

WILLINGTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS  
BOARD OF EDUCATION MEETING MINUTES  
TUESDAY, MARCH 11, 2014  
(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, Mark Jones, Leo Mercado, Michelle Cunningham,  
Ann Grosjean, Barry Walleth, Herb Arico, Superintendent David Harding

ABSENT: None

MOTION: by Erika Wiecenski, seconded by Michelle Cunningham, to move Item D-  
Discussion of fifth grade math curriculum, under Old Business before  
Superintendent Reports on the agenda.

VOTE: Unanimous in Favor  
Motion Passed

COMMUNICATIONS:  
None

OLD BUSINESS:

Discussion of fifth grade math curriculum. HMS Principal, Deb Sullivan stated that the grade five teachers did a pilot of the *Envisions* math program. They got a representative for our area and received the technology piece of the program and have almost fully implemented the pilot of the next unit on fractions.

Grade five teacher, Kara Hennessey, gave the Board members a handout outlining the pilot program. She gave a presentation with an overview of the program and informed the Board that the program aligns with the Common Core curriculum and contains extra materials and resources that can be utilized. She explained how the current curriculum *Growing with Mathematics* had to be supplemented to align to the Common Core.

The new program was designed using the *Understanding by Design* format that the old curriculum also used and is able to be matched up easily with the lesson overview including objective, essential understanding, vocab and materials. The lessons provide teachers with questions to help elevate thinking and understanding. The lessons outline connection to the Common Core and what mathematical practices will be used.

Assessment tools are provided at the lesson level and for the entire topic level. The program includes the ability to create your own assessments to differentiate and save for future use.

The program provides a home-school connection worksheet for each topic to introduce parents to strategies and concepts the students will be learning.

There is a non-fiction text structure in the math book which highlights vocabulary, headings, and visuals along with data charts that correlate with the reading program.

A Common Core review component allows for a spiraling review of all concepts. There is a quick check containing exit slips at the conclusion of each lesson to plan and differentiate homework. The program has a very cohesive feel covering a lot with the Common Core and differentiated instruction to remediate and enrich as needed with three levels of homework, two styles of re-teaching models and information for the teacher on what and how it is taught with examples.

There is a success tracker online used to assess, diagnose, and remediate with immediate

feedback with next steps instructionally to try, along with center options for small group learning differentiated by ability.

Each lesson starts with problem based learning connecting to the real world and is designed for conceptual understanding which will help with the transition to the upper grades *Connected Math Program*.

Resources are available in paper/book form, on CD, and online with tools such as place value blocks to be interactive with the lessons. The lessons hook you in at the start of each unit with a video that demonstrates the real world application. The program contains animated videos for each lesson with real world topics, new vocab and multiple strategies for solving, photographs and engages the students more. The program is SmartBoard ready which will reduce the amount of time scanning materials to use. There are many materials to utilize which will greatly limit the need to supplement materials.

Board asked if there were any negatives to the program with Ms. Hennessey replying the only issue is having so many resources you have to pick which ones will be the best but that is not a bad problem to have. She stated the program is more challenging and will require the students to get used to it and to using the text book but that even after just one lesson using the pilot the students were already more comfortable with the program and were enjoying the new strategies. She stated the *Growing with Mathematics* program had one way to teach each lesson and this program has at least two ways to teach each problem which helps to target more of the class.

Board members expressed they liked the home-school component for the parents and asked about differentiated instruction, she replied she can section students into groups to address that issue and the program has different levels of problems and homework for the different groups to work on.

Members asked about how the program links to the 4-6 curriculum, she responded it ties in better to the transition to the *Connected Math program*. It was clarified that this new *Envisions* program is capable of use for grades K-5 but will only be used in grade 5, *Connected Math* is used in grades 6-8 and *Growing with Math* is used in K-4. Principal Phil Stevens had decided to continue using *Growing with Math* during the transition year of fourth grade moving to Center. The grade 5 would like to use the new program next year and then Principal Stevens can always change over later on if that seems best. Grade five met with the Math Department Chair and reviewed the program and it aligns better with *Connected Math* program used in grades 6-8.

