

WILLINGTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS
BOARD OF EDUCATION MEETING MINUTES
TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 10, 2013
(Unofficial Until Board Approval)

The meeting was called to order at 7:02 p.m. by Chairman Erika Wiecenski at the Town Office Building.

PRESENT: Erika Wiecenski, Herb Arico, Michelle Cunningham, Heather Estey,
Barry Wallett, Mark Jones, Leo Mercado (arrived at 7:15 p.m.)
Superintendent David Harding,

ABSENT: None

Superintendent Harding introduced State Representative for the 53rd District, Sam Belsito, explaining he is reaching out to the constituents and the schools and will visit Hall Memorial School on September 17, 2013 as well. Representative Belsito stated he has lived in Connecticut since 1966 but was new to being elected and was learning as he goes. He said the Board's job is very special, he has attended many board and town council meetings and sees how the people are trying to give the best education to the students in the district while respecting the tax-payer's fund. It is a difficult position and he respects both sides. He spoke about three ideas to help with issues boards are facing at this time.

First is shrinking class sizes, presenting a problem with the budget where it cannot be reduced due to the MBR. Second was parent participation, he likes to give ideas so that others can improve on them or contribute their own. The third proposal he originally made 3 days after he was sworn into the House. UConn is going to spend 1.5-2 billion dollars on a new technology center which will be a big boom for the area. He proposed the first building to be built will be a new technology area for children with special needs. He believes educators, psychologists, and others can make a difference for these children, wants better than what they have now.

Representative Belsito stated that although he is new he can get to the heart of matters and knows people that can help him get answers.

Board members discussed the MBR stating the law is not beneficial to rural towns such as Willington and can Representative Belsito help in changing or eliminating this law. He responded that he would like for the Board to send him an outline of details of how they want the law changed and how it hinders the ability of the schools to do what they need or want to do to make change.

Representative Belsito discussed the Eastern region working together as part of the State against Hartford and other larger cities to push for certain things.

Superintendent Harding thanked Representative Belsito for coming out and hearing the Board's concerns and beginning a relationship to exchange ideas.

Representative Belsito informed the Board that he started this for his children and grandchildren and everyone else's too and that his reason for running was those children need a break and if we don't change they won't be able to live here so we cannot continue on this same road.

Board thanked Representative Belsito for attending.

COMMUNICATIONS:

None

PRESENT TO SPEAK:

None

PRESENTATION:

Superintendent Harding prefaced the presentation stating that this was the last year of CMT testing. The new Smarter Balance Assessment for the Common Core is already being used instead. Willington is supposed to receive a waiver for the CMT's for this year so it makes the data irrelevant. He informed the staff at the beginning of the year not to dwell on these results because we are already moving in another direction. He stated the waiver has not yet been granted but he was told by the Commissioner of Education to proceed as if it had been.

CES Principal Phil Stevens presented the CMT results of grade three showing the improvements in reading, writing and math from previous years. He stated in reading there were about 4 students that were only 1-2 points away which would have brought the scale up to an even higher percentage. In writing the data teams pinpointed where we were weak and figured it out and so there were not any students at below basic. In math they had the second highest at goal and highest at proficient. Overall the results were very good.

HMS Principal Deborah Sullivan presented the CMT results for Hall School. She stated that as always the fourth graders are a little sluggish but by grade 8 they make great gains and are very competitive within the region. The grade 8 math scores were very strong. She showed the results of the current grade 8 students that were in Willington since grade 3 and the big gains made from grade 3 to grade 8 in the scores.

Superintendent Harding said that the principal of E.O. Smith had contacted the middle schools in Region 19 to do a skills assessment at the end of grade 8 to know where the students stand before they get to high school. E.O. Smith developed and administered two tests, one for algebra and one for geometry to the eighth grade students. The Region 19 superintendents then met and received a graph of their schools results. The results showed that Willington students did very well on both tests and the high school is acknowledging that. When the Willington students get to high school they are very competitive and in some ways exceed the expectations.

Board members asked questions regarding Willington's results compared to Ashford and Mansfield, Superintendent Harding has requested more information from E.O. Smith but has not yet received it.

Board discussed the fourth grade drop in scores and that this seems to happen every year. Reasons for the drop can be attributed to fourth grade is a transition year, student's maturity and test taking skills, and being called out of class for other classes. When these students enter fifth grade the scores climb up again.

MOTION: by Erika Wicenski, seconded by Herb Arico, to add an Executive Session to the agenda, after item 10, to discuss the WEA contract negotiations with the Superintendent.

VOTE: Unanimous in Favor

Michelle Cunningham, Heather Estey

Abstain: Herb Arico

Motion Passed

OLD BUSINESS:

Willington Public Schools Enrollment Projection was discussed with Superintendent Harding stating that at previous meetings it was decided to keep this on the agenda to continue getting ideas about how to deal with this. He met with the administration and reviewed the idea of moving grade 4 to CES from HMS and Special Services Director, Holly DiBella-McCarthy, requested that before a decision is rendered to consider the option of creating space at CES to do something with an early childhood program to generate revenue.

