

MINUTES
ROCKY POINT PUBLIC SCHOOLS
BOARD OF EDUCATION MEETING
March 14, 2005
(Rescheduled from February 28, 2005)

Meeting called to Order at 7:32 AM

Pledge of Allegiance

Present: Geraldine Thalen, President
Howard Gimple, Vice-President
Jane Bonner, Trustee
Michael Matera, Trustee
Joseph Sanseverino, Trustee
James J. Gerardi, Superintendent of Schools
Carla D'Ambrosio, Assistant Superintendent for Instruction
Michael Ivanoff, School Business Official
Mary Berretta, Acting District Clerk

Absent: Irene Pedota, District Clerk

Mrs. Thalen opened the meeting to questions or comments from the audience.

- Anthony Gallino – Commissioner, Rocky Point Fire Department – regarding the tax exemption and the letter of January 5, 2005.
- Mrs. Thalen asked if this was a question.
- Mr. Gallino wanted to know what was the BOE's stand on the issue.
- Mrs. Thalen responded that in order to pass this resolution a Public Hearing had to be called a month in advance of the Board meeting. This gives the residents the opportunity for comments and questions.
- Mr. Gallino responded that he was aware of this and thought that the Board was also. He had requested a hearing and to be put on the agenda for the February 28th meeting but that didn't happen and then we had a snowstorm and the meeting was postponed.
- Mrs. Thalen – I think we have enough background on this. It has played itself out in the local papers. Mr. Matera will read a statement.
- Mr. Matera read the following statement:
Governor Pataki signed into law legislation that grants volunteer firefighters and ambulance workers a 10% cut of the assessed value of their homes after five years of service. They would receive this exemption after each satisfactory year of service. In addition, the law states it is the option of school district to grant a lifetime tax exemption for members that accrue 20 or more years of service. Seven counties in the state, including Suffolk County, are granting exemptions. No money is coming from the state and this is another example of an unfounded state mandate that the local property owners will have to fund.

I wish to clarify some of the following statements in the local newspapers.

1. "The Brookhaven Town Law went on the books in September, nearly six full months ago. Why, exactly, haven't Rocky Point Schools taken any action?"
A package from the Rocky Point Fire Department was delivered to the Rocky Point School Board. This package contained a copy of the legislation, resolutions, and a letter requesting that we grant the tax exemptions. This was delivered, not six months ago, but six weeks before the March 1st deadline for submission to the Tax Assessor. The legislation and the resolutions presented many unanswered questions. The School Board reached out to the Fire Commissioners and a meeting was held on February 7th. The Board outlined their concerns and the commissioners promised to answer our questions. The next day we received vague answers to two of our questions and the rest went unanswered. In order to proceed forward, we needed this information. This,

and the lack of time to properly act was the reason for missing the March 1st deadline.

2. “Other school districts approved the state’s resolution in its entirety. They haven’t altered it at all. Why is Rocky Point hesitant, considering it would not affect the school district’s bottom line?”
True, this exemption would not come from school monies but directly from the district’s property owners. The Board is being cautious before adding this additional tax onto the community.
3. “Board of Education members are elected by their constituents to make difficult decisions and that this decision should be made.”
The easy decision would have been for the Board to take the resolutions prepared by the fire department, without any consultation or input from the Board with regard to their content, and vote upon them. The hard decision was take the responsibility thrust upon the Board by the State and make sure the right questions were asked before granting this tax exemption.
4. “The tax break for the twenty year veteran volunteers is the big holdup.”
The Board most likely would not have a problem in granting the tax exemption to the fire fighters with five years of service provided the Board’s questions are answered. With regard to the twenty-year exemption, an eighteen year old can volunteer and serve twenty years and at thirty-eight years of age receive a 10% tax exemption for the rest of his or her life provided they live in the community, whether or not they continue to serve as fire fighters. A person that age could receive this benefit for fifty years. Also, if the department has firefighters with twenty or more years of service, and they do, and they should decide to end their affiliation once their benefit is granted, we would lose the most senior and experienced personnel and this could be dangerous to other firefighters and the people of the community The purpose of this legislation was to recruit and retain firefighters. If the senior personnel left, this would be counter-productive to the intent of legislation.

Although at the present time this tax exemption may not be a significant amount, is it prudent to grant a lifetime tax exemption to the twenty-year volunteers when we don’t know what financial burdens are down the road. For example, we currently grant tax relief to seniors with limited means. There is a new group called SAD (Seniors Against Discrimination) whose co-founder lives in Rocky Point and has signed up 1,000 members since January. Politicians are already paying attention to their growing numbers. Their top priority is a proposal in Albany to freeze school taxes for seniors. Should this legislation be approved, it would be an additional financial burden on the local taxpayers.

