

WILLINGTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS  
BOARD OF EDUCATION MEETING MINUTES  
TUESDAY, JANUARY 14, 2014  
(Unofficial Until Board Approval)

The meeting was called to order at 7:45 p.m. by Chairman Erika Wiecenski at the Town Office Building.

**PRESENT:** Erika Wiecenski, Herb Arico, Mark Jones, Leo Mercado, Michelle Cunningham, Ann Grosjean, Barry Walleth, Superintendent David Harding

**ABSENT:**  
None

**COMMUNICATIONS:**

Superintendent Harding informed the Board he received a letter from a parent inquiring about the pre-school program. Superintendent reminded the Board of the discussions in June last year when it was stated that the discussion needed to happen during budget season. A decision had not been reached and the issue has come up again so a conversation will be needed.

Members discussed process of adding items to the agenda and if a time change caused the meeting to be a special meeting or not.

**PRESENT TO SPEAK:**  
None

**PRESENTATIONS:**

Superintendent Harding reminded the Board that this is a budget item and the Board has to approve new curriculum. At some point in the future this needs to be decided if they want to add this curriculum to the budget.

Hall Memorial School Principal, Deborah Sullivan, presented on the overview of proposed fifth grade math curriculum. She showed the Board samples of the curriculum and handouts of three separate evaluations done by Deb Ostien, Head of the Math Department along with two fifth grade teachers, Kara Hennessey and Connie Wilde. All scored well in the program. The current curriculum being used is not satisfactory, needs to be supplemented and now with the new standards is not going to continue to work. The program presented is more comprehensive, aligned well to the new standards, includes performance tasks, and has lots of materials both paper and electronic available to the teachers. This new program will assist with the transition from grade 5 math to the grade 6, 7, and 8 math program being used.

Board members reviewed material samples and asked various questions including what other programs are currently being used in Willington and also in Ashford and Mansfield, if workbooks and consumables will still be needed with the new program, and if the program has been piloted at the school yet. Principal Sullivan responded that Growing with Math and Connected with Math are currently both being used in Willington but that Ashford and Mansfield use different programs, the consumables would be less with the electronic materials because you have the ability to print items so there would be a savings on some workbooks, and that the program has not yet been piloted but has been reviewed by both the fifth grade teachers and the math department who believe it to be a more comprehensive program.

Members asked about having three separate programs now, one for grades pre-k through 4, one for grade 5 and one for grades 6-8 instead of the usual one for pre-k through 5 and one for 6-8 and if they are comfortable with this. Principal Sullivan informed that originally the program was going to be for grades 4 & 5 but with the move of grade 4 to Center School, Principal Stevens wanted to continue to use the Growing with Math program. Principal Stevens responded that they have included grade 4 because they have already aligned it to the Common Core and it would not be cost effective at this time to change to an alternate program at Center. Both principals are comfortable with the decision because all the programs are aligned with the standards now.

Superintendent Harding asked the Board to review the program and check on line to see what others are saying about it and at future meeting can vote on whether or not they want the new curriculum.

Members asked about piloting the program, if assessments are computer based to prepare students for the Smarter Balance testing, if the program includes algebra and geometry and if any site visits at other schools have taken place. Principal Sullivan stated that they have not yet piloted the program but that she can look into getting the electronic samples from the company and have teachers pilot some lessons from the program. The electronic assessments have not been viewed yet because the company did not provide those samples so it is possible. She informed that throughout the standards there are algebraic and geometry concepts that are taught and included in the materials. She will look into doing a site visit at another local school using the program.

Principal Sullivan then informed the Board of a recent visit by the technology person from the STEM Academy in Willimantic to review Hall School's iPad initiative program and read the thank you letter she received that stated how impressed they were and what an exemplary standard HMS has set in the manner in which teachers and students use the iPads, and that HMS is a model to follow and they will try to do the same.

Principal Sullivan stated she was the state advocate for the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) and shared with the Board an article she submitted, that was published in their national newsletter to school administrators, about the visit to HMS from Congressman Courtney.

Superintendent, David Harding, presented the Willington Public Schools 2014-2015 budget. He reviewed the budget process stating this is the second run of the budget for this season coming in at \$7,917,165 which is down (-1.15%). Reviewed the decreases in salaries and benefits, explained the assumptions, and discussed the teacher contract negotiations with the health insurance savings for the district including the placeholders, deductibles and the census.

