

WHITMAN-HANSON REGIONAL SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEETING

Minutes of February 13, 2019

Held at the Whitman-Hanson Regional High School
600 Franklin Street, Whitman MA

Meeting convened: 7:00 p.m.

Meeting adjourned: 8:31 p.m.

Members present: Robert Hayes, Robert Trotta, Frederick Small, Robert O'Brien, Jr. (left at 7:55 p.m.), Michael Jones, Daniel Cullity, Steve Bois, and Christopher Scriven

Members absent: Alexandria Taylor, Christopher Howard

Administrators present: Jeffrey Szymaniak, Superintendent of Schools
George M. Ferro, Jr., Assistant Superintendent of Schools

Chair Hayes brought the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. and announced the meeting was being recorded and broadcast live.

Chair Hayes took the agenda out of order.

Approval of Meeting Minutes

Meeting Minutes of February 6, 2019

Chair Hayes announced the vote to approve the meeting minutes for February 6, 2019 will be tabled until the next meeting.

New Business

Field Trip

The high school French class is planning a trip Quebec City during the next school year on October 25-27, 2019 for an authentic French experience. The three-day trip is being offered through EF Tours. Additional chaperones will be added as needed, based on student interest/enrollment.

VOTE: Mr. Cullity motioned; Mr. Bois seconded; voted to approve the out-of-state, overnight, field trip for the high school French class to Quebec City on October 25-27, 2019, as presented. The motion passed unanimously.

FY2020 Budget Discussion

The Superintendent reported he attended a meeting on Monday, February 11, 2019 with department heads in the Town of Whitman and Frank Lynam, Whitman Town Administrator. Ernie Sandland and Christine Suckow were also in attendance. The meeting was scheduled by Mr. Lynam to discuss budget. At that meeting, Mr. Lynam announced he had approached all unions, except one, to ask that they consider zero percent salary increases, or a wage freeze, for two years. Mr. Lynam also directly contacted Whitman Hanson Education Association (WHEA) union representative, Beth Stafford, to consider a wage freeze for the teacher's union. Mr. Szymaniak was clear that the request for a wage freeze did not come through the Office of the Superintendent and he has not has any conversations related to a wage freeze with the WHEA union. The Superintendent reported he has had some preliminary budget discussions with the towns, but has not received any concrete figures from either town. Mr. Szymaniak will be attending a Whitman department head meeting on Tuesday, February 19 and may have more information after that meeting.

The Superintendent presented supplemental documents to the School District budget proposal for FY2020 requested by the Committee of a line item comparison of Last Year (LY) versus This Year (TY). The Committee understands several line items will be skewed due to the closing of the Maquan Elementary School and relocation of several programs and many staff. Mr. Szymaniak reported that, overall, the increases represent a 3.6% increase in utilities and facilities, insurances, salary as COLA and steps and lanes. In addition, a 2% increase has been applied in special education costs. The line item comparison schedule represents the same information provided at the Budget Hearing Presentation illustrating LY vs. TY comps with the same bottom line. An adjustment in line items was made as a result of vote by the Committee for Line Item Transfer #1 on January 16, 2019.

Mr. Szymaniak reviewed each line item in detail, by school/location, providing explanations as he went through the comparison with the Committee.

At Indian Head School, paraprofessional salaries are up due to student needs. The substitute line was increased 3% across the board, in all schools, to cover staff absences. Special education staff is up due to student needs and a 0.5 FTE special education teacher was reinstated. Mr. Ferro commented he was not sure why the cut to the teacher was made and found no support for it, but the special education students required services that were not being delivered so that line was increased (back to a 1.0 FTE). The speech services line was also increased based on student need.

At the Conley School, paraprofessionals and supplies lines are down (eliminated one para), teacher line is up 2%. Again, the substitute line was increased 3% across the board. Speech/Special Education was up minimally. At the Duval School, the teacher salary line is up 7% due to steps and lanes, COLA and the hiring of a part-time instrumental music teacher last summer by the former superintendent for the three elementary schools. There was not a budgetary line to support the part-time music teacher. Paraprofessional line for elementary is down (different than paraprofessional's line for special education). Special Education and Speech is up (sharing speech staff with the Middle school). It was necessary to re-organize speech with the former Maquan/IH special education programs that moved to Duval School.

