

WILLINGTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS
BOARD OF EDUCATION MEETING MINUTES
TUESDAY FEBRUARY 9, 2016
(Until Board Approval)

The meeting was called to order at 7:00 pm by Chairman Erika Wiecenski at the Willington Town Office Building, Lower Level Meeting Room.

Present: Herb Arico, Ann Grosjean, Michelle Cunningham, Erika Wiecenski, Shawn Kowalyszyn, Steve Ortiz and Superintendent David Harding.

Absent: Marybeth Wallett

COMMUNICATIONS

Mr. Harding passed out letters of retirement from staff members Monica Dorey, Kris Schultz and Nancy Pettitt. He also mentioned that the 2016-2017 Budget was presented at the Board of Finance meeting and the Board of Finance stated that the budget presented was too high, and that the Board of Education should have more discussion about it in tonight's meeting.

PRESENT TO SPEAK

None

SUPERINTENDENT REPORTS

Mr. Harding stated that there was approval of a transfer of \$79,000 from the non-lapsing fund and that the CIP items that were presented to the Board of Education at the last meeting have been turned in to the CIP board.

COMMITTEE REPORTS

The Board welcomed back Mr. Arico who discussed some information on behalf of the Finance committee. The committee recently met and reviewed bills. Mr. Arico also stated he met with EastConn on January 26, 2016 and the Executive Committee went over teaching and providing a center for educational leadership, trends and professional learning. He also went through the audit of the 2014-2015 budget. They also discussed HeadStart, which is an early childhood education program at EastConn.

Mrs. Grosjean stated that the Policy Committee will be meeting on Monday, February 22, 2016.

NEW BUSINESS

Introduction of Hall Memorial School Interim Principal, Thomas E. O'Rourke

The new interim principal at Hall Memorial School, Thomas O'Rourke was introduced to the Board of Education. Mr. O'Rourke thanked the Board and briefly spoke about his background. He recently retired from his principal duties at Norwich Free Academy and before that was an assistant principal in Killingly where he built a strong school community. Prior to that he had a position as a science teacher in Providence, Rhode Island. Mr. O'Rourke hopes to assist all staff with the transition of students at Hall Memorial School going to high school. He also wanted to state that all students at Hall Memorial School are very well behaved, and committed to learning, that we should all be very proud. He also wanted to comment on the excellent staff we have at the school as well.

Approve minutes of December 8, 2015

Mrs. Cunningham noted an error on the second page of the minutes: 4.66% needs to be changed to 3.84%.

MOTION: by Mrs. Wiecenski to approve the December 8, 2015 minutes with the change noted by Mrs. Cunningham second by Mrs. Cunningham

VOTE: unanimous

Motion passed

MOTION: by Mr. Arico to approve the January 4, 2016 minutes second by Mr. Ortiz

VOTE: unanimous

Motion passed

Approve minutes of January 25, 2016

The recording secretary stated that there should be a change on the last page of the minutes in the discussion section. In the sentence "Mrs. Wiecenski states that she has voted to not take action..." "in the past" should be added after that. Mrs. Cunningham also questioned that some of the names in the present to speak did not have the full last names and addresses written in the minutes. Because there were so many people that spoke in the last meeting it was difficult to catch everyone's information, the Board is looking into possibly having a future sign in sheet for those who wish to speak at the meetings.

MOTION: by Mrs. Wiecenski to approve the January 25, 2016 minutes with the added change, second by Mrs. Cunningham

VOTE: unanimous

Motion passed

OLD BUSINESS

Mr. Harding stated that after going out to bid, our insurance broker has informed us that the new ConnectiCare rate is now 9.7%, which would cause a \$41,347 reduction in the current budget.

Mrs. Grosjean asked if there is a reimbursement for special education. The reimbursement is approximately 70% after the cost exceeds 4.5 times the per pupil cost. Any reimbursement must be spent on special education.