Members asked about e-book availability and the costs associated with that, if available on the iPads or for home use with Superintendent Harding and Principal Sullivan clarified that they are usually available and will look into the price of that feature but that it was not available for this pilot. It is usually an extra component but not out of the question.

Members asked about the online tracker with Ms. Hennessey stating it was not yet available for the pilot but that the tutorials looked like a prep for the Smarter Balance testing and sounded like they had great potential.

Members asked about handling the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) connection and if the students were aware of the new standards. Ms. Hennessey responded that the students know about the standards and that they have shifted now and will still teach some of the other items in the other grades and are for the most part open to the difference. Members asked if this was better moving forward with the CCSS and if all the grade five teachers were happy with this pilot program. Ms. Hennessey and another grade five teacher, Mrs. Wilde both responded that it was much better than the program they currently have and will require a lot less supplementing.

They also stated that with this program the units available all show how and why to teach with instructions, are very supportive and helpful and teacher friendly. It will allow all three teachers to do the same in each class without the individual supplementation so that it will be more cohesive with all three classes in the grade level.

Members stated they like that the program will allow more time for teaching and less time for finding supplemental items and for copying materials. Principal Sullivan stated she appreciated the grade five teachers taking the time to do the pilot and that they did a great job. The teachers stated they have a full set of lessons and may continue to use this pilot on their other units for the remainder of this year.

Superintendent informed Board that he will get information on availability and cost of the e-books and bring that to the Board to vote on for the April meeting.

#### PRESENT TO SPEAK:

None

#### SUPERINTENDENT REPORTS:

Superintendent informed that the principals will report on the proposed breakfast pilot program at the April meeting.

Superintendent stated he spoke with Al Ference of the Board of Finance who stated they may vote this week on the budgets. Mr. Ference stated there would be a question and answer period this week which usually takes time but if they get through it all, they could vote, if not then they would vote next week as originally planned. Superintendent Harding will attend both meetings in case there are any questions on the BOE budget.

Superintendent Harding reviewed a use of facility request that came in regarding an issue with the regulations for the policy. He stated the Board makes the policy and he can change regulations or make exceptions but wanted the Boards guidance on this issue. Board discussed the policy and regulations, setting precedents, repercussions to changes, security issues, and custodial staff needs. Superintendent will speak with the head custodian and make a decision on the request, and inform the Board.

#### COMMITTEE REPORTS:

Finance Committee met with no bills needing review.

Policy Committee met and reviewed the classroom size policy finding there were not any changes necessary because it was broad enough. Superintendent discussed last year when the ad-hoc committee decided that 45 for grade Kindergarten would be what needed to be reached for another teacher to be added. It is not a hard and fast rule. The Board makes the decision contingent upon the budget and programs, which is not unusual in keeping with most policies in the state. The parameters are broad enough for latitude.

Superintendent stated he has a list of the committees and members and will make mail lists for each committee to be able to set up meetings.

Barry Wallett stated he has been getting asked a lot about the Common Core State Standards and curriculum and asked if it was practical to have the curriculum available to the public. Superintendent Harding responded that that was his intent five years ago when creating the new curriculum. In the meantime the Common Core started and as teachers and administration made

adjustments the curriculum is not final. They are still tweaking it to fill in the gaps and have decided it is not the right time to post it yet. He agreed that they should put something up about the Common Core on the website. He also is working on a letter to go out about the Smarter Balanced testing and the Common Core to parents.

Superintendent informed the Board that the Governor had just appointed a commission consisting of parents, superintendents and teachers to look at implications of the Common Core stating this should have been done four years ago before it was put in place.

Principal, Deb Sullivan clarified the Common Core is standards and we have always had standards that we were required to follow so even if the State said no more Common Core they would have to have college and career ready standards to follow. Mark Jones replied the standards are not horrible it is trying to roll out the testing with the issues and tying it to teacher evaluations has muddled it all.

Barry Wallett asked if books, flyers and materials that are used for the curriculum can be placed in the library so that parents could view them. Ann Grosjean asked if parents can go on and see the Common Core. Superintendent Harding will look into what is available and how to present it.

