

## Minutes

### Rowe School Committee

June 20, 2012 at 4:30 P.M.

Rowe Elementary School

**Present:** Chair Bill Loomis, Lisa Danek Burke, Lisa Miller  
**Other Attendees:** Bill Knittle, Rowe Principal; Paul McLatchy III, Minutes Taker  
**Audience of Citizens:** Diane Broncaccio (Greenfield Recorder), Lenny Laffond

**Call to Order:** Chair Loomis called the meeting to order at 4:37 P.M., as a quorum was present.

**Next Meeting:** The first regularly scheduled meeting of FY13 is July 18<sup>th</sup>. Principal Knittle will be in Washington and Ms. Miller will also be out of town. It was suggested to change it to the 25<sup>th</sup> of July, which everyone agreed on. Ms. Miller will try to make it for 6:00. Ms. Danek Burke suggested that for future meetings, a more consistent time be decided on.

**Accreditation:** The decision whether or not to pursue accreditation by the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC) was briefly discussed at the last meeting. Since then, Ms. Miller has done some research, and she feels that it would be a good thing for the school, and is in favor of pursuing it. She feels that being accredited shows that Rowe is a good school. She understands how much work it is, but the more she researches it, the more she is in favor of it. She believes it is more than just "icing on the cake", but a way to continue being a better school.

Chair Loomis said he had spoken to former Chairwoman Maggie Rice, who strongly recommended that the school continue to be accredited.

Ms. Danek Burke said that it certainly was beneficial at the time, as implementations were made, but it's a huge amount of work for the teachers and staff. She wonders what, other than a feel-good letter, does the school get out of it?

Principal Knittle echoed this concern. The School is already involved in a number of projects, and worried that this would be one more project they would have to take on. He has not heard from any other educator that it has value, and the staff is not in favor of it.

Ms. Miller said that the School Committee needs to educate people as to the benefits of being accredited. David Flynn from the NEASC is willing to come down and speak with people on the subject, and Ms. Miller thinks it would be useful for Principal Knittle to meet with him. Ms. Danek Burke said she would like to see the School Committee there as well, to hear what he has to say. Mr. Flynn will be contacted and will hopefully appear at the next School Committee meeting.

The subject will be kept open for discussion. Though the decennial visit is not until 2014, last time it took almost a year to prepare for it.

**Transfers From Last Meeting:** Chair Loomis asked that a more formal list be produced, detailing what the transferred funds would be used for. He said he was quite confused at the last meeting, and just wants to clear some things up. Ms. Danek Burke agreed.

Principal Knittle said that he went over the finances with Business Manager Blier, and told her what he would like to buy. She recommended the categories. Ms. Miller asked for a simple typed list detailing the purchases, and Principal Knittle said it wouldn't be a problem. He showed the School Committee an informal list he had, but the School Committee was satisfied with this list, and copies were distributed.

**School Population:** Principal Knittle informed the School Committee that as of now, there will be 68 students attending Rowe in the 2012-2013 school year. 39 students are from Rowe, and 29 are choice students.

Compared with 2011-2012, there were 43 Rowe students and 26 choice. There have been no new applications for the choice seats declared on February 14, 2012. There *have* been two new pre-school applications, which would still leave two additional seats.

Continuing the discussion from the last meeting, Principal Knittle said that there are two students from Readsboro, Vermont that would like to attend the school, both boys, and both would be entering Kindergarten. Until a rate is set, out-of-state students cannot attend the school. There is also another family that will be moving to Rowe from Wilmington, Vermont that plan on sending their children to Rowe, but they will not be moved in until after the school year starts. Currently, the ruling is that a residence is "where you sleep", and as such, this family would be considered out-of-state.

Ms. Danek Burke said she is leaning towards the School of Choice rate. However, she expressed weariness because in Massachusetts, any special education requirements "follow the student", meaning that the town that the student lives in pays for the required services. With an out-of-state family, this may not be covered, which would leave the school to pick up the extra costs.

Chair Loomis wondered if there is a policy that might cover this. Superintendent Buoniconti was supposed to check with Russell Dupere about this issue, but it has only been a week since that task was assigned.