The School Board is here to listen to the concerns of the firefighters. However, we must also look out for the concerns of the entire community as well.

- Mrs. Thalen – Mr. Gallino, please use the microphone. The Board will be happy to have a Public Hearing but the March 1st deadline has passed for this year. We will be happy to do it for next year.
- Robert Pulick – Chairman of the Board, Sound Beach Fire Department – You will establish a date tonight for a Hearing.
- Mrs. Thalen – The law states you must have a hearing and I did consult a lawyer.
- Mr. Pulick – We will be able to consult our attorney.
- Mrs. Thalen – Is April 20th acceptable?
- Mr. Pulick – How soon after the Public Hearing will you be able to vote for acceptance?
- Mrs. Thalen – We will vote right after the Public Hearing.
- Mrs. Bonner – Do the fireman have other information from the tax assessor to pass it?
- Mr. Gallino – If it could have been passed tonight, the tax assessor would have been able to get it done for this year, but since it was not done tonight it will have to wait for next year.

- Mrs. Thalen – When we do it, it will be done right and we will feel much better even though other districts haven't done it right.
- Mr. Gallino – I thought we would have ample time when I gave the letters two months ago.
- Mrs. Thalen – I don't think I got copies, at least not legal responses.
- Mr. Gallino – We needed to contact our lawyers.
- Mrs. Thalen – We needed to consult with the district's attorney just as well as you needed to.
- Mr. Gallino – We offered to have both attorneys' meet.
- Mr. Sanseverino – Before the Public Hearing the Board should have the number of fireman entitled to the tax break and the amount of money.
- Mr. Gallino – Rocky Point has 21 members at \$280.
- Mrs. Thalen – Could we please have those numbers in writing?
- Mr. Gallino – We don't want to do anything improper.
- Mr. Sanseverino – Retain and recruit – county opens first time homebuyer program in the spring. We need to keep the young people in this area.
- Mr. Pulick – We need to keep the experienced firefighters. The ability to keep them is important. I am a 37-year member.
- Mrs. Thalen – Who makes the determination for exemption?
- Mr. Pulick – There is a prescribed set of regulations and a program of guidelines.
- Mr. Matera – I am offering my services to help with the public meeting.
- Mrs. Thalen – There are only 12 districts on Long Island that have passed this exemption.
- Margaret Galvin-Batillo – Member of the Sound Beach Fire Department/resident Rocky Point - I have been in this district 42 years – have voted yes on every budget – we serve 24/7- we go out in the middle of the night – brush fires – I want to know why you did not pass it and how come you did not consult other districts.
- Mrs. Thalen – I don't consult other districts. We are in sound fiscal shape and I don't feel we need to consult them. I look to the people in the community.
- Mrs. Galvin-Batillo – Part of your district is Miller Place. I had to write a letter to get into this district years ago. They serve your district.
- Mrs. Thalen – They come to my home, I am grateful, we are trying to do it right.
- Mrs. Galvin-Batillo – When they moved to that beautiful expensive building on Rte25A no one asked the taxpayers. You just did it.
- Mrs. Thalen – They are asking us to have one taxpayer pay more than another.
- Mrs. Galvin-Batillo – Give these guys a break.
- Mr. Pulick – Thank you for the opportunity to speak.
- Mr. Gallino – Thank you.
- Mrs. Mary Wandle – There has been mention that the Girls' JV Field Hockey was being eliminated and it is being moved of the field they play on.
- Mrs. Thalen – the team is not being deleted. Please call and discuss this with Mr. Kies.

SUPERINTENDENT'S REPORT

PRESENTATION BY BARBARA KJAERBYE ON THE TEACHER/MENTOR PROGRAM

Mrs. Sherry Alessandro introduced Barbara Kjaerbye. Ms. Kjaerbye presented a slide show on the teacher/mentor program.

- Mrs. Thalen – What is the primary success before the mentor program as opposed to now?
- Ms. Kjaerbye – I can give them immediate feedback, accessibility and release time.
- Mrs. Alessandro – Critical element – confidentiality.
- Ms. Kjaerbye – You need a good atmosphere of trust.

MINUTES

Upon a motion made by Michael Matera and seconded by Joseph Sanseverino, the following resolution was offered:

BE IT RESOLVED, that the Minutes of the following Board of Education Meeting be accepted as presented: **Regular Meeting, January 31, 2005**. All in favor – Motion carried 5-0.

POLICY RE-REVISION – #7130 – SCHOOL ADMISSIONS AND RESIDENCY (FIRST RE-READING)

Upon a motion made by Joseph Sanseverino and seconded by Howard Gimple, the following policy revision was offered:

This policy has been further revised in accordance with the Commissioner's decision calling for December 1st as the cutoff date for entrance into kindergarten, not September 1st as proposed. This policy needs to be moved and voted on affirmatively at two successive meetings of the Board of Education. All in favor – Motion carried 5-0.

