

WHITMAN-HANSON REGIONAL SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEETING

Minutes of August 28, 2019

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

Meeting convened: 7:00 p.m.

Meeting adjourned: 8:45 p.m.

Members present: Robert Hayes, Christopher Scriven, Frederick Small, Daniel Cullity, Christopher Howard, Michael Jones, Steve Bois, Robert O'Brien, Jr., and Dawn Byers

Members absent: Alexandria Taylor

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

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

Chair Hayes reported students returned to school earlier today for the first day of school in the 2019-20 school year.

Approval of School Committee Meeting Minutes

**VOTE: Mr. Cullity motioned; Mr. Small seconded; voted to approve the School Committee meeting minutes of June 12, 2019, as presented. The motion carried unanimously.**

**VOTE: Mr. Cullity motioned; Mr. Small seconded; voted to approve the School Committee meeting minutes of July 22, 2019, as presented. The motion carried unanimously.**

Superintendent's Report

*Opening of School*

Mr. Szymaniak reported staff returned from the summer recess on Monday, August 26, 2019 and highlighted events at the faculty/staff welcome back ceremony held at the Regional High School. Mr. Mark Main was named the recipient of the Dr. John F. McEwan "Do What's Best for Kids" Award. Faculty and staff then heard from keynote speaker, Mike Smith, a motivational speaker, author, and co-founder of "Skate for Change" who provided some humor and a message that our greatest asset is "our students". At the conclusion of Mike's keynote, faculty and staff enjoyed an opening day cookout sponsored by S. J. Services and ice cream truck sponsored by Collegiate Press.

Mr. Szymaniak reported students returned for the new school year on August 28, 2019. Opening Day for students was successful all around with only two bus delays and a minor water issue in the high school girl's locker room. Throughout the district, open houses also went well. The new interim principal at Indian Head School, Garry Pelletier, will be introduced at the September School Committee meeting.

*Summer Impression*

Mr. Szymaniak reported on the facilities tour held prior to opening of schools. No major issues were reported. The buildings are clean and the recovery from a minor flood at Indian Head School is complete. A meeting will be scheduled with S.J. Services management to review the summer work process, identify flaws

and contractual obligations. The installation of thumb safety latches in doors at the Whitman Schools is now complete.

*Superintendent's Evaluation*

Chair Hayes presented the Superintendents' Summative Evaluation Report for 2018-19 SY.

END OF CYCLE SUMMATIVE EVALUATION REPORT: SUPERINTENDENT JEFFREY SZYMANIAK, AUGUST 28 2019 FOR 2018-19 SY						
Step 1	Assess Progress Toward Goals	Did not meet	Some Progress	Significant Progress	Met	Exceeded
	Professional Practice Goal				3	6
	Student Learning Goal				5	4
	District Improvement Goal			1	4	4
Step 2	Assess Performance on Standards	Unsatisfactory	Needs Improvement	Proficient	Exemplary	
	Standard I: Instructional Leadership			5	4	
	Standard II: Management and Operations			6	3	
	Standard III: Family and Community Engagement		1	5	3	
	Standard IV: Professional Culture			5	4	
Step 3	Overall Summative Performance	Unsatisfactory	Needs Improvement	Proficient	Exemplary	
				6	3	

Chair Hayes read aloud excerpts of the Committee members comments.

*Budget Discussion*

*FY2019 Line Item Transfers*

The Executive Director of Business Services, Christine Suckow, presented the final close out and line item transfers for end of year June 2019. The transfers generally reflect personnel movement throughout the school year. Mrs. Suckow will report back to the Committee in November, after the Department of Revenue (DOR) certifies the Excess and Deficiency (E&D) account.

**VOTE: Mr. Small motioned; Mr. Bois seconded; voted to approve the FY2019 Line Item Transfers Final Close Out of June 30, 2019 as presented. The motion passed unanimously.**

*FY2020 Budget Re-Certification*

The Executive Director of Business Services presented cherry sheet estimates for the Whitman-Hanson Regional School District. The preliminary school budget uses the Governor's budget figures and was updated to reflect the final state budget figures. Due to unanticipated state revenue (a slight increase in Chapter 70, charter school reimbursement and regional transportation reimbursement and decrease in sending tuitions for school choice and charter school) net change of \$52,715 was added to the total school district budget. The Committee was asked to re-certify the budget at \$52,425,738.