Superintendent Harding continued to inform the Board that he met with the Region 19 Superintendents on Friday and they are all experiencing the same thing, statewide. They all agreed to have a meeting with the Superintendents and Board Chairs or representative to bounce ideas around to see if there are any common areas to save money, to be more efficient and to be more creative.

He stated he will add to the previously discussed spreadsheet, to reflect the ECS decrease impact, the possible elimination of staff in the budget to more accurately reflect projections for 5-6 years from now so that there is a place to start with the numbers. We have to have something even though the MBR can be cut by .5 each year the E.O. Smith budget impacts our MBR so it is hard to grasp. He stated a need to create some parameters to be able to intelligently discuss projections.

Board members discussed the feedback on the fourth grade move to CES stating that there was not an audience during that meeting but the community feedback so far was positive from parents of the younger students. Members stated that ideally most schools are K-4, K-5, or K-6 and we are definitely atypical.

Board members asked Special Services Director, Holly DiBella-McCarthy, about what types of programs she was considering and what the revenue would be. She responded that she just wanted to be sure the Board was not premature in the decision when there may be other options that could produce revenue such as pre-k or an ABA program which we currently do not provide but could expand into. She and Superintendent Harding explained that further research is needed to give the Board the actual numbers, cost of implementation, and the viability. She has just begun the research and will observe other programs, talk to other directors and update the Board in 2-3 months with more information.

Members liked the idea of the elementary grades all in one common space but asked the principals their thoughts on moving grade 4 to CES. CES Principal, Phil Stevens, responded that if incoming kindergarten is only two classes then it is feasible but if there are three kindergarten classes then we would need to use another room like the computer lab, reading lab or parent pick up room and that could be problematic. The UA schedule will be a challenge to coordinate shared staff since it took months to plan for what they have now.

HSM Principal, Deborah Sullivan, responded that the enrollment issue will impact the schedule no matter what is done due to staff changes.

Other members mentioned it is hard for fourth grade to acclimate to the middle school model and moving to CES is good for academic reasons alone even if there isn't a need for room at HMS.

Unified arts may decrease from full time to part time at both schools in the future but might alleviate some of the scheduling issues at both schools if grade 4 is moved to CES therefore having a revenue impact.

Superintendent Harding explained that everyone is throwing out ideas and we will keep discussing the issue and eventually hope to focus on 2-3 ideas to make proposals to present to the community and see how they feel. He explained that he looked into paying tuition for grades 7 and 8 to Mansfield in order to potentially create a consolidated K-6 school. Many issues came up with that but he wants to be sure potential ideas are kept in the minutes so that people will give feedback as to whether or not they support them. Another idea is to work together with Ashford and consolidate so that one is an elementary school and the other is a middle school. He also looked into making Hall a charter school and tuitioning in students from out of town to generate revenue but there were a series of issues with being a charter school. These types of ideas are potential possibilities once people coalesce around the ideas then we can start to work on that.

Superintendent Harding and the Board encourage parents to contact Board members to give feedback or brainstorm ideas to look at over a long period of time to address decreasing enrollment and other issues. They reiterated that these are just ideas which will be discussed, they are not proposals yet, and they encourage the communities' feedback.

PRESENT TO SPEAK:

Marybeth Luchon stated she has one high school student, two elementary at CES and one at HMS. She likes the proposed move of the fourth grade to Center School. In regards to the CMT results she worries about the maturity level of the fourth graders in the transition year and thinks that fifth grade may be better at dealing with that. She also has not run into any other people who have a fourth grader as a middle school child.

Members responded they agreed that most other schools are not grades 4-8 but 5-8 or 6-8 or just 7 & 8 and if they are K-8 there are separate wings or sections for the older students who usually follow a different schedule.

Ann Grosjean stated that she believes the nutrition and recess issue is to battle obesity through exercise and nutritious meals. She asked if earlier in the meeting if Superintendent was talking about magnet or charter schools.

Superintendent responded it was charter schools but he was not sure of the details, that he was enticed by the initial \$6-8,000 per student subsidy and was interested in seeing how that would be done.

Tracey Anderson stated she was on the fence about the grade 4 move but as the former PTA president people contacted her telling her it is a done deal. She suggested making it clearer that it is just brainstorming not formal. People she spoke with were on both sides of the issue. She spoke about the music program if grade 4 were moved to CES. She hoped that grade 4 would be given the opportunity to still be a part of band such as done in Mansfield where they are bused to the middle school for lessons. Our students have less time for music at HMS then Mansfield who have it five days a week. Music benefits students in developing math and other skills.

BOARD COMMENTS:

Board commented that school started well, hopes the rest falls in place for a good year, and the Board needs to prepare for the upcoming budget season which may be difficult this year

depending on the presentation. Thanked members on the committees for all their work all summer. Looking forward to having conversations for creative ways to address the decreasing enrollment and encourage people to contact the Board. Board welcomed new staff and look forward to a positive year at both schools.

MOTION: by Erika Wiecewski, seconded by Mark Jones, to move into executive session at 8:40p.m. and invite Superintendent Harding to join to discuss contract negotiations.

VOTE: Unanimous in Favor

Motion Passed

Board exited executive session at 9:04 p.m.

Meeting adjourned at 9:05 p.m.

Nichole Page
Recording Secretary