

WILLINGTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS
BOARD OF EDUCATION MEETING MINUTES
TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 12, 2013
(Unofficial Until Board Approval)

The meeting was called to order at 7:00 p.m. by Chairman Erika Wiecenski at the Town Office Building.

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

ABSENT: Michelle Cunningham

COMMUNICATIONS:

None

PRESENT TO SPEAK:

None

SUPERINTENDENT REPORTS:

Superintendent Harding showed a video of the Hall Memorial School morning news program's interview with Congressman Joe Courtney who visited the new studio at Hall School. The interview is online on the school website along with the regular morning news broadcasts accessible from the library page.

He gave a reminder of the next special meeting to discuss declining enrollment on Monday, November 18 from 6-8 at the Hall School library.

Superintendent congratulated the Board members who ran and were reelected and thanked them for continuing to serve on the Board.

He thanked Heather Estey for her time as a board member, stating it has been a pleasure working with her.

He stated Ann Grosjean would be seated in December and nominations for Board Chair, Vice Chair and Secretary would also take place at that time.

Superintendent Harding reported that the Governor had announced the schools in the state that were awarded grant monies from the grant Willington applied for over the summer and Willington was chosen. He reviewed that at the time he only had 4-5 days to put together the grant information which would award funds to reimburse schools at between 60-64% of costs for security upgrades. The grant application was for approximately \$29,000 which included previously made upgrades to cameras and radios for both schools among other items. The reimbursement from the grant should be around \$18,500.00 which can be used for future infrastructure upgrades.

Superintendent reported that he attended the security meeting in Farmington where they discussed new requirements and rules going in place for schools including school security committees which will need local fire and police departments as members.

COMMITTEE REPORTS:

Finance Committee met and reviewed the bills.

Herb Arico, Liaison for EastConn reported met on October 22, 2013 with a special presentation by J. Robinson from UConn on human development and family studies. Board is working on negotiating the teacher contract at this time. The next meeting is set for November 26, 2013.

Herb Arico, Liaison for Charter stated will meet next on November 18, 2013.

NEW BUSINESS:

MOTION: by Herb Arico, seconded by Heather Estey, to approve the minutes of the October 8, 2013 Board meeting.

VOTE: Yes: H. Arico, M. Jones, H. Estey, E. Wiecenski, B. Wallett
 Abstain: Leo Mercado

Motion Passed

OLD BUSINESS:

Willington Public Schools Enrollment Projection was discussed stating the next meeting was on November 18, 2013 at 6pm at Hall School. Board is asking the public to please let them know of any suggestions stating that all ideas are accepted and would be looked at.

One idea suggested by a staff member was to keep grade 9 at Hall School. Members discussed this and asked if E.O. Smith would accept the students that remained as grade 10 once they transferred. Legal issues arise with this as well due to a contract being held with E.O. Smith and that Hall could not give credits.

Board discussed relocation of grade four to Center School with Superintendent Harding reviewing that at first there was concerns about costs and if other programs could be created to generate funds at Center. The other programs turned out not to be feasible and there would not be other costs regarding special education and the rearrangement of staffing, according to Holly DiBella-McCarthy it would work better with the numbers in special education to be at Center. He stated that the Board is comfortable that there will be no costs and that it will be a good move for the students. Voting for the move will allow a shift in the budget for grade four from HMS to CES to start planning for the move.

Board asked if there were any negatives that would hurt the students if the move was made. Superintendent responded that over the years he has tried to find the reason or reasons for the grade four drop in scores including trying to look at whether or not the new activities offered in grade four contributed to this. It is hard to measure and with the new testing. Scores will be difficult to compare. He stated that he has heard all positive feedback so far with other members mentioning that grade four started out at Center years ago. He mentioned that current grade four students participate in some activities at Hall that they would not have at Center such as band.

Board requested comments from the audience to gain feedback on this topic.