At Whitman Middle School, the guidance line is down due to staff movement and new hire at a lower contractual rate. Library salary was changed due to a grant structure. Special Education teacher salary line is up mainly due to steps and lane changes. At Hanson Middle School, same holds true for teacher salary line increases due to steps and lanes. Paraprofessionals work in the school libraries at the elementary level, but the middle and high school continue to have certified media specialists/librarians. The special education program is up to cover a grade 6-8 special education teacher hired for a new program in order to keep a student in district and realize a cost in savings.

At the high school, there is a slight increase in teacher salary line increases due to steps and lanes. Mr. Szymaniak noted line item for instructional materials at the high school level at \$11,000 which is poor. The grant funding for 21st Century Learner's Program is down due to staffing. Again, the substitute line was increased 3% across the board. The guidance line may change as there is a teacher on maternity leave that will increase if the teacher returns. Movement of Special Education Coordinator Lauren Mathisen to Central Office as Interim Director of Student Services, special education teacher who replaced Mrs. Mathisen savings will be realized if no changes made next year.

The Superintendent's line decreased due to retirement date in September of the former superintendent. The District Treasurer line under Business Office-salary increase as Mr. Leary schedule increased a half day weekly per contract with former superintendent. The legal services line was increased as a result of past use of legal services. There is a slight reduction in the interest line. Teaching and Learning line item is now by school location at \$42,000 each – course reimbursement is up contractually as well as principals and administrative assistants COLA and contractual obligations.

The curriculum director's line will be made to shift funds to school location and to an elementary curriculum coordinator by contract. ELL (English Language Learners) tutor line is zero because the tutor became a teacher. The district has two ELL teachers. Based on the ESL (English Second Language) students' population, the program really necessitates three. At the preschool, more students are on Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) (free program mandated by the state) than previously; additional professional salary costs are covered in the revolving account up, which is up \$81,000.

School Choice costs are up \$38,000. Five student residents attend the tuition free full day kindergarten program in Rockland. Charter School is up as well. Salaries account for contractual increases in the technology line. Contracted services are down. The Chromebooks account for the technology replacement equipment line. The nurse (clinic) lines were broken out by school to make that line item cleaner. MA Teacher's Retirement and Plymouth County Retirement as well as GIC show an increase. Employee health insurance is estimated to increase 5% but subject to change. Mr. Szymainak reviewed the district-wide special education numbers showing a savings in the administration salary. The special education teacher salaries have also been broken out by school. The District-wide Special Education tutor, BCBA, Orton-Gillingham, and clerical and transportation contract lines are up based on student needs, IEP requirements and mandated tutoring when a student cannot be in school. Mr. Ferro added the BCBA or, Board Certified Behavioral Analyst, helps students with behavior issues and an advanced degree is needed for the position. The District only has two itinerant BCBA's, but more are needed. The extended school year summer program shows a slight increase as does speech at the preschool level, a 0.5FTE assistant was added based on current mandated student needs. Out of District placements are forecasted at an increase of \$844,967. Mr. Szymaniak spoke to the residential placement tuition costs and Circuit Breaker reimbursement concerns, not fully funded. In addition, building programs to keep students in district, as is currently being done at Hanson Middle School. Mandated McKinney-Vento transportation costs are unknown at this time at an increase of \$5,000. Mr. Ferro provided insight on services needed at an early age via early intervention which can potentially begin at 2.9 years of age in preschool program offerings. Evidence of the increased, current student need can be seen in the speech staffing lines, as discussed. Special Education is up 2% as stated.

Mr. Szymaniak went through the facilities line items, noting some increases in utilities, fuel, insurance (now split out between schools) and overtime for weather related needs.

The bottom line is the same as presented to the Committee on February 6, 2019. The proposed level services budget is \$53,396,915. A budget deficit of \$3,023,729 exists due to insufficient revenue sources.