Barry Wallett asked what the implications are of opting out and what would it mean as far as grades and placement. Superintendent answered the law says all students in grades 3-8 and 10 have to be tested but that he would accommodate parents who choose to opt out. Parents always have the right to opt out without sanctions or penalties to the student or family. Schools are required to have 95% of students in all groups and sub groups tested, if 95% are not tested then the school may receive sanctions and not meet the goals. Principal Sullivan stated if the school does not meet the goal then you are labeled as a certain type of school.

Superintendent discussed the field test which is to test the Smarter Balanced test this year so cannot be labeled this year and a letter will go out to parents to inform them of the test window etc. In the past for CMT testing if a student or parent opted out you just checked the box on the test and dealt with it. Erika Wiczenski stated the letter is encouraged and it would not be good to be labeled. Michelle Cunningham stated the label becomes a PR issue in general with Superintendent responding that somewhere there will be a school that does not meet the 95% and we will see what happens but that he is not concerned about sanctions from the state.

Herb Arico, Liaison for EastConn stated they met on February 25 and covered legislative session and reviewed the mandates which there are about 100 of them with new ones coming out all the time. Reviewed the clinical day treatment program in Columbia, Putnam and Plainfield which assists students with behavior problems to treat them and return them to the regular school setting. He stated that two students, Caitlin Palmer and Graham Frassinelli, of the ACT school were honored for achieving the highest level on the CAPT test and received a letter from the commissioner. This shows that the ACT school has rigorous academic programs along with the arts.

#### NEW BUSINESS:

MOTION: by Erika Wiczenski, seconded by Michelle Cunningham, to approve the minutes of the February 11, 2014 Board meeting with correction of the addition of Erika Wiczenski's yes vote for the first motion listed on page 6 under New Business.

VOTE: Yes: B. Walleth, M. Jones, L. Mercado, A. Grosjean,  
M. Cunningham, E. Wiecenski  
Abstain: H. Arico

Motion Passed

There were no transfers to discuss.

Superintendent Harding informed the Board about the annual CSDE Healthy Food Certification that needs to be approved each year for all who participate in the lunch program stating they follow the healthy food guidelines.

MOTION: by Herb Arico, seconded by Erika Wiecenski, to approve the annual CSDE Healthy Food Certification plan and have the Board Chairman sign the forms.

VOTE: Unanimous in Favor  
Motion Passed

OLD BUSINESS:

MOTION: by Barry Walleth, seconded by Michelle Cunningham, to approve the amended minutes of the January 14, 2014 Board meeting.

VOTE: Unanimous in Favor  
Motion Passed

Superintendent Harding updated the Board on the Willington Public Schools enrollment numbers with the following: K-44, 1st grade -53, 2nd -47, 3rd-32, 4th -46, 5th-55, 6th-52, 7th-46 and 8th-67. The largest group is leaving and if you look at the numbers they are starting to hit the low fifties and forties as they go through. The Board will have to look at the numbers in terms of class size and the impact on the middle school model. There is the potential to have two sections with one person teaching three grade levels of math, reading, science etc. Members expressed that the town population is growing and projected to grow further but the school population is still dropping. Board discussed the threshold for going with larger class sizes of 22-23 or keeping three sections with smaller numbers and having to keep this in mind as continue to go through future budget seasons. Members expressed wanting to keep smaller class sizes in lower grades and the different data on larger sizes vs smaller and having paras at certain numbers.

Superintendent Harding mentioned the Teacher Evaluation Plan is changing once again stating this is the third time this year the State has changed the rules. Principal Deb Sullivan reviewed the changes to the Teacher Evaluation plan that need approval to be submitted. She reviewed the student growth goals which were for all teachers they had two smart goals and can go to one goal but the evaluation committee and administration decided to keep the two since the staff has already invested so much time in doing both. The flex option to be utilized will be to do a 3 year cycle for tenured staff to have one formal observation which is what our original cycle was to begin with so we already have a list of which teachers were due. All other teachers will have three informal observations. She reviewed the requirements for formal and informal observations and the reason allowed to make this flex change is because you have to show how you correlate the old plan to the current plan and we are able to align with the current rating through the CCT indicators, the three levels and the interim assistance plan.