Superintendent reviewed the minimum budget requirement (MBR) state law explaining it only allows a district to cut a certain amount of money from what was appropriated last year. The amount is estimated based on the E.O. Smith education costs added with the K-8 education costs to total Willington's contribution toward education. This year EO Smith is estimated at an increase of 2.6% which would be about \$49,000 plus a \$60,000 decrease for the K-8 which totals \$109,000 that the budget can be reduced by. The penalty for every dollar exceeding the limit is a reduction in the ECS by \$2.00. Superintendent spoke with the State and was told they have never given a waiver to any town for MBR.

Superintendent mentioned that each year the numbers in the budget in terms of percentages hardly change. Over 80-83% of the budget is for people, the rest is contractual obligations. He noted that there will be two certified retirements this year that will not be replaced. One is a special education teacher at Center and one is the PE/health teacher at Hall. The teacher at Center will be covered by the grade 4 move and the extra staff going over. The teacher at Hall will be covered by the remaining PE/health teacher along with other unified arts teachers picking up health classes to teach. This is a temporary fix until next years' changes in the schedule are looked at more comprehensively for the future classes coming over to Hall. We are using creative solutions so that another person does not need to be hired.

Superintendent reviewed the changes in more line items in the budget including CIP items moved into the budget, dental, subscriptions, stipends, purchased services, books, and operations. He explained the bond program for the savings under operations for electricity and heat. He discussed the transportation contract increase, fuel decrease, enrollment study and future enrollment issues.

The budget ends with an allowable amount of \$17,000 more that can be cut according to the MBR but if EO Smith does less than a 2.6% budget then Willington will have less money to cut.

Superintendent discussed exploring opportunities to create revenue by tuitioning in a few students from out of town.

Superintendent Harding mentioned the preschool program stating it is not revenue neutral, it has a cost to it. Some issues are that if it is open for all you do not know how many you may have, and we would have to provide transportation and resources for all. Some parents who pay for preschool want the public school to provide the service but it is a cost and the Board needs to discuss it.

Board discussed the preschool option asking questions about how long the program has been in place, is there an increased need of identified children or do we meet the needs now, how many open slots for each age, how is the lottery set up, what is the rationale behind the lottery system and why can't everyone get it for free, and is it legal to charge for preschool.

Special Services Director, Holly DiBella-McCarthy, answered the questions stating that the program has been run over 20 years, the pre-k program is an integrated program by law to service students with special needs and have peers without disabilities who become peer models for the students with needs. The program is required and funded partially by the State to provide services to special needs students. Sometimes able to invite students at risk so that early intervention can prevent need of services in the future. There are currently slots open for age 3, there is not a need for another section, the lottery occurred because there are only so many slots available therefore a selection process is needed and it is literally names pulled out of a hat that are chosen, no one is denied their name just may not be pulled out for selection. Students are screened in the spring to be identified for needs. The program is a half day program so parents would still need to provide care for the other half of the day. Other pre-k programs charge a minimum amount to attend.

Superintendent noted that if added another class, would need another teacher for the program and that would be additional costs. The position would be filled through attrition, once created you cannot undo so 5 years from now still paying for program.

He informed the Board of a grant for an assessment of our technology and the lack of support personnel for the schools and the town. The email is down regularly, many items not functioning properly with our servers for testing and reports needed to be completed, we are understaffed for support. Considering a position to be shared between the town and the school, this will continue to come up as a necessary item.

Board asked questions about details of specific line items including substitute numbers, computer figures. Superintendent answered the questions and responded that he does not copy and hand out all the worksheets used to get the budget numbers but has them available to review and answer any questions. He stated we are always looking at ways to save and eliminate waste. For example we recently eliminated 2 annual postage machine contract by switching to U.S.P.S. stamped envelopes. He mentioned sending Brenda Weber to Washington, D.C. for two days of training at an E-Rate conference. Today he received the Funding Commitment Decision Letter awarding the district \$8,807.57. He stated he can project some of the remaining expenditures for the current school year but there is still half a year to go.

Members mentioned they would like to have the business manager at the next meeting to answer the questions that could not be answered today.

Members are to review the budget and send any questions or requests to Superintendent Harding before the next budget meeting on Tuesday, January 21, 2014 at 7 p.m. at the Hall School Library.

#### SUPERINTENDENT REPORTS:

None

#### COMMITTEE REPORTS:

Finance Committee met and reviewed the bills.

