

WHITMAN-HANSON REGIONAL SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEETING

Minutes of February 15, 2017

Held at the Whitman-Hanson Regional High School

Meeting convened: 6:51 p.m.

Meeting adjourned: 10:06 p.m.

Members present: Robert Hayes, Frederick Small, Daniel Cullity, Robert Trotta, Christopher Howard, Michael Jones, Robert O'Brien, Jr., Kevin Lynam, and Steve Bois Alexandria Taylor participated remotely.

Members absent: none

Administrators present: Dr. Ruth Gilbert-Whitner, Superintendent of Schools
Dr. Patrick Dillon, Asst. Superintendent of Schools
Ellen Stockdale, Director of Curriculum, Instruction and Staff Development
Dr. John Queally, Administrator for Special Education and PPS
Christine Suckow, Director of Business Services
Chad Peters, Director of Technology Services

Chair Hayes brought the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. and announced the meeting was being broadcast live and recorded. Chair Hayes announced that School Committee member, Alexandria Taylor, was participating remotely and all votes will be taken by roll call.

APPROVAL OF MEETING MINUTES

VOTE: Mr. Small motioned; Mr. Cullity seconded; roll call voted to approve the February 1, 2017 Public Hearing School Committee meeting minutes, as presented. The motion passed 8-0-2. Mr. Lynam and Mr. O'Brien abstained.

STUDENT ADVISORY REPORT

Marah Burt, Student Advisor to the School Committee for the February 15, 2017 meeting, reported on current student activities. This week, Student Council initiated "Random Acts of Kindness Week" that recognizes good behavior and doing good deeds, as well as a chance to be entered in a raffle. The Freshmen/Sophomore Semi-Formal dance will be held on Friday, April 1 in WHRHS Student Dining. At the middle schools, grade 8 students will be working on course selection as they transition to the high school next year. Children's book illustrator, John Steven Gurney, visited students at the Conley Elementary School to talk about the process of creating an illustration and his life as an author and illustrator. The Duval Elementary School spaghetti dinner was a huge success with over 350 people served. Maquan and Indian Head Elementary Schools are promoting jump rope for health. Read Across America will begin at the elementary level schools after the February break.

Chair Hayes took the agenda out of order.

Chair Hayes announced upcoming important dates to remember.

- February 16, 2017 – Meeting with Whitman Buildings, Facilities, and Capital Expenditures Committee at 4:30 PM, Whitman Town Hall.
- March 8, 2017 – School Committee Meeting at 7:00 PM.
- March 9, 2017 – Conley School Basket Auction at Whitman Middle School 5:00 PM.
- March 15, 2017 – School Committee Meeting at 7:00 PM.

SUPERINTENDENT’S REPORT

Project 351

Dr. Whitner introduced Carolyn Casey, Executive Director of Project 351. Ms. Casey provided an overview of Project 351, and recognized Project 351 Ambassadors and Alumni who represent the Whitman-Hanson Regional School District. Project 351 is a youth service nonprofit organization that develops a rising generation of ‘community-first’ citizen leaders. Selected grade 8 students from each school in 351 cities and towns across the Commonwealth become ambassadors based on their ability to demonstrate the values of compassion, kindness, humility, and gratitude. The students participate in team-based public service in January and May each year to address and raise awareness of hunger, homelessness, and poverty. Ambassadors also receive comprehensive training and support throughout the year. Ms. Casey explained how the program has grown since its inception in 2011 and the impact to community service. She also commended the Whitman-Hanson Regional School District as a model community for Project 351. A short video showcased the experiences of the students participating in the program. The Annual Launch & Service Day was held on January 14, 2017 in Faneuil Hall to kick off the year of service for 2017. From there, ambassadors departed for their service to selected sites around Boston. The Committee heard from Whitman-Hanson Regional School District Ambassadors and Alumni about their experiences as ambassadors. Courtney Woodward (Grade 9), Gabrielle Trongone (Grade 10), Regan Hayes (Grade 11), Emma Rogers (Grade 8), and Christopher Blackman (Grade 8) were eager to talk about their experiences on Launch Day, how they have developed the skills as Ambassadors, and their successes with fundraisers such as Cradles to Crayons and other clothing drives. Dr. Whitner added she also participated in Project 351 along with Ellen Stockdale and Bill Tranter and appreciated the opportunity to be a part of such a special and meaningful program.