Principal Knittle asked if a price can more-or-less be decided on without making any formal decision, simply so he can contact the parents and let them know what the price will *likely* be. Ms. Danek Burke said that there was a general sense of the meeting that the School Committee is in favor of opening up to out-of-state students, and that they support the school of choice rate. Principal Knittle will call them to let them know, and inform them that special education costs would still be worked on.

**Cafeteria Food:** Carol Lively has done some calculations on the amount of compost that the school created this last year. She estimates that approximately 6,000 pounds (3 tons) of food waste was composted and not incinerated/landfilled. Ms. Danek Burke was surprised by the amount, and recalled that in Nature's Classroom, they encourage children to reduce the amount of "ort", or uneaten/wasted food. She asked if this was being done at Rowe, and Principal Knittle said it was encouraged. Ms. Miller disagreed, as the State mandates a certain number of different foods be served to be reimbursed, so there's no real incentive to downsize.

**Three District Agreement:** At the Special Town Meeting last night (June 19<sup>th</sup>), there was an article to ask for an additional \$15,000 on top of the original \$25,000 appropriation for legal expenses between the town and Mohawk. This article was rejected by a vote of 33-22. The original amount was appropriated to research matters between the town and Mohawk, and neither town counsel of the school's counsel could be used, as they represent other towns and schools in the Mohawk District, respectively.

A handout was passed out at the town meeting, and indicated that there was \$2,500 or so left in the account, but that the last invoice was received in April. A lot of work has been done since then to prepare for litigation, and as such, Chair Loomis believes that there will be no money left in the account for negotiation with Mohawk.

Chair Loomis said that without money, there is no real way for the attorneys to communicate or negotiate. He felt that there were three options:

1. Negotiate a new agreement. This cannot be done due to lack of legal funds.
2. Go with another district to acquire services. There are no legal funds to produce an agreement.
3. Sign the agreement proposed by Mohawk.

Chair Loomis felt that the third option was the only possible one at this point in time, and therefore made a motion to accept the 2011 Three-District Shared Expenses Agreement between Mohawk, Hawlemont, and Rowe. Ms. Miller seconded the motion.

Ms. Danek Burke stated that July 1<sup>st</sup> is closing rapidly, but that no one in any meeting has said that Rowe would be shut out as of July 1<sup>st</sup>. Our administrative expenses were planned on going up due to the increased enrollment. While Rowe's enrollment has consistently increased, Hawlemont's has consistently decreased.

Chair Loomis said that the town will be required to pay for anything that Mohawk offers or adds, whether or not Rowe utilizes the service. He was surprised that Ms. Danek Burke is a little hesitant, since she wanted to sign it before. Ms. Danek Burke corrected him, saying that she made a motion in November to sign the agreement, *pending legal review*. She has no idea what the attorneys have said about this agreement. The attorneys, however, were not tasked to review *this* agreement, but to keep the 2008 agreement intact. Ms. Danek Burke said that she wanted to make sure Rowe was protected under this new agreement.

Chair Loomis feels that there is no real option at this point other than to approve the agreement. Ms. Danek Burke questioned what would happen if nothing was done? Perhaps a joint meeting with Mohawk can be held? Chair Loomis said he wouldn't be upset if the motion failed, but simply feels it's the logical way to go. Ms. Danek Burke was also surprised that Chair Loomis *wanted* to sign the agreement, as he has been fighting against it for some time.

Ms. Miller expressed disappointment that people were willing to believe rumors over what is discussed in meetings. Ms. Danek Burke said that people simply haven't been receiving a lot of information, and that not much has been discussed during open meetings. People want to know what the money was spent on, and the many were upset that it had gotten to this point.

Ms. Miller said that the people spoke at the town meeting, and they said that they didn't want to go any further, and that they'd rather pay the extra \$22,000 per year than a one-time cost of \$15,000.

Ms. Danek Burke repeated that she would have liked the language of the agreement looked over by the attorney, but with no further discussion, the motion passed 3-0.

