

Approved + released  
2/12/15 DH

SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEETING  
THURSDAY, JANUARY 8, 2015  
TOWN HALL AUDITORIUM

Note: These minutes were prepared from a video recording.

1. Call to order: 7:01 P M.

Present: Michael Niles, Michael Barbaro, Andrea Suchocki, Susan Burdsall, Dawn Harris  
Salah Khelfaoui-Superintendent  
Mark Chapulis-TMS/Business Manager

A. Suchocki moved, with great sadness, to reorganize the school committee removing Michael Niles from the chairman position for the following reason-On December 17 (2014) the Chairman allowed a town employee, the Town Accountant, to speak and attack our schools and the operations of our Central Office. Vice-Chair (Susan Burdsall) arranged this appearance without informing all members of the committee that this would occur. When the Town Accountant started to speak negatively and inaccurately about the schools, Chairman Niles allowed it to drag on for about 45 minutes, then proceeded to shut down our Superintendent when he tried to defend us. It is my belief, as well as many parents and citizens, that Chairman Niles no longer represents the school children's best interest. For reasons we will never understand, our school system is under constant attack, unwarranted, by our town government. We need strong leadership and total commitment in support of our schools to deal with this. Can I get a second to my motion? Michael Barbaro seconded the motion. A. Suchocki asked for a roll call vote. Michael Niles asked why the request was made, noting it was not on the agenda. Superintendent Khelfaoui called for the vote. Dawn Harris-Yes; Susan Burdsall-No; Michael Niles-No; Andrea Suchocki-Yes; Michael Barbaro-Yes. Motion passed 3-2-0.. S. Khelfaoui asked for nominations. A. Suchocki nominated Dawn Harris for the new Chairperson, as she is an unbiased, fair member who I believe will be a good leader and bring our committee together as one unit with the sole focus on our schools and the education of our children. Dawn may be new but she is a strong, intelligent woman who does her homework and has already worked hard as a volunteer in our system for many years. Dawn also is the only member who has children in the system. Can I get a second? M. Barbaro seconded the notion. Dawn Harris-Yes (I accept); Susan Burdsall-No; Michael Niles-Abstained; Andrea Suchocki-Yes; Michael Barbaro-Yes. Motion passed 3-1-1.

D. Harris assumed chairmanship of the committee. M. Niles said "Congratulations" and left the meeting at 7:09. D. Harris thanked the committee, noting she will take the new position carefully and promptly, and urged people to come to her with any questions or concerns, noting she will learn a lot. S. Burdsall noted this action has "taken some of us completely by surprise, noting her comments are not in agreement and does not imply that Chair Harris is not capable, able, willing or would fairly represent. She noted A. Suchocki was not present at the meeting on December 17, 2104, and not part of any conversations or reasoning that led to that presentation, and did not ask for any reasoning whatsoever from then Chairman Niles or the Vice-Chair as to what

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transpired or why it did, or why the conversation, as it was degrading that evening, was shut down as it was.

2. Citizen Questions and Comments:
3. Correspondence and Announcements: The district received the annual \$500.00 donation from Mr. Mikes Exxon Mobile, given to the middle and high schools to support math and science programs. He thanked them. M. Barbaro moved to accept the donation of \$500.00 from Mr. Mikes. Second by S. Burdsall. Approved 4-0-0.
4. Student Recognition: none  
Student Representative: none

5. Superintendent Report: FY16 Budget discussions start next week; he asked committee members to submit their priorities, concerns or suggestions. The results of that meeting will be presented to the committee. He read a news release that will be released to the news media concerning the December 17, 2014 meeting. The erroneous payment to 6 retired employees amounting to \$20,000 was immediately reported to the committee and the Town Accountant. He noted there is a legal mechanism to reverse those transactions and recoup the funds. He stated it was unsettling to discover through the Town Manager that as of that meeting, 3 months later, the funds were still uncollected. He reviewed the request for documentation of the efforts to recoup the funds from the employees who reportedly refused to return the funds, including the districts' offer of assistance. Several days later he was informed by the Town Treasurer that the payments in question **had** been recovered in October, 2 months prior to the Town Accountants statements at the December meeting. He stated the media once again failed to check the facts before reporting the news. The resulting upset to the community and slandering of the school administration and contracted professionals involved with school finances was avoidable and the actions of the reporter unprofessional. He noted this was not the first erroneous report about the district regarding finances. There have been no retractions from the news media.