Regional High School Program of Studies

Principal Jeff Szymaniak proposed several new electives as additions to the high school Program of Studies for the upcoming 2017-18 school year. The offerings expand subject areas in wellness, English Language Arts, social studies, and technology. Mr. Szymaniak highlighted electives that enhance a 21st century education. Digital Citizenship will assist students in using the internet properly. Virtual Merchandising will help students learn to post and represent an on-line business. Advanced Computer Aided Design (CAD) will help students learn the basics of Sketch Up and three-dimensional modeling software. Teen Literature, Creative Writing II, and Storytelling will help with the challenge of engaging students in reading and literature. Several wellness and fitness electives, including Group Fitness, Weights & Cardio, and Individual & Team Sports, are also new. History and social studies offerings include September 11 and the War on Terror and American Government Academic and Advanced. A full listing of the additional electives with descriptions and updated Program of Studies was presented to the Committee.

VOTE: Mr. Bois motioned; Mr. Small seconded; roll call voted to approve the 2017-2018 Program of Studies, as presented. The motion passed unanimously.

Budget Report – Year to Date FY2017

Christine Suckow reviewed the year to date expenditure and revenue reports illustrating original appropriations, transfers and/or adjustments and year to date expenditures, encumbrances and available budget used to date. Mrs. Suckow highlighted anticipated revenue line items. The interest earned line item is realizing a slight increase. Initial revenue projections were \$10,000; however, interest is now estimated to reach \$17,500. Mrs. Suckow also identified miscellaneous revenue from previously dispersed payment checks that were never cashed. As reported previously, District Treasurer, David Leary, is researching opportunities to earn greater interest on several savings bank accounts. Mrs. Suckow highlighted line items in the expenditures and appropriations report. Snow removal costs to cover the recent February snowstorms are not reflected in the report. Mrs. Suckow reported that McKinney-Vento transportation for homeless students is currently over budget by \$20,000. She noted that the state reimbursement rate is 30% of costs.

OLD BUSINESS

Regional Agreement Committee

Chair Hayes updated the Committee on the progress of establishing a Regional Agreement Committee. In addition to the Superintendent of Schools, Dr. Ruth Gilbert-Whitner; School Committee members, Fred Small (W) and Christopher Howard (H); and Board of Selectmen Chair, Jim McGahan (H), will serve on the Committee along with Chris George, a Town of Whitman resident. Chair Hayes will contact the town offices to complete the Committee with a representative from the Finance Committee from each town, a member of the Board of Selectmen from the Town of Whitman, and a community member at large from the Town of Hanson.

School District Budget FY2018

Chair Hayes opened a discussion on the budget proposal for FY2018 with comments made at the last School Committee meeting after challenges and options faced by the Committee to close the budget deficit of \$2,727,754 for level services were deliberated. Chair Hayes discussed a number of considerations that included the closing of Maquan School, double sessions, eliminating athletics, staff reductions, and transferring money from the reserve Excess and Deficiency (E&D) account. Chair Hayes maintained these considerations are not threats by any means but merely discussions to explore any and all options to help reduce the deficit. Dr. Whitner reported on a recent meeting with the Hanson Capital Improvement Committee which included a discussion of the current costs for proposed capital projects for the Maquan School, which currently exceed \$5 million. The discussions regarding available funds to cover repair costs for Maquan School were not encouraging. Dr. Whitner reported that over the last two weeks, an exploration of space, conditions, and time frame, was prepared regarding the feasibility of closing Maquan School and moving students to alternate school locations. From the information gathered, any proposal to close the school could not occur until the 2018-2019 school year at the earliest. The closing of Maquan for this fall does not seem to be a viable option for multiple reasons including space availability and the accommodation of special education programs. Dr. Queally commented on the special education programs and associated laws. Dr. Whitner discussed the impact the movement would have to space, teachers, parents, and students. Dr. Dillon reported that both Hanson Middle and Indian Head schools should have the capacity to absorb grade levels. Dr. Dillon theorized moving pre-school classes to the Duval School in Whitman. Grades K through 2 could re-locate to Indian Head School and grade 5 could transfer to Hanson Middle School.