**Additional Expenses:** Chair Loomis explained that now with the new agreement in place, the school is \$22,270 "in the hole". He made a motion to transfer \$15,000 from the late bus, and \$7,270 from the Spanish program to cover the increased expenses from the Mohawk/Hawlemont agreement. Ms. Miller seconded the motion.

Ms. Danek Burke didn't think that anything should be cut right now, and didn't want to make a decision this evening. She wanted to know what cutting that money will do to the Spanish program. Until they know more, she doesn't want to allocate the money.

Chair Loomis said that he didn't want to take it out of the elementary school, as they have been cut more and more over the past few years.

As \$17,848 will be spent out of the FY12 budget for items in FY13, she wants to review where the extra money will be rather than making blind cuts. Based on her arguments, Chair Loomis withdrew his motion.

**Spanish Program:** This conversation came about as a result of the above discussion. Ms. Danek Burke said that some changes were made to the program so that 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> graders wouldn't have Spanish for the whole year. She wants to hear from the Central Office about how much was spent and how much could potentially be cut. She has heard feedback from people that have liked it, and those that haven't. Now that it has been reduced, there may be some larger gaps in how long students are going without classes. Ms. Danek Burke asked Principal Knittle whether Sue Kranz (the Rowe Spanish teacher) has done any integrating with the 7/8 Spanish program.

Ms. Miller believes that another important aspect of the program is the social effects. If students have their related arts classes (the special Spanish program is done in place of related arts), cliques have already formed. Therefore, she thinks it would be better for students to do their Spanish in the spring. Also, even with their advantage of a special class, there is still a limit of how much Spanish they can learn at Mohawk. Both she and Ms. Danek Burke will do some research and report back.

**Absence Policy:** An absence policy has been introduced, and is now in its second reading. Principal Knittle said that the current policy has no “teeth”, and there is nothing to fall back on if there is a problem. This is not necessarily punitive, but more constructive to help the family.

Ms. Danek Burke said that she had nothing substantive to change about it, but only a couple of “housekeeping” items. She would like to see the policy have a reference code, which can be gotten from Judy Willis. A heading and date of adoption should also be added. The only other item is whether or not a reference to the Mohawk truant officer should be referenced as Rowe instead. There was also a question of whether the attendance officer will be adequate for this policy. Principal Knittle will clean it up and present it at the next meeting.

**Personal Electronic Device Policy:** Ms. Danek Burke said she has the same corrections as the absence policy (heading, date of adoption, and reference code). There was also an asterisk that had no source, so that will be cleaned up. There is a mention of not using the school wireless system with a PED, and that will still be applied.

Chair Loomis asked if the teachers would keep track of permission from parents, and Principal Knittle answered yes. He will clean it up for the next meeting.

**Bullying Policy:** Chair Loomis said that there has been some work around Mohawk to include teachers in working on the policy. Ms. Miller said that it might be nice to connect with someone at Mohawk to get information. The Hawlemont principal does some training along this line, and Ms. Miller will connect with her.

**Executive Session Minutes:** It was agreed that a number of Executive Session minutes should be released. Ms. Danek Burke questioned what the procedure is for releasing minutes from before Ms. Miller or Chair Loomis were on the committee.

**School of Choice Policy:** Chair Loomis said that he asked for more information on this policy a while ago, and Ms. Danek Burke had given him the latest version. There was a passage about reviewing numbers that the attorney felt may not be legal, and therefore, the policy was revised. Otherwise, it looks okay.

**Concussion Policy:** There was a question of whether or not one is needed, as there are no afterschool sports and the fact that Rowe is only an elementary school. Ms. Danek Burke asked if there was any reason not to. Chair Loomis recommended that Russell Dupere look at it, and get back to the committee.

**Teacher Evaluations:** There is a ballot question in November that could result in a new procedure if it passes. Ms. Danek Burke said she would stay up to date on the issue.

**Cafeteria Numbers:** Ms. Miller has asked for these numbers in the past, and would like to see them from the last four years to get a view of how the cafeteria is utilized. She would like to see it in the Principal’s Report, to get a monthly update. She feels that the lunches are worse than they used to be, and would like to see if everyone but a select few are eating it (which she said means it “could just be them”.) Otherwise, perhaps some changes could be made. She would like to see the numbers from before and after the Central Office began taking over the purchasing. Michael Buoniconti will be contacted to have the report added to the Principal’s Report. On a side note, Principal Knittle said that a survey had been done last fall and that he had received a good amount of feedback.