Chair Hayes discussed why an attorney is necessary for legal and litigation needs throughout the year. Mr. Small asked if the Committee would consider a process used in a previous year at a Whitman Annual Town Meeting, to split a portion of the school budget out as a warrant article and an override vote. At that annual town meeting a few years ago, 6% of the school budget was subject to an approved override. Mr. Small alluded to portioning out only what was needed and placing the balance as an override. Mr. Szymaniak responded the proposed budget is what is needed for the schools for level service next year. Mr. Szymaniak is hearing from the Town of Whitman only that they may need an override to fund some of their budgets but he has not been presented any financial information for the Committee in terms of an assessment. If cuts are necessary, he will look at district-wide administrative cuts in an effort to keep teachers in place. This budget reflects the recent creativity in restructuring programs to provide students services they need, including a math curriculum and social and emotional needs. Mr. Szymaniak understands that Whitman and Hanson are in two different arenas to support a school budget assessment. He anticipates the Town Administrators may be at upcoming School Committee meetings as the Committee moves to set an assessment. As far as the special education line being up 2%, there is not much that can be done in terms of cuts in that area.

Mr. Trotta expressed disappointment in the lack of structure from the Town of Whitman and no financial plan offered to the Committee. Mr. Ferro discussed the previous processes in school budget proposals, and declared this budget proposal is at the very level of student service's needs. It is up to the Committee to discern if they wish to cut further, which consequently may increase class size, reduce programs to only academic, etc. Mr. Jones commented that the Superintendent's proposed budget is what the Committee should support and the fact that a town administrator contacted a school district union representative to discuss salary freezes without the knowledge of the Superintendent is amiss. Chair Hayes commented that the Committee is responsible to advocate for children and the educational services they require and support the budget.

The assessment must be set 45 days prior to the May 6, 2019 Annual Town meeting.

Shawn Kain of Whitman commented on the possibility of an override and attaining community support in the best interest of the children.

Mr. Small requested a year-to-date (YTD) Munis expenditures report to determine if a projection can be made for the Excess and Deficiency (E&D) line for FY2019. Mr. Szymaniak added if there is anything further the Committee may need, to contact the Office of the Superintendent.

It was the consensus of the Committee not to vote transferring funds from E&D at this time.

Mr. Szymaniak reported he met with a consultant working with the Town of Whitman that is assisting them with a capital plan. Mr. Szymaniak may be presenting a consideration for the Committee to begin a Statement of Interest through MA School Building Authority (MSBA) for the Whitman Middle School at the next School Committee meeting, as facility issues continue at that building.

Chair Hayes announced important upcoming dates.

- February 18-22, 2019 – Winter Recess – NO SCHOOL
- February 27, 2019 – Facilities Subcommittee Meeting – HS Library 6:00 PM
- February 27, 2019 – School Committee Meeting – HS Library 7:00 PM

Mr. Cullity reported a Massachusetts Association of School Committees (MASC) meeting is scheduled in March. The Topic of Discussion is "Chapter 70 Equity Lawsuits - How We Fund Public Education in the Commonwealth" sponsored by MASC Division III. The meeting will be held at the Boston Tavern in West Bridgewater at 6:00 p.m. Please contact the Office of the Superintendent to register.

Mr. Szymaniak reported he signed an endorsement along with 200 other superintendents petitioning the state to review the Circuit Breaker is funded. Mr. Small is working with legislators to increase special education transportation funding. Mr. Trotta requested that any meetings Mr. Small is involved in, that he report out to the full Committee. Mr. Small indicated that much of the conversation is in group chats and on Facebook.

Jill Kain, Whitman parent and preschool teacher, spoke to the Committee of what her job entails; the notable increase in student social and emotional needs, and minimal support for services that cannot be cut further. Mrs. Kain asked for the Committee's guidance on how to support the proposed budget. Another Whitman parent, Lela Donovan, offered comments related to the increased social and emotional student needs.

Chair Hayes will work with administration to publicize supporting the proposed budget. The Chair thanked all for attending the meeting and providing input.

Warrant signings

Warrants signed at the School Committee meeting follow:

021319AP \$582,353.57
P21419 \$1,317,776.27

Meeting Adjournment

VOTE: Mr. Small motioned; Mr. Bois seconded; voted to adjourn the School Committee Meeting at 8:31 p.m. The motion passed unanimously.

Minutes respectfully submitted by Michelle Lindberg

Signature of School Committee Secretary

Meeting Handouts:

- Meeting Agenda for February 13, 2019
- FY2020 School District Supplemental Budget Documents
- Field Trip Request High School
- Copy of letters to legislators regarding per pupil expenditure and state funding concerns