FY2020 Cherry Sheet Estimates				
Whitman Hanson				
Governors	FINAL BUDGET			
PROGRAM		FY2020 Preliminary	Net Change	
<b>Education Receipts :</b>				
Chapter 70	24,776,700	24,739,620	37,080	000110-4620
Charter Tuition Reimbursement	114,118	154,699	-40,581	000110-4621
Regional School Transportation	888,213	831,997	56,216	000110-4622
			<b>52,715</b>	
<b>Expenses</b>				
School Choice Sending Tuition Increase	150,763	114,558	36,205	1022008-5910
Charter School Sending Tuition Increase	817,704	765,862	51,842	1022009-5920
State assessments net change		Decrease	-35,332	1030701-5110
			<b>52,715</b>	
		Preliminary		<b>52,373,023.00</b>
		Final	Re-certify at	<b>52,425,738.00</b>

**VOTE: Mr. Small motioned; Mr. Bois seconded; voted to re-certify the FY2020 budget in accordance with the PK-12 Whitman-Hanson Regional School District Agreement, Section IV, Paragraph D and E and M.G.L. c70 §2 at \$ 52,425,738. The motion passed unanimously**

#### *FY2020 Budget*

Superintendent Szymaniak presented the IT Infrastructure Needs Assessment proposal, as previously discussed and is the first step in district-wide departmental audits. The audit firm, Custom Computer Specialists, is also on the state bid list. The scope of services would include assessing the District's IT infrastructure including its current use of hardware, software, personnel, technology, wireless, internet security, etc. A final report will be available in December. The total cost of the assessment is \$12,600. Any IT matters the Committee would like to focus on should be sent to the Superintendent. Mr. Ferro reported several initiatives are in progress in technology services. In moving forward with virtualization, the District needs in to build a platform to accept Windows 10. Cloud based programs and Google applications are also being considered.

#### *Whitman Budget Override Evaluation Committee Report*

Mr. Szymaniak reported on the Whitman Budget Override Evaluation Committee which he and School Committee member, Dawn Byers both serve on as appointed members. Although Mr. Szymaniak did not attend the August 26 meeting, he commented on general discussion of the development of a five-year plan and the mission of the Override Evaluation Committee to see if an override is something to consider. Dawn Byers added that former Duxbury Finance Director, John Madden, is the consultant hired to review the town of Whitman's finances.

Mr. Szymaniak reported the Massachusetts Association of Regional Schools (MARS) Consulting Group prepared financial assessments of both towns for the school district. Mr. Szymaniak added there is a section of the proposed Amended Regional Agreement that could impact the potential Whitman override and will be discussed later during the School Committee meeting as an agenda item. Whitman Selectman and Chair of the Whitman Override Evaluation Committee, Randy LaMattina, reported on the consultant group in Whitman overseeing the financial assessment. He stated that John Madden will report on progress at the September 16, 2019 Finance Committee meeting. Mr. LaMattina added an October 2019 override may be too soon and the Collins Center will conduct another assessment in the fall.

#### Unfinished Business

##### *Amended Regional Agreement*

Mr. Szymaniak reported the 2018 proposed Amended Regional Agreement, was voted approved on June 6, 2018 by the School Committee, and voted to send to the towns to be placed as a warrant article for a vote of the citizens. The 2018 proposed Amended Regional Agreement was voted approved at the November of 2018 Special town meeting in the Town of Hanson. In May 2019, the Town of Whitman passed over the article at their Annual Town Meeting due to questions regarding the K-8 pull out or cessation by a town and how funding was to be broken out in the local assessment between the two towns.

Mr. Szymaniak explained the current concerns with the proposed Amended Regional Agreement. He reported he was recently informed that there are two local assessment methods. One is called the statutory method and the other is called the alternative method. Statutory is the recommended method by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE). The Superintendent further described that in 2007, DESE released a memo encouraging use of the statutory method of local assessment, which considers the minimum local contribution, which may vary year to year based on factors of inflation, property taxes, municipal revenue growth, etc. Using the statutory assessment method will change the funding in the local assessment based on the current method the district uses.

