to teach middle school.
- U.** Anthony Sinapi, a member of the public at this meeting, stated that on the subject of exploratory classes it would be good for students to have a choice, but there may be courses that students should take. Requirements may be helpful for students to realize what they like or what they are good at. If the exploratory classes are not taught by certified people who previously taught them, then it is a downgrade. Personal finance is necessary in the real world. He mentioned the hostility at school committee meetings and that the audience gets heckled by school committee members. He said that when the city council has a meeting there is an agenda and documents. He said that at school committee meetings it seems that there is insider information.
- V.** Ms. Bachus announced that Mr. Sinapi is going to be the community member for this committee.
- W.** Superintendent Thornton drew a distinction between meetings in public and public meetings.
- X.** Mr. Ladouceur said that in his opinion members of the school committee have not been transparent.
- Y.** Superintendent Thornton said that he has requested to come before the city council and open lines of communication.

- Z.** Mr. Cornell said to the superintendent that he had spoken about this committee giving an update at the school committee meetings.
- V. Discussion/Action: 2006 Bond Issue for School Facilities**
- A.** Mr. Ladouceur reviewed what happened at the budget hearings last year. The school department did not provide a list of repairs and costs that the city requested.
 - B.** Superintendent Thornton reviewed some recent figures and said that he would get the list.
 - C.** Susan Baker said to Superintendent Thornton that the mayor has had some conversations with him and anticipates having more.
 - D.** Mr. Ladouceur took responsibility for not telling Ms. Baker about the meeting that she did not attend. He had a letter from the mayor that he read aloud.
 - E.** Ms. Netcoh said that if the relationship between the school department and the city had not been so bad, then there could have been a bond issue to implement the “campus model” that was one of SMMA’s consolidation suggestions for the school committee.
 - F.** Ms. Bachus said that the schools only got the money the last time because they voted to pay the debt.
 - G.** Mr. Ladouceur pointed out that the school department asks for more money and then has a surplus.
 - H.** Superintendent Thornton talked about some of his plans for the district.
- VI. Discussion/Action: Funding for Warwick Public Schools**
- A.** Mr. Cornell said that he put this item on the agenda because he heard that the schools would be level-funded.
 - B.** Superintendent Thornton said, “I wouldn’t trust me either. I have to prove that we’re not going to steal stuff.” He is recommending Chromebooks for all students in Grades 7 and 8. He plans to finally do all-day kindergarten, look at expanding pre-school, and look at the high school start time.
 - C.** Mr. Ladouceur explained his experience with the school department in the last three budget hearings. He said that he will not vote to increase funds until he learns the truth. There are healthcare reserves.
 - D.** Ms. Netcoh brought up the year the city under-funded the schools the full 5% below the maintenance of effort that the state had allowed that year.
 - E.** Mr. Cornell asked Mr. Ladouceur if he would consider giving the school department more money if they had a clear budget.
 - F.** Mr. Ladouceur said that he would have to see it all. He said that he was not going to answer a speculative question.
 - G.** Mr. Pierce drew an analogy to the exploratory classes. He said, “Hey, approve these classes; hey, give me money—I’ll tell you later.”
 - H.** Mr. Cornell said that a good first step would be to have the school department be honest with funds.
- VII. Public Comment:** No members of the public wanted to comment.
- VIII. Next Meeting:** February 3, 2016
- IX. Adjournment:** 8:37 pm