M. Barbaro noted the Recording Secretary was absent and would write the minutes from a video recording

Business Office Report: M. Chapulis reviewed the tentative FY16 Budget Timeline, noting a revised version with corrected dates will be available when finalized. The year to date FY15 operating budget lines that show a deficit will be balanced by budget transfers; changes will be sent to the Town Accountant. The SPED private tuitions and tuitions to Collaboratives will be addressed as Circuit Breakers funds are sent from the state. The \$217,000 due is for the 2<sup>nd</sup> quarter and includes the \$121,000 from the FY14 settlement allowed to be used in FY15 by the DOR. S. Khelifaoui and D. Harris signed a document that authorizes the City of Gardner to be the administrator on the behalf of the WPS for the Collaborative Transportation bid on January 29, 2015. M. Barbaro moved to allow Gardiner to open up the bid for the school transportation. Second by A. Suchiocki. Approved 4-0-0. The Town Manager is aware of the bid and timeline. M. Chapulis noted it is a tight but on track budget. The Harpers Payroll transition will be completed by January 9<sup>th</sup>. Payroll expenditures will be available for posting into Munis and the budget. Chartwells Food Service will present a financial report at the next meeting; the service has recouped its initial expenses and is running even now.

6. Old Business:

A) Policy GCCD-Domestic Violence Leave Policy-2<sup>nd</sup> Reading-M. Barbaro moved to table. Second by A. Suchiocki. Approved 4-0-0.

7. New Business:

A) FY16 Budget Discussion-S. Khelifaoui noted the budget figures regarding SPED transportation requested by the Town Manager will be delivered by January 22<sup>nd</sup> along with a draft budget (no figures from the state).

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B) School Committee Calendar-Regular meetings will remain on the 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Thursdays of the month. The Policy sub-committee and the Legal sub-committee are scheduled to meet on January 14<sup>th</sup>. Meeting dates for quarterly meetings with other boards and special meetings will be determined. The School Committee Workshop is on January 17<sup>th</sup> at 9AM at Central Office needs to be posted.

8. Consideration of Minutes of Previous Meetings Not Yet Approved or Released:

A) October 23, 2014-Executive Session-M. Barbaro moved to approve and hold. Second by S. Burdsall. Approved 4-0-0.

B) December 4, 2014- Executive Session-S. Burdsall moved to approve and hold. Second by A. Suchocki. Approved 3-0-1. M. Barbaro abstained.

C) December 4, 2014-Regular Session-M. Barbaro moved to approve. Second by A. Suchocki. Approved 4-0-0.

9. Questions and Comments by Members: J. Kreidler noted the Insurance Advisory Committee will meet next week; all union and non-union representatives of the district and general government have been notified. M. Barbaro noted the towns' finances (fiscal bailout) have been signed off by the Governor. He hopes to foster a more community working environment between the departments. Operational issues should not be brought before the school committee. The committee can submit Capital Planning items by January 23<sup>rd</sup>. D. Harris noted her surprise at the nights developments and hopes to do a good job.

10. Other: Greg Vine noted he attended this meeting as a news correspondent but is now speaking as a resident. He stated the "nastiness creeping into the politics of this town at large and at some of the meetings.." referring to the recent recalls, firings and removals from boards. He completely disagreed that Michael Niles did not have the best interest of the school committee, taxpayers and children in the school system at heart the entire time he has been on the school committee. He stated A. Suchocki's assertion and statement was obscene and that the treatment of Mike Niles was shabby and shameful. A. Suchocki responded her action was because of recent events and not a reflection of Mr. Niles' years of service. She cited the lack of communication and behind the scenes actions as the reason for her action. She noted that Mr. Vines' reporting has been fair. D. Harris stated the committee will reach out to Mr. Niles, noting he is still on the committee.

11. Future Agenda Items:

- A) Guidance Department Review
- B) Negotiation Strategy Meeting
- C) Policy GCCD-Domestic Violence Leave Policy-2<sup>nd</sup> Reading

12. Executive Session: 7:50 PM moved to go into executive session for Purpose #3-To discuss strategy with respect to collective bargaining or litigation if a meeting may have a detrimental effect on the bargaining or litigating position or the public body and the chair so declares, and to return to open session for the sole purpose of adjourning. Second by Michael Barbaro-Aye; Andrea Suchocki,-Aye; Susan Burdsall-Aye; Dawn Harris-Aye. Approved 4-0-0.

13. Adjournment:

Respectfully submitted: \_\_\_\_\_  
Barrie E. Martins, School Committee Recording Secretary