

WILLINGTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS
BOARD OF EDUCATION MEETING MINUTES
TUESDAY, JANUARY 8, 2013

The meeting was called to order at 7:03 p.m. by Chairman Erika Wiecenski at the Town Office Building.

PRESENT: Erika Wiecenski, Herb Arico, Mark Jones, Heather Estey, Michelle Cunningham, Barry Wallett, Leo Mercado, Superintendent David Harding

ABSENT: None

COMMUNICATIONS:

None

PRESENT TO SPEAK:

Val Mosely stated she was there to support the budget.

Peter Latincsics asked if a copy of the presentation would be available at a later time.

Superintendent Harding responded that he would make a copy available.

PRESENTATIONS:

Superintendent Harding reviewed the budget process and then presented on the 2013-2014 BOE proposed budget. The current budget amount is \$8,042,617.00 which is a 5.28% increase over last year. He explained this budget does not include any cuts to any programs. He explained the assumptions that were included in the budget and the primary increases. He reviewed the information about the Region #19 budget with the expected decrease in Willington's share due to the population change.

Board discussed the budget items presented.

MOTION: By Michelle Cunningham, seconded by Leo Mercado, to add agenda item Present to Speak after item 4- Presentation.

VOTE: Unanimous in Favor

Alex Strong asked for Superintendent Harding to show the slide on projected enrollment again.

Superintendent Harding gave him a copy of the slide.

Alex Strong questioned the number of students listed for the Kindergarten projection being only 38 and asked if it would be better to have two homerooms of 19 students each instead of three with 12 or 13 students each.

Board responded that the estimated number at this time of year is usually around 40 but increases to around 52 before school starts for the next year but you won't know until much later in the year.

Alex Strong asked about the ratio of teachers to homerooms, asking if you get rid of one homeroom does that mean you get rid of two staff members.

Board and Superintendent replied no that it is not a 1 to 1 ratio and that it depends on the grade level and other factors such as the unified arts/support staff that need to be taken into consideration.

Peter Latincics asked about situations like Alex Strong described or health care insurance figures and how has that been built into the budget, is it a floating line item?

Superintendent Harding responded that the assumptions made about health insurance change as new information is received.

Peter Latincics stated he is more interested in the Board's reaction than his own at this time. He also questioned his understanding of the Affordable Care Act asking if anything over 10% increase has to be reviewed by state regulators.

Superintendent Harding stated he was not sure if that was the correct interpretation of that and it could be referencing the fees not to be more than 10% of an increase but he deferred to the Business Manager, Donna Latincics who responded that she was not positive and will ask the agent about it.

Alex Strong questioned the number of full time staff in PreK-8 not totaling the number of sections.

Superintendent Harding responded that the sections are the homerooms only and not all full time staff have a homeroom, there are unified arts teachers, OT and PT people, psychologists, speech therapists, etc. and that there is not a correlation between homerooms and all teachers listed. He continued to explain that in the upper grades there are two sections yet you still have all the support people and certified teachers included that are not counted as additional sections.

Alex Strong asked if you reduced the homerooms can you reduce the amount of unified arts teachers as well.

Superintendent Harding explained how that has been done in the past if justified by enrollment.

Alex Strong asked about how the per pupil expenditure was charged, that he believes it is high and what the increase would be per pupil.

Board responded that they would like to stick to the discussion of the budget at this time and not get into the technicalities of per pupil expenditure.

Tracey Anderson stated that she felt a lot of research and thought has gone into building a reasonable budget and is in support of what was presented.

Peter Latincics asked the Board if they will be discussing the budget in the next meetings and if so to look carefully at the purchased services large increase and why is that. He said we have been a successful district at keeping those services in house and the town would want to continue and be better at that and keep those costs in house.

SUPERINTENDENT'S REPORT:

Superintendent Harding attended a statewide symposium on security with national presenters, talking about what can be done. There were state police, fire departments and state agencies in attendance. He did not include any additional costs in the proposed budget as far as security goes, based on discussions starting now there could be some impacts on the budget to come. He handed out a copy of a recent article regarding this topic.

Superintendent Harding also explained another item not included in the proposed budget is costs for training for the new teacher evaluation plan and education reform. It has not happened yet and it is unclear when it will be implemented, may get postponed a year or it may be partially implemented. It is hard to add money to budget when you are not sure what you need or when it is needed by.

He discussed an overview of Willington's response to the school shooting in Newtown as well as some of the things they are looking at to ensure best practices with regards to safety. Parents appreciated the phone message that was sent. The following Monday troopers were stationed in the parking lots at the schools. Some complaints were made about the morning procedure of students entering the building between 7-7:30 am to go to the library with the doors open at that time. A change was made and the doors remained locked now in the morning and a staff member mans the door to allow entry of the students in to go to the library during that time.

Board discussed what is reasonable, valid and necessary. Superintendent Harding stated that a lot of the recommended items Willington has already implemented within the last few years such as a key fob swipe entry system, locked doors with a buzzer, cameras, holding practice drills, cutting trees in front of buildings, and clearing out the congestion in front of schools.

Board members questioned the budget process and how it would be addressed if some security items were to move forward after the budget was already completed, asking "how would the costs be covered?" Superintendent responded that if the Board felt the item was a safety concern then it would not be a CIP issue, the funds would have to be found within the current budget or return to the BOF for Funds.

