

WILLINGTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS  
BOARD OF EDUCATION MEETING MINUTES  
TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 11, 2014

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

PRESENT: Erika Wiecenski, Mark Jones, Leo Mercado, Michelle Cunningham,  
Ann Grosjean, Barry Wallett, Superintendent David Harding

ABSENT: Herb Arico

MOTION: by Erika Wiecenski, seconded by Mark Jones, to move Agenda Item *A Discussion of possible student school breakfast program* under Old Business to after the first Present to Speak.

VOTE: Unanimous in Favor  
Motion Passed

COMMUNICATIONS:

Superintendent Harding distributed copies of letters from six parents regarding the possible school breakfast program to Board members.

PRESENT TO SPEAK:

Mary Beth Luchon spoke about the breakfast program stating she wants to work together to bring the program to the town. She suggested swapping the snack with breakfast time, she mentioned life threatening allergies and the need to work together to address the issue. She suggested a hybrid of in-class and cafeteria program with students with allergies to eat in the cafeteria and have the nurse maintain protocols for allergy issues. She wondered why there was the need and found that the poverty rates in town are high and she listed rates in surrounding towns as well, stating she was shocked and had no idea previously that Willington has such a high rate. She hoped the Board would recommend making the program happen. She stated she understood it may need an increase in existing food service, custodial staff, grant writer, feasibility study but hopes that the Board would agree on the value of the program. She stated iPads and a new roof are great but don't mean much to a student who starts the day with an empty belly.

Ginger Halle spoke on behalf of Tara Bergeron of the WYFSS who could not attend the meeting tonight due to a conflict in schedule. She read a letter prepared by Tara stating Tara favored the breakfast program and as the Willington Town Case Manager she sees the struggles of low income and moderate income families on a daily basis. Food insecurity is a serious and frightening issue for families of little means. She stated the Access Community Action Agency has selected Willington to receive additional food support through a bi-weekly mobile food van program beginning in 2014 and for this reason she strongly supports the introduction and maintenance of a workable Breakfast Program in Willington. She mentioned two points she wanted to bring forth, first, research from both State and Federal Departments of Education has shown children who are hungry do not learn or test as effectively as children who are adequately nourished. For this reason, most public schools provide food during State/Federal testing periods. Second, current data on poverty in Willington shows as of 2010 16.3% of households live in poverty and approximately 20% of school-aged children qualify and receive free-reduced

lunch. She stated she feels strongly that any logistical issues such as concerns with food allergies and scheduling could be resolved if the Board would only vote to pass this poverty-fighting program. She thanked the Board for their time and consideration.

Alison Gaffey said she sent a letter yesterday but brought it to read since it would not reach the Board in time for tonight's meeting. She read her letter stating she has a child who attends HMS and while she fully supports offering a nutritional breakfast to those in need, she has serious concerns regarding how the District will plan for the safety of students with food allergies. She stated she was contacted by Principal Sullivan on January 17 and was informed that the Board was considering a "grab-and-go" style breakfast program which would be the only option as there is not adequate space in the cafeteria for all students at one time and informed that there would not be time to adequately clean the classrooms after the food is consumed, which is currently required in certain classrooms. Alison explained if food residues are not properly cleaned and students and faculty's hand washed, there is a significant risk of contact reaction and anaphylaxis. Even when precautions are taken there is not guarantee that the cleaning will be done adequately. If students are handling classroom materials while eating, this further spreads food residue and is impossible to clean properly. The best way to keep children with life-threatening food allergies safe is to keep food out of the classroom. She stated her son has had serious reactions from contact with food residue in the past and his allergist wrote a letter, which she submitted to the school, stating that exposure to allergens either directly or indirectly may cause a life-threatening anaphylaxis reaction and requested that her son's exposure to these allergens be minimized in the classroom. She therefore respectfully requested the Board to seriously consider limiting this program to the cafeteria or find time and properly train staff to clean food residue, wash hands after breakfast is consumed and implement restrictions regarding contact with classroom materials while eating, thereby, keeping all students with food allergies safe.