Discussion on items that were added:

3 paraprofessionals for kindergarten:

This would add more helping hands in the classroom for younger students. The Board needs to decide whether to have 2 or 3 classrooms, and the classes could either have less paras or shared paras. Currently there are only paras in classrooms that have students with special needs. The question is if they would rather have a large class with a para or one teacher with a smaller class. The number of students in next year's kindergarten keeps going up, it's a high number at 39 right now and we don't know if there will be more. Mrs. Wiecenski questioned how much an interventionist is used by the kindergarten. Center School Principal Phil Stevens stated that it depends on the students that year. Mrs. Cunningham noted that we also couldn't rely on parents volunteering within classrooms.

New classroom teacher:

In order to maintain the interventionist position it would mean hiring a new classroom teacher. (If the interventionist position was eliminated, then that person will transfer to that classroom teacher position.) Mr. Ortiz asked about how the interventionist position started; was it because of students' low grades? Mrs. Wiecenski stated that yes, that is how it started and they found there was a need for an interventionist position. Mr. Harding mentioned that the Board of Finance said the percent increase was way too high and wanted us to come back with a budget that is lower than what was presented. Mrs. Wiecenski noted that our job is to aide and benefit the students' education not just to cut to get the low numbers. We have to be comfortable with a budget that serves our students and she would stand behind a higher budget to present. Mr. Harding stated that we always have added things that the Board of Finance and Board of Education have put in. The trick is to keep moving forward and balancing the two. Mrs.

Cunningham agrees with Mrs. Wiecenski, and stated that because Willington is a small district, one child's needs affect us all. Given that the majority of this increase is tied to specific students we are tied to those needs and it would be wrong to cut out what was added. Insurance would also help decrease the budget percent as well. Mr. Harding mentioned that we conduct a teacher survey at the end of the year and that a couple of them are still contemplating retirement so there could possibly be two more. If that happens, there would be potential savings in insurance of \$55,000.

Music Keyboard Lab:

Mrs. Wiecenski states that the fact the students are using such old keyboard equipment is disheartening. The quality of them right now is very poor. This lab would include 18-21 keyboards. Mrs. Wiecenski questioned if there are funds from the PTA. Carrie-Anne Kelly, president of the PTA, stated that the PTA would be willing to help fund this keyboarding lab and this could be a possible avenue to explore. Mr. Harding stated that the reason why this lab was not put in the budget at first was because it could have been funded from money that was left over at the end of the year, or there could be another mechanism to do that. Mrs. Wiecenski states that it is an item that is needed but there are other avenues we could use to come up with that money. Mr. Kowalyshyn mentioned that if we were to buy it, is there a way that every grade could utilize it? Mrs. Cunningham said that the Hall School music teacher Jason Phillips mentioned at the last meeting that they currently use it for seventh grade now, but if the lab were purchased we would use it for all grades. Mrs. Wiecenski stated that we should look at other resources and take it out of this current budget. Mr. Ortiz stated that he is very opposed to cut anything that is beneficial to the students. Mr. Arico agrees to that and stated that keyboarding is a very essential skill for children to have. It is an easy way to understand music theory. Mrs. Wiecenski stated that keyboarding is definitely a priority, but there has to be things that need to be cut and discussed, they are all equally important. There may be different ways to get that money rather than put in the budget.