#### NEW BUSINESS:

Michelle Cunningham asked for a correction on her report on page two under Committee Reports to change the word Superintendent to district staff.

**MOTION:** by Erika Wicewski, seconded by Herb Arico, to approve the minutes of the December 10, 2013 Board meeting as amended.

**VOTE:** Unanimous in Favor  
Motion Passed

Superintendent explained the transfer request to cover the cost of an additional student attending a magnet school which the district is required to pay a percentage of the tuition through School Choice.

**MOTION:** by Herb Arico, seconded by Michelle Cunningham, to approve the transfer in the amount of \$5,015.00 as presented.

**VOTE:** Unanimous in Favor  
Motion Passed

Superintendent Harding reviewed that as a result of the prior meeting this evening the Board needs to establish a committee and have a member or two on the committee. Leo Mercado and Erika Wicewski agreed to sit on the committee.

MOTION: by Erika Wiecenski, seconded by Herb Arico, to move that the BOE establish a Building Committee to oversee the roof replacement project on the north wing of Center Elementary School.

VOTE: Unanimous in Favor  
Motion Passed

Superintendent Harding stated the specifications needed to be approved by the Board so that he can complete the application submitted to the State for the roof repairs at Center School. Board discussed language required regarding elementary status for 20 years and the asbestos testing.

MOTION: by Mark Jones, seconded by Erika Wiecenski, to move that the BOE approve the education specifications for the roof replacement on the north wing of Center Elementary School.

VOTE: Unanimous in Favor  
Motion Passed

Superintendent Harding thanked Brenda Weber for her work on the E-rate program which he explained to the Board is the Schools and Libraries Program (under the oversight of the Federal Communications Commission) and provides reimbursements or discounts to schools and libraries on internet, phone service and related services.

**PRESENT TO SPEAK:**

Tara Bergeron, Director of the Willington Youth and Family Social Services stated that at the end of June her computer crashed and a new one was installed but she stopped getting the Board of Education minutes so she missed the conversation on the breakfast program that may or may not be coming to Willington Schools and she asked the Board what happened and where does that stand.

Michelle Cunningham replied that they discussed the feasibility of the program but that it was not voted on and they did not apply for the grant due to the time limit. She stated a site visit was made to Ashford Food Service with Willington principal, Board & committee members attending. The program has been considered, it is not a budget item because it pays for itself. They have worked with End Hunger who continues to offer the \$3,000 grant to Willington who is considered a severe risk school. It is something that is being considered but there are issues that need to be worked out such as allergies of students and logistics of time and local at HMS, before the program could be initiated. Ashford school has two bus runs and time before school to have the program in their cafeteria where HMS only has a few minutes before students are in class and grab-n-go option is limited due to the allergy classrooms and the amount of custodial clean up required. Therefore allergies, time and space would require a hybrid type of program that has not been worked out. This item is not on the agenda tonight but that is where the Board stands, it is not a budget item.

Leo Mercado stated he has information to share on this topic as well.

Deb Sullivan mentioned if the buses let the students off earlier than you have to have staff in the rooms earlier and change the time of school.

David Harding stated it is a struggle with logistics; you would have to open the teacher contract if you changed the times that students enter the classrooms and that would be a large cost.

Mark Jones asked if this item could be on the next agenda to discuss.

Leo Mercado stated January 27 is the deadline for the next grant and Superintendent responded that in the past they have said they would waive the deadline.

Barry Wallet asked if the need has been demonstrated and Superintendent replied it is based on the Free and Reduced lunch lists.

Tara Bergeron stated she has information as well.

#### BOARD COMMENTS:

Members expressed that they would welcome a conversation about the breakfast program, want to look into various models and/or possibly pilot a program and encourage parents to come and speak on the subject. Members also would like to keep the Pre-K discussion open to see if there are any creative ways to investigate the options.

Board members thanked Deb Sullivan for her presentation on the math curriculum, David Harding and the staff and administration for their hard work on the budget, Brenda Weber for her work on E-rate, thanked residents for attending the meeting, stated basketball teams are doing well, and the musical production of *Once on This Island* is under way.

Erika Wicewski expressed extreme disappointment that the Business Manager was not present tonight during the budget presentation to answer the Boards questions and requests her presence at the next meeting.

Meeting adjourned at 9:43 p.m.

Nichole Page  
Recording Secretary