Jan Castle, teacher at Center School, stated she believes in Mansfield one day a week the elementary students go to the middle school before school begins for band lessons in the morning then are brought to the elementary school for the start of their regular school day. She stated that there is staff to do the lessons but not enough time in her position at .6 to add a grade

four chorus. The Board discussed using recorders and she replied that most schools start instrumental music in grade four. Mark Jones clarified that in Mansfield the students are bused to both schools and the parents do not have to transport the students.

Erika Wiczenski mentioned that the play and musicals are not open to grade 4 students at Hall and that the amount of overall Spanish would remain the same for grade 4 students if moved to Center.

Carrie-Ann Kelley, parent of CES student, asked what was going on and what had started this discussion to move grade four to Center. Barry Wallett replied it was due to the declining enrollment. Superintendent Harding responded that educationally it makes sense to have the elementary grade at Center school since there was now available space to do that. Academically there is a drop in scores in grade four so now that may change.

Carrie-Ann Kelley stated it would be wonderful but was concerned and asked if there would be a flip flop in later years if the enrollment were to increase. Mr. Harding replied as long as space remains available they would not return them to Hall.

Board members asked Phil Stevens where at Center the space was available. He replied the math intervention room and a kindergarten classroom were currently open but that some shuffling would need to happen to coordinate grade levels to be near one another. He also commented that the issue of space if a bubble year with a third section went through it could be accommodated in utilizing other areas of the school.

Dina Gilbert, parent of grade 7 and grade 3 students, stated she would selfishly like to have both students at the same school but academically and developmentally it would be the right thing to do to have grade 4 move to Center. She also stated that already there were 3 or 4 new students in grade 3 in the last two weeks, if more keep moving here she wondered about next year and a flip flop.

Phil Stevens responded that the enrollment now is 37 and it is still under to justify a third section, it is not even on the fence. With grade three you usually have enough by several or not. Unless there is some sort of boom there is not enough. Superintendent Harding stated it would be a good problem if it happened but projections are not indicating a boom.

Carrie-Ann Kelley agreed that academically and developmentally it is the right thing.

Superintendent Harding stated that Willington is one of the only schools districts to have this configuration and that the transition to middle school is difficult for students, emotionally, it is an early rise, he tried to look at everything that could cause the drop in scores including the teachers, progress, etc. but it seems to be the transition that affects them. He said there are more resources at Center, Hall has higher expectations for an early age, and they may get a better foundation at the elementary school for one more year.

Carrie-Ann Kelley asked if the fifth grade would ever be moved over and Board replied that it is a space issue but they have been talking about all possible options.

Peter Latincsics said he assumes that the fourth grade option has no impact on the budget. Mr. Harding replied that was correct. They have ruled out other options and had resources in place first before deciding to go this route. There may be a shifting of budget but no new expenses. One reason to do this earlier as well is to do budgets. The Board is looking at the long term not just the short term.

Phil Stevens stated that the preliminary schedule is made and it will work.

Carrie-Ann Kelley asked what the kids might lose in fourth grade and down the road if fifth grade were to move would the kids lose a lot if this happens compared to other towns. Board replied most towns are kindergarten through grade 4 or kindergarten through grade 5 and that is not unusual. Carrie-Ann Kelley asked about the band aspect. Superintendent Harding stated that is the only thing that would be a loss but as Jan stated there could be a way for that, not sure yet but other than Band nothing else lost but would gain instead.

Members and audience mentioned enrichment clubs and the morning news program with replies that grade four is allowed the second half of the year to work on the technical side of the morning news and Phil Stevens replying that clubs are stipend positions that can be budgeted for those kinds of things. There are things to look at moving forward to enhance Center so that even the grade 3 students may benefit with other things too. These are all viable options.

Barry Wallett stated that this is a budget neutral move and it benefits the students. Once decided it is not going to affect or split resources, shifting of resources will occur.

Members asked audience if there has been any negative feedback or if it has been mostly positive. Dina Gilbert replied she has heard some parents of older students speak negatively but mostly because they wanted both kids to be in one school even though they think it would benefit the students to make the move. Phil Stevens stated it has been in the digital backpack and most parents of grade 3 students are aware of this discussion. Members stated it has been in the minutes and community has had the opportunity to speak on this topic since August when they began the discussions. Overwhelmingly most feedback has been positive.