Website Development:

Mr. Harding stated that he and Mr. Stevens have been talking with the Tech Committee, still exploring all the options that are not as expensive. Mrs. Cunningham stated that her thinking when she put this item in that the money would be for the content of the website rather than social media. She wants to make sure the imagery and marketing content represents the students. It is not something you can get a volunteer to do. It would be an investment for a high quality website to communicate with current and prospective families. Mrs. Grosjean wondered if this service could be shared with the town. Mrs. Cunningham doesn't think this could work with the content. Mr. Arico said that this is an expense that is not extremely necessary right now, yet he does see the advantages to it. Mr. Kowalyshyn asked who is in charge of the content now. Mr. Stevens said that the classroom teachers are in charge of their individual pages,

have to have ways to communicate with the parents. The current site is not an easy site to use. For a professional website it would roughly cost \$16,000 start up and then \$6,000 a year after that. Mrs. Cunningham asked if it would be worth it to get a new site that was easier to update rather than content. Mr. Stevens said that this is what he and the Tech Committee are exploring with Mr. Harding. Mrs. Grosjean asked about the timeline with the Tech Committee and if they are going to put options on the table in March. Mr. Kowalyshyn mentioned the Board could form a communications subcommittee and look at other sites, see what our town would want. Mrs. Wicewski stated that this topic could wait and perhaps does not fit into this year's budget.

Mrs. Wicewski stated that the Board doesn't have to have a decision tonight on these topics. Mr. Harding stated that we do need to be realistic with the numbers when presenting to the Board of Finance.

Mr. Ortiz asked what percentage of the budget does special education take up? Mr. Harding said that the number fluctuates but it is close to 20%. Mr. Ortiz stated that in regards to special education in the future more students could be placed under IEPs, budget number could continue to grow. Mr. Ortiz also wanted to address the increase in budget does not comply with the decreasing enrollment. He asked about the two secretaries in each school. Mr. Harding said they don't have a backup if there was just one and we have a greater overhead because of the two buildings; the number of students doesn't impact the need for secretaries. He also stated over the years they have been addressing the declining enrollment and we are well aware of that. Now we have to maintain the school system. Many other schools have larger contingency funds that they use. Mr. Ortiz wanted to look at the budget long term with a strategic lens. Mrs. Wicewski stated because the new Board members enter the year during budget season, they will eventually address different issues including declining enrollment. Mr. Ortiz asked about the possibility of combining grades. Mrs. Wicewski stated that we could lose some good teachers because of that, that also was an initial projection because the enrollment was declining. Mrs. Cunningham wanted to add she really liked the idea of putting in the social worker position because of the more hours and establishing good relationships with the parents and students. Mr. Arico stated he sees the importance of the social worker position, as well as the three paras in the kindergarten classrooms. Mr. Ortiz asked about the cell phone budgets for Mr. Harding and his assistant and Mr. Harding stated he is available 24/7 and uses the service to communicate with the town, public works and the BOE, and it is a \$30 per month allowance in their contracts. Mr. Ortiz also asked about conferences and membership dues and stated he doesn't need it. Mrs. Grosjean said that a conference she went to and it really has been beneficial to her. Mr. Arico also said that he goes to every conference he can and that they are very beneficial.

Mrs. Wicewski asked the Board if there is anything in the budget that we don't see we need?

Mr. Arico stated that he thinks we need everything that is listed. Mr. Ortiz asked Mr. Harding to come up with a budget that is 2%. Mrs. Wiecenski stated it is up to the Board of Education and then the Board of Finance to decide the amount. Mr. Harding says the original budget at 3.84% is status quo, to go under 3% he would need two more retirements with the 3.84% budget. He said that his job is to be reasonable and reflect what the community wants.

Mrs. Wiecenski asked if we need time for another meeting. The Board wants to hear from the public and then go item by item to get more discussion on those items.

MOTION: by Mrs. Wiecenski motioned that we allow present to speak at this time, second by Mrs. Grosjean

VOTE: unanimous

Motion passed.

PRESENT TO SPEAK

Kim Kowalyshyn stated that she works in a municipality that uses a website that cost \$5,300 and took all of their content with a three year contract. It is a different package than what the school uses. The website is called Virtual Towns and Schools.