Mr. Szymaniak reported he has notified the town of Hanson Interim Town Administrator and Town Accountant in Hanson of the current situation with the method of assessment. Currently, because the 2018 proposed Amended Regional Agreement has not been voted approved in Whitman, Mr. Szymaniak believes the original Regional Agreement is still in effect, however, is investigating information if the 2007 DESE memo supersedes the way the district is assessing the towns. Legal counsel for the school district opined if there is no binding agreement, to default to the statutory method. Mr. Szymaniak reported the swing in the assessment using the statutory method will impact funding from Hanson close to \$1 million dollars. Local assessments are currently based on per pupil population, as stated in the 1991 Regional Agreement, and use the prior years' assessment. The Department of Revenue (DOR) report of the minimum local contribution is a different figure than the per pupil amount being used by the district. The DOR does not release its' figures until February of each year. The Superintendent realizes the proposed Amended Regional Agreement may be grey in areas, but does spell out the statutory method and how it is allocated. The Superintendent's Office will review minutes of School Committee meetings in 2007 to determine if the 2007 DESE memo was presented as a recommendation (guidelines). The matter is currently under legal review as it involves a substantial amount of money and financially impacts both towns. Mr. Szymaniak also learned that the Town of Hanson may revoke the vote to approve the 2018 proposed Amended Regional Agreement.

Mr. Szymaniak read from the 2007 memo issued by DESE titled *Guidance for Regional School Districts*. The Superintendent has not been able to determine if the 2007 DESE memo regarding the local assessment method was presented or discussed with the then, administration team and School Committee. It is the understanding of the Superintendent that the 1991 Regional Agreement stands because the proposed amended agreement has not been approved by the Town of Whitman. Chair Hayes re-stated that the Town of Hanson may put a placeholder on the 2019 October warrant to revoke the vote to approve the 2018 proposed Amended Regional Agreement.

Superintendent Szymaniak read aloud portions of the 2007 DESE memo to the Committee.

### ***Guidance for Regional School Districts***

#### **Assessment methodologies:**

*The new regulations, as recently amended, outline two methodologies available to regional school districts for calculating assessments to member towns. The methodologies are defined in CMR 41.02 and as follows:*

*1. Statutory Assessment Method:*

- *The Regional school district prepares its assessment to each member municipality in a multi step process, as follows:*
  - *The member's required local contribution as determined by the Commissioner of Education in accordance with Chapter 70*
  - *Any additional share of the region's net school spending that exceeds the total required contribution, this share to be allocated to each member pursuant to the assessment provisions of the regional school district agreement.*
  - *Transportation and other non-net school spending costs allocated to each member pursuant to the assessment provisions of the regional school district agreement.*
  - *Capital cost allocated to each member pursuant to the assessment provisions of the regional school district agreement.*
- *An annual affirmative vote of the appropriating authorities of 2/3 of the members is required.*
- *Notification to the Department of Education is not required.*

2. *Alternative Assessment Method: The calculation of members' assessments pursuant to the local option provided in the fourth paragraph of M.G.L. c 71, s. 16B. Each such assessment shall be the sum of the following amounts: (i) the member's share of the regional school district's net school spending, as defined by M.G.L. c70 s.2; and (ii) the member's share of costs for transportation, capital project debt service, other capital costs, and all other expenditures not included in the regional school district's net school spending; both such shares to be allocated pursuant to the assessment provisions of the regional agreement.*

*Key points:*

- *Statutory Language: etc....*
- *All members of the regional school district must unanimously approve this method.*
  
- *A vote must be taken each year to utilize this method.*
  
- *Adoption of this method must be reported to the Commissioner of Education on the district's annual end of year pupil and financial report.*
  
- *Assessments are annually determined after deducting state aid receipts based on the provisions outlined in the regional school district agreement.*
  
- *The total assessment allocated to each member is the sum of the following amounts:*
  - *An assessment for categories defined in c70, s2 as net school spending.*
  - *Separate assessment(s) for all other operating or capital costs.*
  
- *The combined sum of all the members' assessments for net school spending must at least equal the district's total net school spending requirement net of state Chapter 70 aid.*

Mr. Szymaniak stated he does not recall the School Committee voting to choose one assessment over the other at any time in his tenure. The objective now is to define what the district does to move forward from this matter. The Superintendent commented that the proposed amended regional agreement may need to be reviewed to clarify the multiple methods of a local assessment and how they are formulated. Mr. Szymaniak added that the local assessment does not seem to be defined in the current proposed amended regional agreement, although it outlines the statutory method.

Mr. Small reported that DESE informed him that Whitman-Hanson Regional School District follows the statutory method when filing End of Year Reports.

Mr. Howard recommended remaining focused as this will impact the District's vision and school budget process. He suggested spending time now to work through the matter quickly to accelerate clearing it up. Mr. O'Brien questioned why the School Committee did not know there were two methods of setting the local assessment and would like more information sent to the Committee. Mr. Szymaniak will email the Committee as much information he has in order to prepare for discussion. Mr. Szymaniak reported legal counsel is reviewing the regional agreement assessment method as well as the Whitman water/sewer bill issue. Again, Mr. Szymaniak stated he has not been able to determine from history/records why the 2007 DESE memo regarding the local assessment method was not presented at that time.