Members asked about forms, the data management system used, feedback, if teachers have access to reviews and are able to make comments, and review of practice. Mrs. Sullivan answered the questions stating we use Bloomboard data management system to record observations and give feedback to the staff who she can share the information with. The staff are able to view and can respond to the evaluations with comments. She explained the review of practice can consist of anything other than classroom instruction like the presentation given tonight on the math curriculum, PPT meetings, parent meetings or data team meetings. She reviewed the six domains and the indicators, stating the plan is an incredible work load for administrators and teachers with all the meetings originally required. The full plan is available for review on the State website.

MOTION: by Michelle Cunningham, seconded by Herb Arico, to approve the amendments to the Willington Public Schools Teacher Evaluation Plan as presented.

VOTE: Unanimous in Favor  
Motion Passed

Board discussed the continuation of the 7th and 8th grade iPad initiative. There are more students leaving than coming in for the coming year so a smaller batch of iPads would need to be purchased at approximately \$12-15,000. The originally purchased iPads could be sold to the grade 8 students leaving. Superintendent informed that only 3 accounts can be used on each iPad and that Apple is not flexible on that rule. You cannot get more accounts on it, cannot reformat, but the student that has it now could continue to use if on their same account if purchased the iPad when they graduated.

Members asked why not looking at the sixth grade for the iPads with Superintendent responding that one of the issues that needs to be addressed is the tech support for all of our tech equipment. He is hesitant to add another class without additional support. Members mentioned the maturity level is not quite there yet for that age group and that the potential for more issues concerning usage is greater. That grade level has use in classes with the iPad cart. There is not enough time for adequate support as of now with only one technology person. Members understand that now is not the time but in the future look forward to ability to access resources for the students to go farther and focus on that to enhance education.

Superintendent Harding mentioned that originally the partnership with UConn was supposed to include follow through with surveys to measure success with data points but that has not happened. Data is anecdotal with feedback from staff, students, and parents indicates the program has been successful. The original goal was to have the student population improve their skill set with technology and technology literacy and that has been achieved. The students are more sophisticated with technology than others in the same grade that do not have a 1-1 iPad initiative.

Board discussed using Chromebooks and Google Docs versus the iPads with Superintendent responding that originally he thought about using those but not having the technology support that utilizing e-backpack programs was an easier transition for all with the iPads. The technology support is still an issue having only one technician for both buildings and the town. Further support is necessary and we should be receiving the evaluation report from the consultants about the technology needs this coming week. May need a company to come in and help with some of the fixes needed or need to get more support for a long range plan.

Members discussed selling the iPads to the grade 8 students leaving at the end of the year.

Members noted that if one iPad had already used two accounts and only had one left then not an equal to an iPad that may only have had one account used. How do you price these out comparing to used iPads online especially since these would still have one more year of warranty left on them. Discussed what is currently done with extra iPads, used for independent work and remediation for students. Special education department has some they use but they are not 1-1 so the account is the school account not student accounts. Superintendent Harding will put together proposals for costs and a letter for the next meeting for the Board to approve. Board requested he include how the price is set and the justification and warranty information.

**PRESENT TO SPEAK:**

None

**BOARD COMMENTS:**

Herb Arico mentioned he attended the CABE on the Hill on March 5 to meet legislators, asked about the committee list and commented on the approved calendar remarking that EastConn is pushing for a regional calendar and that the State law taking the calendar setting away is another item the towns were able to handle and won't be able to in the future and he is not happy about that.

Members thanked grade five for piloting the math program and Ms. Hennessey for the great math curriculum presentation stating it was very informative and are excited for the potential of the program including the home-school connection.

Members attended the PTA "Snow Ball" dance stating it was a fun, relaxed time in a nice and safe atmosphere where the girls had a blast and enjoyed participating in the Read Across America Day at Center School stating it is a fun and rewarding activity that the kids love. Commented on a great basketball season with the teams doing well, Eastern Regionals held last week and the groups sounded great, and encouraged everyone to see the musical coming up at Hall School on March 28 and 29.

Meeting adjourned at 9:04 p.m.

Nichole Page  
Recording Secretary