Lisa Finkelman spoke stating she has a student that attends HMS and thinks it is a wonderful idea but urges the district to consider the responsibility to plan for safety of life threatening food allergies. The grab and go option does not allow for adequate time for clean-up for risk reduction and allergen control strategies. She stated people think if you have a food allergy, just don't eat that food, but there are serious reactions for contact with food residue. She says her child has ended up in the ER just from touching something such as a table or grocery store shopping cart. There will not be adequate time to clean, you can have someone touch a pencil and put on the desk then pick up the pencil and it is contaminated. She cited an article that did research and swabbed desks 7-8 days after food was consumed at the desk and found the food proteins still remained. She mentioned an article from the Journal of Asthma on the persistence of peanut allergens which stated that on a table checked after 110 days the allergen was still present, also a man who used playing cards and had a reaction from someone who ate peanuts and used the cards previously. She explained without adequate time to clean classrooms more allergens will be introduced. Both her son's allergist and pediatrician recommend an allergen free classroom, or if not, then clean and wash hands properly. She mentioned how national school board organizations are all moving toward the removal of allergens from the classrooms and that Connecticut guidelines are that the tables be cleaned before and after along with hand washing to eliminate allergens. She said in the cafeteria you have to provide time to be cleaned and that would need to be adopted in the classroom as well.

John Patton of 346 Tolland Turnpike spoke because he heard about the program and was surprised by it. He stated he talked to Board member Leo Mercado and he understands the convenience and that it would be nice to have but that the mission of the Board of Education is to educate children. He is not sure why people are asking the public to pay for the convenience of

school breakfast, he does not care if it is a grant or taxes, he asked if a grant was not available would you ask the taxpayers to pay, he does not think so. John asked about the grab and go option, why can't a parent provide that, why does the staff have to provide it? He mentioned he is thankful he came tonight and learned about the allergy piece and he believes this is not a program that is needed and that it is not an education issue and we should let the parents feed their children.

Marybeth Wallett of 23 Birch Meadow Lane, asked the Board to vote against the breakfast program. She stated she takes offense at the assumption that if you are poor you don't feed your kids, saying she grew up poor but always had enough food. She explained the poverty levels cited are skewed by the student population in both Mansfield and Willington. She does not want kids to be hungry but wants the schools to focus on education. She does not want to see a situation develop where the poor student population is pitted in an argument with the allergy student population. The Board needs to focus on educating not feeding the students.

#### OLD BUSINESS:

Board held discussion of a possible student school breakfast program. Superintendent Harding provided information about the program and feasibility. He clarified it is not a cost item. The grant money was for start-up costs for staffing or tables. Most districts make money because the federal government gives reimbursements so it is not a cost to the town. Taxes pay for free and reduced lunch and the money gets reimbursed to the town. There is not a need to do the grant. He stated he actually turned it down because the grant was only if you need to buy items like garbage cans or a computer, not to pay for the breakfast. Students would have to pay to purchase breakfast the same as they would lunch, if you are on free or reduced lunch then you would receive free or reduced breakfast as well. The district does not make a profit. The money generated goes into the food service program and pays for the people and the food and makes the program self-sufficient with the federal government subsidy. The government also sets the rate scale as they do for the lunch programs.

Superintendent reviewed the results of the survey sent out through the digital backpack. He received 70 responses which gives a snapshot of the people who responded but not an accurate number for all in the town. The results showed that of the 70 people that responded, 11 people at Hall and 8 people at Center, said they would utilize the breakfast program every day. 77% of the responders stated they eat at home, 9% stated they were on free or reduced lunch, 26% would participate, 41% would not, and 33% said sometimes.

Board discussed the survey numbers and the estimated amount of students that would use the program on a daily basis and what the needs would be for logistics regarding allergies and time dependent on those variable numbers. They discussed what would happen if it starts out small but grows too large to remain in the cafeteria or to have enough time to feed a large amount of students before class would begin. They discussed the cost of opening the teacher contract to watch students in the cafeteria earlier in the morning versus having the program just during the regular homeroom time so that you can just assign duties without opening the contract.