Members stated they would like to look at keeping enrichment and modify the music program for the grade four at Center.

Members asked if the teachers were on board with the move. Superintendent replied that only 2 of the 3 current grade 4 teachers would be needed and some moving of staff would be required. The teachers present were positive.

MOTION: by Erika Wiecenski, seconded by Mark Jones, to relocate the fourth grade from Hall Memorial School to Center Elementary School next school year 2014-2015.

VOTE: All in Favor
Motion Passed

Board discussed the Early Retirement Incentive results with Superintendent Harding reporting that he received three qualifying applications for the early retirement incentive and two that did not qualify. The incentive required four. Therefore, no teacher received the incentive. One of the three teachers who qualified has stated that she will retire anyway. One of the two who did not qualify will also definitely be retiring. The two teachers who will be retiring this year are Deb Zelinski and Dianne Goodale.

Superintendent noted that one of the non-qualifying applications was looking for Board approval. Board determined anyone not meeting the requirements does not qualify for the incentive. Teachers did not meet the guidelines so the terms were not met and the offer is null

and void. Superintendent stated there may be others before the year ends and that he thinks the retirement incentive was a good idea but it is something that should not be offered all the time.

MOTION: by Herb Arico, seconded by Erika Wiecenski, to remove from the table Policy 1140 Distribution of Materials by students.

VOTE: All in Favor
Motion Passed

Board held third reading of the policy specifying the persons that could distribute materials via the digital backpack. Board discussed the groups to be included and putting a link into the message part of the backpack versus attachments.

MOTION: by Mark Jones, seconded by Barry Wallett, to approve Policy 1140 Distribution of Materials by students as presented.

VOTE: All in Favor
Motion Passed

Board reviewed BOE Policy 0200 Mission-Goals-Objectives discussing the changed wording and the meanings of the goals. Superintendent clarified items and stated the Board should understand and be able to articulate the goals to guide the superintendent and not the other way around. Members discussed the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) and aligning to that in the goals. Board members will review further and make suggestions for changes.

Barry Wallett referenced recent media articles regarding CCSS and purchased curriculum containing political items with Superintendent Harding clarifying that the standards are published and people can purchase a curriculum from various vendors that is supposedly already aligned to the new standards. He stated there are materials and lessons available for purchase and that Deb Sullivan will be approaching the Board to approve a curriculum purchase of math materials for grades 4 and 5. He stated that now with the grade 4 move she will have to alter that to just grade 5 and Phil Stevens will need to determine his needs for proceeding with grade 4 at Center. He stated the Board would need to review and approve any purchases for curriculum. Barry Wallett stated that the curriculum committee should be reinstated next month as one of the committees now that curriculum changes will again be taking place.

PRESENT TO SPEAK:
None

BOARD COMMENTS:

Board members thanked Heather Estey for her time and input on the Board and wished her luck in the future. Board thanked the audience for being there and for their input stating it is good to have feedback. Board commented on the HMS broadcast and interview saying they did an excellent job and that they look forward to the grade four move and the positive impact it will have on the students. Members thanked the community for their support on the teacher contract vote.

Member Heather Estey thanked the Board for educating her and that the members care so much, that they put in the time, effort and heart and that she was fortunate to get to know everyone in the capacity of this Board.

Member Barry Wallett commented that he did not understand the question that some residents of the town had regarding the teacher's contract and he invited anyone with questions or needing information at any time in the future to email him for answers and discussion so that they can prevent it getting to the point it did recently. His email is bwallett@willingtonct.org

MOTION: by Erika Wicewski, seconded by Herb Arico to enter executive session at 8:20 p.m. and invite Superintendent Harding to join.

VOTE: All in Favor
Motion Passed

Board exited executive session at 8:55 p.m.

Meeting adjourned at 8:56 p.m.

Nichole Page
Recording Secretary