Dr. Dillon reported on estimated costs and associated savings for the closing of the Maquan School. Preliminary numbers suggest aggregate savings of about \$850,000. Savings would be realized in staffing attrition and retirement, support staff reductions, utilities, insurance, maintenance and facilities. A revenue loss of \$45,000 annually from classroom space rental to North River Collaborative would net the cost savings to about \$800,000. The District does not anticipate savings in special education costs. Reductions in transportation costs would be inconsequential. Dr. Whitner discussed considerations for the Maquan School and suggested that the Committee may want to reconsider the submission a statement of interest (SOI) to Massachusetts School Building Authority (MSBA) for a CORE project. If the school building went back to the town, the town could consider renting space as a source of revenue, but would still have the same maintenance/facility issues. The Committee briefly discussed beginning a conversation with Hanson town officials and possibly holding a public forum on the subject of closing the Maquan School. It was also reported that since January 2011, routine maintenance costs at the Maquan School have totaled \$600,000.

Another consideration to reduce the budget deficit was to eliminate athletics. Mrs. Suckow reported the athletic budget is under \$400,000 and consists mainly of coach stipends, insurance, and equipment mandates. In addition, user fees collected fund all of the transportation, referee and officials costs and other supplies not funded by the operating budget.

Another consideration discussed was the reduction of personnel. Dr. Whitner commented that discussions need to revolve around increasing revenue so that programs and staff are not eliminated. The Superintendent added that incentives for early retirement that waive the notification date of July 1, 2016, were announced to staff last week. The District is also considering charging the Food Services Department for use of facilities. Mrs. Suckow is working with the Director of Food Services to offset \$50,000 in facilities costs.

Dr. Whitner reported the current proposed level service budget does not reflect any increase in the local operating assessment nor does it include any transfers from the Excess and Deficiency E&D account. At this time, a budget deficit of \$2,727,754 exists.

Christine Suckow reviewed the anticipated increases in costs of \$1,857,987 in the level service budget. However, insurance rates under the Mayflower Municipal Health Group (MMHG) have not been set to date. Mrs. Suckow reported the next Steering Committee meeting for the health insurance group will be held on March 2 and increases over 10% are anticipated to be voted by the member towns.

There was also a brief discussion regarding non-mandated busing (transportation) costs, noting that the towns could potentially charge for services. Hanson's estimated cost for 2017-18 is \$102,026 and Whitman's cost is \$365,362.

Ms. Suckow reported the current balance in the E&D account is \$1,246,484. Although the E&D funds are for unanticipated costs, the Committee considered transferring an amount to the operating budget to further reduce the budget deficit. Dr. Whitner notified the Committee the last eligible date to set the local assessment is March 15, which is 45 days prior to town meeting.

VOTE: Mr. Small motioned; Mr. Bois seconded; roll call voted to transfer \$750,000 from Excess & Deficiency Account to the FY2018 operating budget, as discussed. The motion passed unanimously.

With the vote to transfer from the E&D account, the budget deficit was reduced to \$1,977,754. The Committee reviewed the local assessment schedule and the impact for each town. Chair Hayes indicated each percentage represents \$186,718 in revenue. Of that one percent assessment increase, the Town of Whitman would be responsible for \$111,191 and the Town of Hanson would be \$75,528. In order to balance the budget, a 10.5% local assessment increase would be necessary. Mr. Trotta felt strongly the Committee should determine the local assessment increase and uphold that decision. There were no town officials present from Hanson or Whitman to engage in the assessment discussion or share financial forecasts. The Committee discussed local aid issues, target share, and staff reductions to balance the budget. Chair Hayes stated the administration will bring additional options back to the Committee for consideration.