**Salary of Non-contract Employees:** Ms. Miller has done some research, comparing salaries between Rowe staff and surrounding schools and districts. She feels it would be nice to try and things “more in line”.

Ms. Danek Burke said that the School Committee sets the increase in pay, but as the staff is not hired by the School Committee, they have not been involved in the starting salaries.

This topic will be reviewed at future meetings.

**Full Day Preschool:** Though she is not looking for any conclusion this evening, Ms. Miller wanted to “put it out there” for people to start thinking about full-day preschool. This would be more in-tune with what people need, and some students are not necessarily coming into Kindergarten well-prepared.

Ms. Danek Burke recalled that this was briefly discussed during a meeting when they were addressing the Tools of the Mind program. Principal Knittle said it would be a great thing to consider, but asked how they would go about surveying the need. Unfortunately, as Ms. Danek Burke pointed out, there is not much of an opportunity for parents to go out and get much accomplished in the few hours that preschool is offered.

Principal Knittle again said that it would be a great thing to start thinking about, and perhaps some outreach could begin, such as Goal Post articles, meetings with parents, etc...

**Previous Agenda Items:** Chair Loomis said that a number of the items on the agenda had been continuously rolled over due to meetings running late. He asked Ms. Danek Burke to discuss any of the items she had placed on the agenda.

Ms. Danek Burke said that a number of the items have already been discussed. Chair Loomis said he would like to look at things and take constructive criticism, but if there's not much else to say, then they don't need to be addressed again. The only comment Ms. Danek Burke said was that there was a number of things that should've been a part of the packet that weren't, but otherwise, there wasn't any sense in going over things again.

**Executive Session:** It was decided to postpone the Executive Session. The School Committee met in E.S. on April 10, 2012 to discuss releasing minutes from the previous year. They weren't sure about releasing them, so they asked Russell Dupere, who recommended they be released. Ms. Danek Burke did the minutes for that meeting.

**Departure:** Chair Loomis said that he has recently done a lot of "soul searching". The regional agreement is progressing, and with the hiring of Mark Abraham, Rowe will be able to provide input and information. This will help with pursuing a fair tuition rate and some other aspects of Section 9 of the agreement. Chair Loomis will e-mail him and give him David Newell's name.

In the beginning, Chair Loomis found that a number of teachers were feeling intimidated, but that in the last sixth months, things have apparently improved. The Town seems to be in favor of Ms. Danek Burke's philosophy or working with Mohawk.

At this time, he does not feel that he is representing the will of the people. He informed the Committee that he will be resigning. He said that he will be there for information and data, but feels that his time is up. Ms. Miller thanked him for his service.

Mr. Laffond said that it will be hard to find someone who will do the amount of hard work that Chair Loomis did.

Chair Loomis thanked Principal Knittle for his work, and departed the meeting at 7:09 P.M.

**Civil Rights Compliance:** Principal Knittle said he had received a sheet from Patricia Bell, and is wondering if the district has a procedure to comply with civil rights requirements. If not, she sent along some wording. This will potentially be put on the School Improvement Plan.

**Joint Meeting:** The next scheduled meeting will be July 25<sup>th</sup>. However, as Chair Loomis will be resigning, a joint meeting will need to be held with the Selectmen to fill the vacancy. A letter will need to be sent to the Selectmen within thirty days.

**Adjourn:** Ms. Danek Burke motioned to adjourn, and was seconded by Ms. Miller. The vote was 2-0 in favor, and the meeting was closed at 7:19 P.M.

*Respectfully Submitted,*

Paul McLatchy III  
*Minutes Taker*

Approved on: \_\_\_\_\_

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Bill Loomis, *Chair*

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Lisa Miller, *Vice-Chair*

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Lisa Danek Burke, *Secretary*

Attached Documents:

- Agenda

*Note:* This meeting was intended to be a continuation of the June 12, 2012 meeting. No packet was created or distributed for this meeting.