Mr. Scriven reported this information was brought to his attention by a Whitman resident. Then by another, and found it confusing. He subsequently began researching the issue and learned the potential impact to the local assessment in Hanson. He added that a regional agreement should be a document that brings the towns together as a community. He also agreed the matter needs to be resolved quickly and move on with developing an appropriate budget.

Dawn Byers commented that as a member of the Whitman Override Evaluation Committee, she took an oath and has a fiduciary responsibility to Whitman. She added the statutory method was mentioned at a Board of

Selectmen's meeting. She then researched information and found other regional districts are also working through which method they are using, alternate or statutory. The figure being discussed if the District uses statutory is a \$1 million dollar increase to the local assessment to Hanson. The local minimum contribution shifts some of the ability different towns have to pay. Her understanding is the statutory method is also referred to as the two-step method; minimum local contribution and enrollment split. Mrs. Byers also said she believes it is the Committee's vote to decide which method is used. Mr. Szymaniak stated the minimum local contribution figures listed by DESE are obtained from the Department of Revenue (DOR) in February annually. The Executive Director of Business Services was unsure how DESE reviews reporting methods when End of Year reporting is submitted; stating they (DESE) do not question which method is reported.

Christopher Howard recommended having an internal resource walk the Committee through examples of using both methods at the next meeting to see what the calculations look like. Mr. Szymaniak stated he has those calculations prepared for FY2019 and FY2020 and will present at the September School Committee meeting to provide more clarity for the Committee and the towns. The Committee can vote which method to use.

Chair Hayes announced that due to the serious financial and budget impact of the discussion, the next meeting will be a public hearing on the local assessment method. The MARS Consulting Group developed minimum local contributions trends and the Member Town Financial reports will be available for the Committee.

Chris George, citizen of Whitman, stated this is something he has been aware of for a couple of years. As a member of the Whitman Override Evaluation Committee, he also has a fiduciary duty and took a closer look. He quoted from the 2007 memo "Notwithstanding regional agreement" and contended that the statutory method is straight forward and if the school district is using the alternative method, it is not following the proper procedure. Mr. George added he is not pointing fingers but that is seeking to have it resolved going forward.

Whitman Town Administrator, Frank Lynam, and Selectman Randy LaMattina, commented briefly this is a critical issue and need to move forward and not point fingers. Mr. Szymaniak summarized his related tasks to prepare for the public hearing and discussion on the local assessment method for the next meeting.

#### New Business

*Proposal to change September School Committee meeting to September 18, 2019*

Mr. Szymaniak requested moving the September 11 meeting to September 18 for preparation purposes.

**VOTE: Mr. Small motioned; Mr. Cullity seconded; voted to approve moving the September 11, 2019 School Committee meeting to September 18, 2019 as requested. The motion carried unanimously.**

#### *Student and Faculty Handbook*

Mr. Szymaniak presented the 2019-20 school year Elementary Schools, Middle Schools and Regional High School Student Handbooks and the Faculty Handbook for approval by the Committee. An overview of the updates was presented in memos accordingly. In most cases, updates to language were made and dress code (gender neutral) information amended. Mr. Ferro noted the use of electronic devices procedure was added on page 20 in the middle schools handbook. Mr. Shawn Kain of Whitman asked the Committee to consider amending language regarding student substance abuse and related consequences from a perspective of the abuse being a disability. Mr. Szymaniak noted the policies in the handbook are associated with the School Committee policies which can be reviewed and amended at any time and will consider the request. Mr. Szymaniak also reported the District works closely with Whitman WILL for assistance and feedback in areas of student substance abuse. Mr. Szymaniak will review policy and research counseling options versus a punitive approach related to student substance abuse. There was a brief discussion regarding Massachusetts

Interscholastic Athletic Association (MIAA) rules and insuring the commitment to that organization is equitable.

**VOTE: Mr. Small motioned; Mr. Bois seconded; voted to approve the 2019-20 school year Elementary Schools, Middle Schools and Regional High School Student Handbooks and Faculty Handbook, as presented. The motion passed unanimously.**

#### *Acceptance of Gifts*

##### *Food Services Donation*

Mr. Kyle Austin of Austin Insurance Agency in Whitman donated \$866.36 to the Food Services Department to be used to cover the outstanding balances of student meals accounts with negative balances remaining at the end of the 2018-19 school year. The Superintendent will send a thank you letter to Mr. Austin on behalf of the Committee.