POLICY REVISION - #8450 – HOME TUTORING (TEMPORARY INSTRUCTION) (SECOND READING)

Upon a motion made by Joseph Howard Gimple and seconded by Jane Bonner, the following policy revision was offered:

The amendment to this policy formalizes our current practice. This policy needs to be moved and voted on affirmatively at two successive meetings of the Board of Education. All in favor – Motion carried 5-0.

DISTRICT CODE OF CONDUCT REVISIONS (COPIES SENT TO BOARD IN DECEMBER)

Upon a motion made by Jane Bonner and seconded by Michael Matera, the following resolution was offered:

BE IT RESOLVED, that upon the recommendation of the Superintendent of Schools, that the Board of Education approve the District Code of Conduct revisions, which is mandated by the State Education Department. All in favor – Motion carried 5-0.

COMMITTEES ON SPECIAL EDUCATION/PRESCHOOL SPECIAL EDUCATION RECOMMENDATIONS

Upon a motion made by Michael Matera and seconded by Joseph Sanseverino, the following resolution was offered:

BE IT RESOLVED, that upon the recommendation of the Superintendent of Schools, that the Board of Education votes to arrange for appropriate services pursuant to the recommendations of Schedule 3-14-05-A and 3-14-05-B. All in favor – Motion carried 5-0.

PERSONNEL

Upon a motion made by Joseph Sanseverino and seconded by Howard Gimple, the following resolution was offered:

BE IT RESOLVED, that upon the recommendation of the Superintendent of Schools, that the Board of Education accept the attached Personnel changes. All in favor – Motion carried 5-0.

ADOPTION OF THE 2005 - 2006 SCHOOL CALENDAR

Upon a motion made by Howard Gimple and seconded by Jane Bonner, the following resolution was offered:

BE IT RESOLVED, that upon the recommendation of the Superintendent of Schools, that the Board of Education adopt the 2005 - 2006 School Calendar as presented. All in favor – Motion carried 5-0.

CHANGE OF BOARD OF EDUCATION MEETING DATE

Upon a motion made by Jane Bonner and seconded by Michael Matera, the following resolution was offered:

BE IT RESOLVED, that upon the recommendation of the Superintendent of Schools, that the Board of Education votes to change the April meeting date from April 18, 2005 to April 20, 2005. This action allows the Board to vote on the proposed BOCES administrative budget and to elect members of the BOCES Board. All in favor – Motion carried 5-0.

PRESENTATION OF BUDGET ITEMS BY MICHAEL IVANOFF, SCHOOL BUSINESS OFFICIAL

Mr. Ivanoff reviewed the line items that had an increase since the 04/05 budget and answered particular questions and concerns with regard to the proposed budget.

- Ms. Bonner – What do legal expenses incur?
- Mr. Ivanoff – Our school attorney, David Pearl, superintendent hearings...
- Mrs. Thalen – Why such a large jump in our auditing fees.
- Mr. Ivanoff – Alan Hevesi, State Comptroller has expanded auditing mandates.
- Mr. Sanseverino – Is this a reaction to Roslyn?
- Mr. Ivanoff – Yes, more is expected.
- Ms. Bonner – Could you give us examples.
- Mr. Ivanoff – When they audit they take random samples – instead of 5 perhaps they will take ten – might need outside CPA firm to help.
- Mrs. Thalen – Explain internal auditor, then external auditor to the audience.
- Mr. Ivanoff – Internal auditor – audit our purchase orders and checks; external auditor – audits our year-end financial state and our overall financial health of the district.
- An unidentified member of the audience – Building inspections – how often are these done? Middle School roof is brand new and has been leaking since the beginning.
- Mrs. Thalen – Dr. Centamore is that true? Who is doing the inspection and is the contractor responsible?
- Mr. Gerardi – The roof has been leaking since the first rain when someone left a screwdriver in the roof. We thought that was the problem, not so. When it rains and the wind comes from the northeast and we have a build up, not so. We rebuilt the curbs, we did some reconfiguring, we redid skylights, and we just don't know the problem. The problem persists – we have a leak, but we can't find it.
- Mrs. Bonner – Are we covered for this?
- Mr. Gerardi – Yes, we are not paying a thing?
- Mrs. Thalen – Are you satisfied?
- Member of the Audience – Yes, thank you.
- Ms. Bonner – Line 1621 – Special projects – why the \$60,000 decrease
- Mr. Ivanoff – That was the cosmetology room that has now been finished.
- Ms. Thalen – Are all custodians wearing uniforms.
- Mr. Ivanoff – Yes, so they can be identified, even the substitutes will have them on.
- Mrs. Thalen – Line 1680 – What is Student Management Services?
- Mr. Ivanoff – SASI
- Mrs. D'Ambrosio – That is are system that tracks all our student information, grade reporting, state reports, etc.
- Mr. Ivanoff – Also are purchasing system, etc.
- Ms. Bonner – Does our health insurance go out to bid?
- Mr. Ivanoff – I am not 100% sure.
- Mr. Gerardi – We need cooperation of all the employees.
- Ms. Bonner – I can pick with the county – why don't we have that option to pick.
- Mr. Gerardi – Every plan out there has something different to offer. This is the one that had all the benefits they wanted.
- Ms. Bonner – For \$700,00 we should have some say.