Maquan School Roof Repair

Mrs. Suckow presented a Change Order for approval for the repair work for the Maquan school roof. As previously voted, the second phase of the roof repair bid was awarded to Almar LLC. Gale Associates is overseeing the repair work. A Change Order in the amount of \$7,610 was presented for approval.

VOTE: Mr. Small motioned; Mrs. Taylor seconded; roll call voted to approve the recommended Change Order from Gale Associates in the amount \$7,610, as discussed. The motion passed unanimously.

Field Trip

All-State Music Festival/Concert at the Sheraton Plaza in Boston

VOTE: Mr. Small motioned; Mr. Bois seconded; roll call voted to waive the nurse requirement and approve the overnight field trip request for Chorus to participate in the All-State Music Festival and Concert at the Sheraton Boston Hotel March 9 through March 11, 2017, as presented. The motion passed unanimously.

Surplus

Maquan School – Everyday Math materials

A memo requesting Everyday Mathematics program materials be declared surplus as a result of the elimination of the Everyday Math at the elementary level.

VOTE: Mr. Small motioned; Mr. Bois seconded; roll call voted to declare Everyday Mathematics materials be declared as surplus at the Maquan Elementary School, as presented. The motion passed unanimously.

SUBCOMMITTEE REPORTS

Policy Sub-Committee

There was nothing new to report.

Facilities and Capital Improvements Sub-committee Report

Mr. Small reported the Facilities Subcommittee met earlier in the evening. The Maquan School was the main topic of the meeting and reported on earlier in the School Committee meeting. Mr. Small reported the facilities team handled 25 inches of snow from February 9 through 13. Maintenance is scheduled during the February school vacation week along with carpet cleaning in all schools. The Director of Facilities is procuring bids for repair and an automated efficient boiler system for Hanson Middle School. Mr. Small reported a ceiling leak at the high school on the 3rd floor was addressed.

Legislative Update

There was nothing new to report.

Pilgrim Area Collaborative Representative Report

Dr. Whitner reported that Pilgrim Area Collaborative is using the same Planning for Success model that Whitman-Hanson Regional School District just completed for their strategic planning process. The Collaborative is facing challenges in finding space for their programs.

North River Collaborative Representative Report

Mr. Bois reported that after one failed vote and a vote to reconsider, the North River Collaborative Board of Directors met on February 13 and voted 4-1 to change the current Board make up from school committee members to superintendents of the member districts effective July 1, 2017. Also, interviews are in progress to for an executive director to replace Joanne Haley-Sullivan. Dr. Whitner elaborated on reasons the Board considered the change in the board make-up. Moving to a superintendent board may be better for communication purposes, as well as knowledge and experience related to the Collaborative. Member superintendents meet monthly with the Collaborative. Under the current Board structure, decisions are made by the Board while taking superintendents recommendations into consideration.

Chair Hayes announced the School Committee will enter into Executive Session for the purpose of discussing the reputation, character, physical condition or mental health, rather than professional competence, of an individual.

VOTE: Mr. Small motioned; Mr. Bois seconded; roll call voted to enter into Executive Session at 8:57 p.m. The motion carried unanimously.

VOTE: Mr. Small motioned; Mr. Cullity seconded; roll call voted to come out of Executive Session at 10:06 p.m. The motion carried unanimously.

VOTE: Mr. Small motioned; Mr. Cullity; seconded; voted to adjourn the meeting at 10:06 p.m. The motion carried unanimously.

Minutes respectfully submitted Michelle Kelley

Enclosed:

- 1) February 15, 2017 Meeting Agenda
- 2) February 1, 2017 Meeting Minutes
- 3) Project 351 materials
- 4) Program of Studies
- 5) Level Service proposed budget anticipated revenue increases FY18
- 6) FY2017 Expenditures and Appropriations Year-to-Date Reports
- 7) Field trip request for Chorus
- 8) Maquan School Surplus