Superintendent Harding reported on attending the CIP meeting stating he presented the list of items that were previously discussed. The CIP committee asked for a broader plan of all that could go wrong with the buildings. Superintendent had not updated the list this year so he met with Ron Strong to look at the list and update it. He will present the new list to the committee when the energy efficiency group meets. The date for that meeting has not been set yet.

Board members discussed the minimum budget requirement (MBR) asking if the budget gets voted in for 8 million this year and the enrollment is down again are we stuck at 8 million again next year. Superintendent clarified that the MBR regulations concerning regional districts such as ours are different. With Willington being tied to EO Smith if one is up and one is down it does not have an impact. He also stated people are looking at changes to the MBR so that the towns would have more flexibility to favor the municipality but with Willington it is less of an impact because of EO Smith.

Superintendent Harding stated there are more scheduled budget meetings and he is looking for guidance from the Board for next weeks' meeting.

COMMITTEE REPORTS:

Finance Committee met and reviewed the bills.

Herb Arico, Liaison for Region 19 stated they have meetings scheduled tonight and on February 5, 11 and 26 and on March 5, 12, 19, 26 as well to review the budget.

NEW BUSINESS:

Board discussed the December meeting minutes with members questioning the absence of a statement reflecting that the Superintendent was going to come up with different ideas for discussion regarding professional development to be discussed before the next calendar approval meeting. Superintendent Harding responded that the minutes reflect that discussion of professional development will be ongoing and it was his understanding that they would be having further discussion on the issue after he had investigated the contractual obligations in regards to the calendar and professional development days to offer different options to the Board.

MOTION: by Herb Arico, seconded by Erika Wiecenski, to approve the minutes of the December 11, 2012 Board meeting.

VOTE: Yes: Herb Arico, Mark Jones, Barry Walleth, Erika Wiecenski,
Michelle Cunningham, Heather Estey
Abstain: Leo Mercado

Motion passed.

Board discussed the B.O.E budget workshop meetings scheduled noting the next meeting on January 16, 2013 is at 7pm at the HMS Library and the January 23, 2013 meeting at 7pm is at the Town Office Building, lower level meeting room.

Members asked Superintendent Harding to bring a copy of the trend of enrollment to the next meeting. Members also requested that the budget meetings be reflected on the town website. Members commented on the states enrollment projections being so far off for so many years.

Superintendent Harding asked members to email him any questions they have on the budget or any specifics that they want to see so that he can provide the information at the next budget meeting.

PRESENT TO SPEAK:

Alex Strong asked about a follow up on enrollment trends, stating CSDE he thinks is based on Census data, noting the Willington projections seem the overall trend is steadily downward, with that not being disputed, at what point does the town realize that it is more efficient to have one school for PreK-8 instead of two schools.

Superintendent Harding responded that the current facility used to house all the grade levels would have to be HMS and that the town would not want the primary grade levels on Route 32 and that the HMS building is not structured for primary grade students. It would require a building project to construct a new school that would hold all grades to make it work. The challenges faced to have a building project for a parking lot at CES was rough, he does not think a new building would be supported.

Board Member questioned the vacancy at HMS and how would it work if you tried to shoehorn it in, why is it not feasible.

Superintendent responded that he had looked into this in the past, looked at farming out two grade levels to pay tuition to Mansfield schools and at that time Mansfield could not take them.

He stated it would be difficult and there would be backlash with having the younger students on Route 32 and the building is not built or equipped for students of that size.

Alex Strong asked why Center school could not be added onto to accommodate all students.

Board responded that there is not enough space for an annex at Center and that the State would not allow additions to either of the existing buildings because of space issues.

Tracey Anderson spoke about the security issues stating she does not know what is right but does not want a prison environment. She stated there are rooms without air conditioning and in the warmer temperatures there would be problems with bullet proof glass or fences and again she stated she does not know what the answer is but feels individuals will try to get in no matter what but she does not want the kids to feel penned in.

Superintendent Harding responded that we are doing the right things, we have the support systems, small class sizes, connective-ness which allows us to foresee problems and head them off before larger issues arise.

Val Mosely, spoke as a substitute in Willington, she believes it would be beneficial to have been present for a drill so that substitutes would know the protocol or have training if something were to happen.

BOARD COMMENTS:

Board thanked the staff, administration and David Harding for their work on the budget and presentation, stating that Willington Public Schools provide a great value for the money with excellent services for the per pupil cost. Thanked the community for the support. Noted the budget discussions do not end tonight they will be discussing it at the next budget meeting on January 16, 2013 at the HMS Library.

Board commented that the purchased services seem to be driven by Special Education and some of what was discussed is in legislation regarding cost sharing and it is an important area to have conversations to prevent more cuts in cost sharing.

Board commented that it is necessary to continue the investigation on security, maintain due diligence in this area to meet the obligation to keep students safe,.

Superintendent Harding commented that when the buzzer systems were put in at the schools meaning the doors were locked they faced resistance on the issue. Then when the cameras were installed they faced resistance on that too. Two years ago they were discussing background checks on volunteers in the schools, he stated that Willington has always been ahead of the curve and preparedness is good and will probably be mandated in the future. He noted many of the recommendations made for security, Willington already has in place.

Board thanked Superintendent Harding for the notification call that went out the day of the Newtown incident to parents stating it was reassuring.

Meeting adjourned at 8:50 p.m.

Nichole Page
Recording Secretary