Board discussed and asked Food Service Manager, Wendy Knight, what the program would look like food wise. Wendy responded it would most likely be a dairy, grain and fruit. Stating the requirements of grains, proteins, etc. would be dictated by the government as to how many components are needed, just as they are for the lunch program. Members asked about waste and about the effects on staffing. Wendy said that one staff member would have to come in about 1.5 hours earlier to provide the program. Members asked if that would cut into the profit of the lunch program. Wendy stated you would need to sell a certain number of breakfasts to break

even.

Members discussed allergies, choking, hybrid plans, cross contamination, grab and go issues, the amount of students in need, the amount of time, possible disruption to classes, possible IEP and 504 violations, having the program at one school but not both, and holding a pilot program to gain more information necessary.

Members inquired about the nutrition committee and the data needed that should be provided to the Board to help make this decision before it is brought up in a meeting. Superintendent replied this is not a new issue, it has been discussed previously and parents have written in about the program, and a survey was completed. Members replied that they have done investigations, spoken with other schools, visited other programs, and have had discussions about the feasibility of the program and are willing to answer any questions they can. Members wanted to know how much money are teachers and nurses spending out of pocket to feed students. This question is not able to be answered accurately, most teachers have some food available for students throughout the day.

Superintendent Harding stated that the number of students going to the nurse saying they are hungry and getting food daily is 6 at Hall and 2 at Center. He also clarified the numbers stated earlier for poverty levels in Willington are not accurate as quoted at 22 or 16%. As others pointed out the numbers are skewed due to the UConn student population that live here and that these numbers calculate the number of students that get free and reduced against the total number of lunches sold which does not account for those who do not purchase meals. The actual number of students on free and reduced lunch is 38 free and 11 reduced to total 49 at both HMS and CES so it is actually only 10% of the students not 22%. Poverty level percentages reported include all in the town, elderly, college students, etc. not just the population dealt with at school.

Members discussed the issue of a convenience need and desire versus a hunger need, the school taking on the role of parents, philosophical issue and the logistical issues, risking allergy students, and the costs and value.

**MOTION:** by Michelle Cunningham, seconded by Leo Mercado, to move for the Board of Education to authorize the Superintendent to plan and implement a pilot only program to assess the needs for a full implementation of a school breakfast program.

**VOTE:** Yes: M. Jones, L. Mercado, M. Cunningham, A. Grosjean  
No: B. Walleth, E. Wicewski

Motion Passed

Members discussed role of the Board to set policy and approve a program but not to set details of implementation, that is the administrations responsibility, but that can and are requesting a presentation of the pilot plan to be implemented before it occurs and again after with the results of the program.

Board discussed what would be considered successful with members replying self-sufficient, has to be doable and manageable. If too many and making classes start late or disrupting, or too few and not paying for the cost then not successful and should not be continued.

#### **SUPERINTENDENT REPORTS:**

Superintendent Harding gave an update on the changes to the teacher evaluation plan that has been recently proposed by the governor. The plan can now have changes made to it and

Principal, Deborah Sullivan, will attend several workshops and come back with information and revisions. Modifications to what tests used for evaluation of teachers, number of formal observations, and multiple goals are taking place. Willington took a practical approach from the beginning so the modifications will not have a great impact on our plan, some changes will occur but they will be presented to the Board for approval before resubmission to the State.

Superintendent Harding informed the Board that the required motions to start the roof project at CES are now complete and asked for dates of availability to get the building committee together to meet with the town engineer about the specs. Committee members are to send dates to Superintendent Harding.

#### COMMITTEE REPORTS:

Finance Committee met and reviewed the bills.

Policy Committee needs to set date to meet.

Superintendent Harding stated the budget presented to the Board of Finance was -1.15% and that we always budget for out of district placements as they exist not as anticipated. He informed the Board of an additional out of district placement at a cost of approximately \$79,000.00. He discussed making modifications to the budget to keep the bottom line number the same instead of going to the BOF for additional funds. He discussed the position of remediation/substitute that was being originally considered, the effect on MBR, natural attrition, and the multiple paths possible depending on different factors (such as retirements, insurance, kindergarten enrollment numbers) that will occur this year to achieve the transfer of the \$79,000 needed. He mentioned the \$79,000 already accounts for the reimbursement amount, transportation and excess costs. The timing of this is what makes the difference this year and not going to the Board of Finance yet, if this came up last month, the proposed budget would have looked differently but still had the same bottom line. It is not credible or fair to go to the Board of Finance at this point, if another placement came up then we may need to do so but at this time should be able to make adjustments to cover the cost. He plans to communicate this to the Board of Finance so they know the plan and are aware of the changes.