- Mrs. Thalen – Who administers the program? – Personnel
- Mrs. Mary Wandle – I received a letter costing \$.37 postage for owing \$.25 for lunch money at Joseph Edgar. Personally, I think this is a waste of money. Why didn't they just send a note home with my daughter?
- Mrs. Thalen – Can administration tell me if this is a policy?
- Ms. Tvelia – Food service department first tells the child they owe money, if they do not get a response then they send a letter. That department is self-funded.

Mrs. Thalen asked if there were any other questions or comments before the Board moved to Executive Session:

- Mrs. Thalen – Clarify Policy #7130 – School Admissions and Residency - we were going to change the date of entrance to kindergarten to September 1st but we have to keep it at the December 1st date.
- Mrs. Annemarie Johanassen – Why can it be up to the district? Every district seems to have a different date.
- Mr. Gerardi – Commissioner has come down with a new ruling.
- Mrs. Thalen – Mr. Read – Do we still use the McCarthy Screening for kindergarteners?
- Mr. Read – No, we now use McGraw- Hill.
- Mrs. Margaret Smith – Regarding the musical – this is the first time that my daughter was in the musical. I thought it was magical. Everyone did an incredible job. Congratulations to everyone who worked so hard.
- Mr. Read – Just a reminder that the second grade chorus is back after being away for a couple of years. Their first concert will be Wednesday night at 7:30 in the High School Auditorium. I hope everyone will be able to attend.
- An unidentified member of the audience – Bus Z – always being pulled and kids put on another bus or they need it for athletics – why? Laidlaw says they have no drivers, not enough buses.
- Mr. Ivanoff – This is not acceptable, we are looking into it.
- Mr. Gimple – Could we have BOCES who drives for us in the summer help out?
- Mr. Ivanoff - Last year we sent out RFP's and Laidlaw was the only company we heard from. We will also make sure that we will not be charged for the buses that we are not using.
- Mrs. Janice Vest – Bus U – FJC – changed the bus driver because of the Middle School kids – why are they not taking care of the behavior of the students on the bus instead of changing the driver.
- Mrs. Thalen – Consequences for bus behavior should be taken up with the administration of that building.
- Mr. Sanseverino – Play was wonderful, so many students were involved. We should advertise it on the two signs we have outside the buildings.
- Mrs. Thalen – Director of the Musical should ask the building administrator to use the signs.
- Mr. Gerardi – This is the first time the Marching Band will go down Fifth Avenue for the St. Patrick's Day Parade.
- Mrs. Sparks – Congratulations to Board of Education, Superintendent and Administration and to Susan Wilson on doing such a good job. Thrilled that we have a second grade chorus. Thanks to the Fire Department, I would never have the courage to do what they do. Their job is similar to what the Board does, unpaid volunteers. I do appreciate that you are doing it the way you are doing it.
- Ms. Bonner – I've been so quiet on this issue. We have done so with diligence but somehow this has turned into a personal issue. I take offense to the fact that you are implying that we aren't sympathetic towards the firefighters and what they do. We are gathering the facts to present to the public so we can make a decision. Do you see any firefighters left here at this meeting?
- Mrs. Sparks – I didn't mean for this for my comments to be misinterpreted.
- Mrs. Thalen – Let's bring closure to this issue. We are trying to do the right thing. Are there any further questions/comments?

There were no further questions or comments.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

At 9:23 PM a motion was made by Jane Bonner and seconded by Howard Gimple to go into executive session to discuss particular personnel matters. All in favor – Motion carried 5-0.

Respectfully submitted,

Mary Berretta
Acting District Clerk

The Board returned to Open Session at 10:51 PM.

ADJOURNMENT

A motion was made by Joseph Sanseverino and seconded by Howard Gimple at 10:52 PM for the Board of Education adjourn the meeting. All in favor – Motion carried 5-0.

Respectfully submitted,

James J. Gerardi
Superintendent of Schools