Carrie-Anne Kelley of Blair Rd stated that it would be most helpful to go through each of the lines for discussion. She is in total support of the three paras and keeping the interventionist and bringing a new teacher. She feels the keyboarding is very important but there could be other avenues to fund it and agrees that while the website is important, right now is not the best time but maybe something in the future. She wanted to mention that hiring a social worker makes a lot of sense and is a smart decision. She questioned if the keyboarding is something that was a big enough deal to have a music focus group going again.

Erik Kruger of Tolland Turnpike agreed a lot with Mrs. Kelley. He said he and his wife volunteer in kindergarten and the three paras are very beneficial especially in the early education. The interventionist position is also extremely important for the students and we still have to support all the students no matter the size of the classrooms. He does not think we should back down and we should push forward for what is best for the students.

Melissa McKinnon of 15 Williams Rd. stated as a volunteer in kindergarten, help is definitely needed and the paras are definitely needed for the classrooms. The interventionist position is also necessary in the budget. She stated the school system has significantly helped her children and thinks the website is very important, but there could be other ways to help.

Peter Latincsics of 97 Trask Rd. stated that he that his questions or comments are not considered criticism and that Mr. Harding has done an excellent job for the town. He stated his confusion about the increase in staff while the pupils are decreasing. He also wanted to state that there was also a high amount of trust between the community, school system and board of finance.

Tracey Anderson of 151 Willington Hill Rd. agreed with the Board and other members of the community. Over the past years residents didn't have to come to the meetings because no cuts were affecting the students, right now we can't do anything about the two buildings with two sets of staff and we have to accept that, some of these costs are non negotiable and we should keep that in mind.

MOTION: by Mrs. Cunningham motioned to maintain the full amount of the presented budget for \$8,256,235, second by Mrs. Wiecenski.

DISCUSSION: Mrs. Grosjean stated she would cut the keyboarding for \$14,000 and Mrs. Wiecenski also stated she is comfortable cutting the keyboarding because of the different avenues it could be funded by. Mr. Kowalyshyn and Mr. Arico agreed as long as we keep it on the agenda and Mrs. Cunningham stated she does not agree but will support the rest of the Board's decision. As far as website development, Mrs. stated the Board should wait on that and not put it in this year's budget. Mrs. Grosjean, Mr. Arico, and Mr. Kowalyshyn agreed. Mr. Ortiz disagreed. As far as the 3 paras in kindergarten, Mr. Arico said he supports it but still doesn't know how many paras should be put in. Mrs. Cunningham stated she supports it because of the social emotional learning and Mrs. Grosjean agreed. Mrs. proposed that if there are three kindergarten classes, there should be two shared paras instead. Mrs. Wiecenski stated she would only accept that if the interventionist and social worker positions stayed, and Mrs. Grosjean agreed. The \$24,000 could come from the maintenance fund in place of the para position that would be dropped from this presented budget. Mrs. Wiecenski stated she sees the need for the social worker and interventionist position, the Board agreed except Mr. Arico who abstained.

MOTION: Mrs. Cunningham proposed to amend her motion to subtract \$53,000 from the total \$8,203,235, and the budget will not include the keyboard lab, the website and one para for kindergarten, second by Mrs. Wiecenski

VOTE: Yes: Mr. Arico, Mrs. Cunningham, Mrs. Wiecenski, Mr. Kowalyshyn, Mrs. Grosjean

No: Mr. Ortiz

Motion passed

Mrs. Wiecenski welcomed and again thanked Mr. O'Rourke and thanked everyone that spoke tonight. Mr. Arico thanked all the parents that came to this meeting tonight as well as Mr. O'Rourke.

MOTION: by Mrs. Wiecenski to enter into executive session and have Mr. Harding and Mr. Stevens join, second by Mrs. Cunningham (Mr. Ortiz left the meeting at this point.)

VOTE: all in favor (remaining Board members)

Motion passed

The Board and invitees entered into executive session at 10:20 p.m. and exited at 10:45 p.m.

Meeting adjourned at 10:46 p.m.

Amanda Kelly
Board of Education
Recording Secretary