

May 19, 2003

I. CALL TO ORDER

Finance Chairperson, Katrina Murray, called a Finance and Facilities Committee of the Whole Meeting of the School Committee to order in the committee room at city hall at 6:30 p.m., for approval of billrolls and discussion of the FY04 budget.

II. ROLL CALL

Present were Ms. Cardoso, Ms. Harris, Mayor Gay, Ms. Bauer, Mr. Sullivan, Ms. Taylor, Mr. Murray, and Ms. Rossetti.

Alderman O'Donovan was absent.

Dr. Albert F. Argenziano, Superintendent of Schools, Ms. Marie B. Ferrari, Assistant Superintendent for Finance and Administration, Mr. Anthony C. Caliri, Human Resources Manager, and Dr. Steven F. Jenkins, District Administrator for Student Services were also present, along with approximately twenty four members of the audience.

Present from the Mayor's office was Mr. John McGinn, Chief Financial Officer.

III. Approval of Billrolls

MOTION: Ms. Bauer made a motion, seconded by Ms. Harris to approve the FY2002 Billrolls as presented this evening. The motion was approved by voice vote.

MOTION: Ms. Rossetti made a motion, seconded by Harris to approve the FY2003 Billrolls as presented this evening. The motion was approved by voice vote.

Before going into this evening's discussion regarding the FY04 budget, the Superintendent updated members on the Question 2 Implementation item discussed at the last Finance and Facilities Committee meeting. He referred to the school committee's request to have evening meetings scheduled, in order to accommodate parents, concerning the Implementation of Question 2. He provided to the committee an evening meeting schedule that included school buildings, number of nights, number of staff, and advised that the cost would be \$6,960. plus an additional \$2,000., for translators and PAC people to be available, as needed. This brought the total to \$8,960.00. Brief discussion followed.

The school committee directed the Superintendent to proceed with setting up the evening meetings.

IV. FY04 Budget Discussion

Because of the numerous meetings the school committee has had regarding the budget, Ms. Murray began by asking the members, whether or not the committee is prepared to finalize tonight, their own bottom line budget figure in order to better understand what direction the committee is headed during the next couple of weeks. After receiving input from members it was decided Ms. Murray would ask that question after this evening's discussion.

Ms. Murray then turned the meeting over to Mayor Gay.

IV. FY04 Budget Discussion (cont.)

Mayor Gay gave a brief overview of the fiscal crisis the city is faced with. She reported that we are at an \$11.8 million short fall at this point in time. She informed the committee she met last week, with the Superintendent of Schools, and suggested to the Superintendent the bottom line figure for the school department will be \$46.2 million. She cannot go above this figure. The Mayor explained she is not asking the school department to take a 10% cut as other departments across the city are doing, as an average. She realized this is a shock to everyone, as well as herself, but the fact that we are over \$11 million down, and with our costs continuing to rise, this is the amount she was able to submit to the Superintendent. The Mayor stressed she has a fiduciary responsibility to the taxpayers of the city and she also has an obligation to balance the budget and the amount of \$46.2 million is what she is able to submit to the Superintendent of Schools as a bottom line figure.

Ms. Murray asked Dr. Argenziano to respond, for further discussion, concerning this issue. The Superintendent reiterated again what was said at last Tuesday's Finance and Facilities Meeting. He still feels very strongly that what makes the Somerville Public Schools unique and different is that we have new facilities, we have structure, low class size, full day Pre-Kindergarten, full day Kindergarten, small schools, quality teachers and day care up to 6:00 p.m. In order to keep all this in place whether the budget is 50.2 million to 46.2 million, he has to go forward with what he is given by the Mayor. He explained if the city is taking a loss of close to \$12 million and the school department is a third (which is \$4 million) then this is what we have to deal with. The Superintendent stressed he cannot give the school committee an organization until the bottom line is completed. There have been so many organizations/options that have been prepared by Administration, and now, there are only eighteen school days left to notify people of what is happening. As of tonight, and after listening to the Mayor and the Chief Financial Officer, \$46.2 million is where we are.

Dr. Argenziano also reminded the school committee that on two occasions, a vote was taken, and it was asked that he not close schools. He briefly talked about what he is planning a year from now, regarding the school closings, space issues and where the programs would be housed. The Superintendent advised, as of right now, he is doing what the school committee has requested. In closing, Dr. Argenziano stated when presented with the bottom line, he will prepare an organization.

After listening to the Mayor's presentation and the Superintendent's response, discussion followed. The members asked many questions, shared input and voiced their concerns to the Mayor, Mr. McGinn and the Superintendent.

The members decided not to vote on a bottom line figure, as they felt more discussion and decisions have to be made by the committee. One of the issues discussed was to raise the figure of \$46.2 million proposed by the Mayor and bring the increased amount to the Board of Aldermen for their support, when voting for the school department budget.

Ms. Murray informed the public further discussion will take place at the next Finance and Facilities Committee meeting scheduled for June 2, 2003 at 6:30 p.m. There will also be two additional evenings set aside for discussion, if necessary. The dates are June 3 and June 4, 2003. The Somerville School Committee Public Budget Hearing will be held on Wednesday, June 11, 2003 at 6:30 p.m. in the auditorium at the East Somerville Community School.

V. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 7:50 p.m., by voice vote.

Dr. Albert F. Argenziano
Secretary