**VOTE: Mr. Small motioned; Mr. Cullity seconded; voted to accept the donation from Kyle Austin of Austin Insurance Agency in Whitman of \$866.36 to the Food Services Department. The donation will to be used to cover the outstanding balances of student meals accounts with negative balances remaining at the end of the 2018-19 school year.**

#### Subcommittee Reports

##### *Insurance Subcommittee*

Mr. Small reported the Insurance Subcommittee met on July 2, 2019. The next meeting is scheduled for September 23, 2019. Mayflower Municipal Health Group (MMHG) will have a presentation at that meeting.

##### *Warrant Subcommittee*

*Approval of Warrant Subcommittee meeting minutes 6/6/2019, 6/20/2019, 8/1/2019, 8/15/2019*

**VOTE: Mr. Small motioned; Mr. Cullity seconded; voted to approve the Warrant Subcommittee minutes of June 6, 2019, as presented. The motion passed unanimously.**

**VOTE: Mr. Small motioned; Mr. Cullity seconded; voted to approve the Warrant Subcommittee minutes of June 20, 2019, as presented. The motion passed 8-0-1. Mr. Cullity abstained.**

**VOTE: Mr. Small motioned; Mr. Cullity seconded; voted to approve the Warrant Subcommittee minutes of August 1, 2019, as presented. The motion passed unanimously.**

**VOTE: Mr. Small motioned; Mr. Cullity seconded; voted to approve the Warrant Subcommittee minutes of August 15, 2019, as presented. The motion passed unanimously.**

##### *Warrants signed at the meeting*

082819AP	\$1,235,051.61
082119AP	\$4,967.80
P82819	\$1,198,253.05

##### *Policy Subcommittee*

Mr. Szymaniak will review the District's policy on advertising per the request of Mr. Small.

##### *Facilities Subcommittee*

Mr. Small reported the Subcommittee met earlier in the evening and reviewed current capital items. Mr. Szymaniak reported he received information from the Massachusetts Association of Regional Schools (MARS) that the state legislature will be working on an FY19 budget supplemental to deal with the \$1.9 billion in excess revenue in September. MARS suggested writing the state to earmark funding for capital items in the District. Mr. Szymaniak prepared a letter to Governor Baker and state legislators requesting funding for crucial capital items that the towns are unable to fund. Present members of the School Committee signed the letter to send to the state legislators.

*Legislative Update*

Mr. Small reported the state has developed and released its budget. Supplemental funding may become available.

*Pilgrim Area Collaborative*

Mr. Bois reported the next board meeting is scheduled for October 8, 2019.

*Negotiations Subcommittee*

Mr. Szymaniak reported this is year two of a three year WHEA contracts. No action is necessary at this time. Negotiations are likely to begin after the start of the next school year.

Mr. Frank Lynam reported the Town of Whitman is working with the Edward J. Collins Jr. Center for Public Management on a capital plan. The School Committee will be invited to attend a joint meeting of the Whitman Board of Selectmen and the Whitman Finance Committee to review the capital study on October 8, 2019 at the Whitman Town Hall at 7:00 p.m. Mr. Lynam added the meeting is intended to be a kick off for starting a formalized capital plan.

*Meeting Adjournment*

**VOTE: Mr. Small motioned; Mr. Cullity seconded: voted to adjourn the meeting at 8:45 p.m. The motion carried unanimously.**

Minutes respectfully submitted by Michelle Lindberg

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*Signature of School Committee Secretary*

Meeting Handouts:

- Meeting agenda for August 28, 2019
- Meeting minutes of June 12 and July 22, 2019
- Student and Faculty Handbooks memo's outlining changes (e-copy of 2019-20 Handbooks)
- Food Services memo to accept donation
- Warrant Subcommittee meeting minutes 6/6/2019, 6/20/2019, 8/1/2019, 8/15/2019
- SEPAC Brochure
- FY2019 Line Item Transfers Final Close Out 6/30/2019
- Budget Re-certification voting language
- FY2020 Cherry Sheet Estimates
- W-H High School Handbook memo changes amended copy (see last page)
- Draft letter to State regarding FY2019 \$1.9 billion excess revenue
- IT Infrastructure Needs Assessment
- MGL 2019 for School Committees and School Personnel