Board discussed issuing of pink slips in April to non-tenured personnel to let them know with Superintendent stating the people are all aware of the possibilities and it is a more complicated process if done later. Members mentioned the retirement stipend and if it should be reviewed again with Superintendent stating he considered that but does not feel it is necessary at this time but maybe in a future year.

Board discussed issue of going back to the Board of Finance and setting precedents with Superintendent explaining he is maintaining past precedents and his creditability with the Board of Finance by not requesting the funds at this time but he will communicate the situation with the Board of Finance so they are aware of this.

#### NEW BUSINESS:

Barry Wallett asked that his statement regarding the preschool program being a peer program and being based on the economic principle of demand determining the price to attract the needed numbers to fit and that this program is not free, as it shouldn't be, preserving the two businesses in town that are in business to provide preschool, be added into the minutes on page 3 before the Paragraph starting with Special Services Director.

**MOTION:** by Erika Wiczenski, seconded by Michelle Cunningham, to approve the minutes of the January 14, 2014 Board meeting with amendment as stated.

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

Motion Passed

MOTION: by Erika Wiecenski, seconded by Ann Grosjean, to approve the minutes of the January 28, 2014 special board Meeting.

VOTE: Unanimous in Favor  
Motion Passed

Board discussed the Willington Public Schools 2014-15 school calendar and the law which in the past has encouraged Boards to adopt calendars to coincide with the regional calendar. The law next year will be that you must adopt it, not just are encouraged to. EastConn is the regional calendar that Willington would need to coincide with. Members mentioned that CABA will be recommending to maintain the law as it is so as not to be problematic for towns that plan their calendars according to their own needs.

MOTION: by Michelle Cunningham, seconded by Mark Jones, to move to approve the Willington Public Schools 2014-2015 School Calendar as presented.

VOTE: Unanimous in Favor  
Motion Passed

#### OLD BUSINESS:

Board discussed the Willington Public Schools Enrollment with Superintendent Harding stating there was not any new information at this time. Members asked about the outstanding projection of how long it would be before HMS could house all the pre-k through grade 8 students. Superintendent discussed the possibilities of additional space at Hall by adding classrooms over the gym and science wings to create 3 or 4 more possible spaces. There is currently 11 homerooms at Center and 29 classrooms at Hall. The plan would be at least 5 years out to have the numbers where the schools could be consolidated. Members mentioned the possibility of building one new school for all grades mentioning the 65% reimbursement and the MBR fight that it may be something to be looked into in the future as well.

CES Principal, Phil Stevens, was asked about the enrollment number for kindergarten this fall and he replied it is currently at 43 which is high now but that number goes up and down until school begins.

#### PRESENT TO SPEAK:

Christina Mailhos, First Selectman, stated she missed the discussion about the breakfast topic but commends the Board for looking at a serious issue that needs to be addressed in some way. She has concerns about not impacting instructional time and worries about the allergy issues, wants it to be cost neutral to the tax payers, and if would be serving truly healthy options and not processed packaged food.

Erika Wicencski replied that it was a 4 to 2 vote in favor of allowing the administration to plan and implement a pilot program and that all concerns listed were expressed by the audience and board members present and before the implementation takes place there will be a presentation of the proposed plan to the Board .

**BOARD COMMENTS:**

Erika Wiczenski stated the Wellington Board of Education and the public schools are in no way associated with any multi-day/overnight trip happening in town. She thanked Superintendent Harding for submitting the public notice to make people aware of the exact details and how it is handled to clear up anything as far as the Board is concerned.

Board commended the basketball teams on their season, appreciated the open discussion and dialogue during this meeting which is good for the community, pleased so many people turned out and wrote letters on the breakfast topic, and thanked Superintendent Harding and Barry Wallett for attending the Board of Finance meetings.

Meeting adjourned at 8:56 p.m.

Nichole Page  
Recording Secretary