

WHITMAN-HANSON REGIONAL SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEETING
Minutes of March 4, 2020
Held at the Whitman-Hanson Regional High School
600 Franklin Street, Whitman MA

Meeting convened: 8:00 p.m.

Meeting adjourned: 10:36 p.m.

Members present: Robert Hayes, Christopher Scriven, Frederick Small, Daniel Cullity, Christopher Howard, Michael Jones, Steve Bois, Alexandria Taylor and Dawn Byers

Members absent: Robert O'Brien, Jr.

Administrators present: Jeffrey Szymaniak, Superintendent of Schools
George M. Ferro, Jr., Assistant Superintendent of Schools
John Tuffy, Interim Business Manager

Chair Hayes brought the meeting to order at 8:00 p.m. and announced the meeting was being recorded and broadcast live.

Moment of Silence

Pledge of Allegiance

Unfinished Business

Budget Discussion

Superintendent Szymaniak announced that at request of School Committee and community, the FY2021 budget will be discussed this evening on a line by line basis. It is anticipated that the Committee will vote on the approved budget and local assessment no later than March 11, 2020. John Tuffy, part-time interim business manager, described the budget line item detail document as based on the Superintendent's FY2021 Required Budget Proposal, is organized by school and includes a two-year history for each line item. The report includes several zero line items, which represent accounts no longer in use, but were maintained in the spreadsheet to keep its integrity.

Mr. Tuffy commented on the following:

- Salaries in budget lines are contractual obligations; vacancies are made by an allowance.
- Utility line accounts are estimated – price increases represent supply, distribution and transmission.
- Water line account also increased due to invoicing received.
- Line items are carried forward to the next year and some may have discrepancies – for example, the substitute line; only Hanson Middle School had a surplus in that line item.
- The current YTD 2/2020 Expenditures report was provided as a point of reference.

Mr. Szymaniak noted to be cognizant that the District has supplemented staff through grant funding and have cut in those areas as well due to reductions in grant funding. Some positions paid using previous grant funding monies have been transferred to the LEA budget (to maintain level service). Mr. Szymaniak also noted that school choice and charter school expenses are higher than in the past.

Chair Hayes went through the budget line item detail pausing for questions and explanations.

Line Item Notes

- Indian Head School Special education teacher salary line – Increase due to the closing of Maquan and special education classrooms moving to Duval School in Whitman, maternity leave, transfer of teacher to Hanson Middle.
- General salary increases represent COLA and step and lane changes per the Collective Bargaining Contract.
- Principal salaries are listed under District Wide budget lines.
- Mr. Ferro explained how Title I funding works.
- Mr. Szymaniak explained that teacher's salaries previously paid through grant funding still need to be funded and impacts budget, when the grant is no longer available.
- Mr. Szymaniak noted class size at Indian Head Elementary, Duval Elementary and the High School (science) are high and additional teachers are needed, but not included in the required Budget because staffing in technology and curriculum additions are necessary.
- Substitute lines, in most cases, are higher than anticipated or encumbered.
- Mrs. Mathisen discussed issues with staffing professional salaries in speech/language and school psychologists, noting that contracted services were utilized due to low candidate pool response to job postings. That money needs to transfer from the speech line to cover the contracted services line.
- Mr. Tuffy noted that because the District runs on a fiscal year calendar, teachers received five payrolls at the end of June (not an even spend rate).
- Conley School teacher salary lines increased due to Title I Grant changes.
- Paraprofessional line items increase due to student needs and 1:1 aides.
- Duval teacher salary line represents elimination of one grade1-5 elementary teacher and the addition of one K teacher due to enrollment
- Mr. Ferro explained the paraprofessional line at Duval increase is due to specialized education staff and re-classification of special education paras and instructional paras.
- Mr. Szymaniak noted the kindergarten tuition has not increased, however, more students require full day and services. He noted the Kindergarten revolving budget line is depleted.
- Substitute line at Duval was noted as coverage for leaves of absence, use of sick leave and bank, etc.
- Mr. Grable noted Whitman Middle School supply line is down – most supplies are purchased through fundraiser activity.
- Hanson Middle School special education teacher line increased due to language-based program introduced last year.

Ms. Kara Moser, Hanson resident, addressed the Committee with concerns of class size, specifically at the Indian Head School where there is one classroom with 28 pupils.

- High School Principal, Dr. Chris Jones, explained the essential reasons for the principal travel stipend.
- Mr. Szymaniak reported the Curriculum director salary line is 0.6 FTE teacher and 0.4FTE director and includes the new elementary curriculum position.
- Mr. Szymaniak noted to continue to receive continued funding through the 21st Century Community Learning Grant (CCLC), the District was to absorb the cost of particular salaries after five years.
- Mr. Szymaniak noted that the District will look into amending the accounting lines for some district-wide items that currently fall under high school line items; for example Community Evening School, Edgenuity on-line learning and NEASC and other membership dues.

District-wide line item notes

School Committee expense line

- Committee member, Mr. Fred Small suggested eliminating providing bottled water for all school committee meetings as a cost savings. Members could bring their own at future meetings.

- Superintendent Szymaniak discussed the importance of an expense line for School Committee members to engage in conferences, memberships, legal information and professional development in order to make informed decisions.
- Mr. Szymaniak reported the legal line is higher than anticipated.
- There was discussion of recommendations to eliminate travel expenses and overnight stays
- The Superintendent will provide a breakdown and detailed history of the School Committee account.
- The Superintendent will determine what line item DW Business Finance Sup contract represents.
- Whitman Town Administrator, Frank Lynam, commented on the debt service line which Mr. Tuffy will re-visit.
- The Assistant Superintendent will provide detail on line item DW Instruct sup and other exp.
- The Director of Student Services will provide current trends of student services needs that will have strategic implications.
- The Superintendent will determine which line item offsets of the new front end loader
- Assistant Superintendent will provide detail for line item DW Fac Equip contrasvc \$120,000.

Whitman resident and Whitman Finance Committee Member, Kathleen Ottina, presented current elementary student enrollment figures and urged the Committee to consider re-instating four elementary teacher positions (cost of \$280,000) due to class size issues, particularly at Duval Elementary School.

The Superintendent addressed the failing technology infrastructure and need for technology staff as a high priority. The Superintendent confirmed class size is an issue at Duval first and second grade, Indian Head grade four as well as high school science. If four teachers are added to the Required Budget proposal at a cost of \$280,000, that will increase the required budget proposal to \$55,297,938. Mr. Szymaniak stated a budget and local assessment vote will be needed at the March 11 meeting. Mr. Howard requested possibly illustrating an assessment schedule with add-ins over the required proposed budget for the next meeting.

Mr. Szymaniak discussed possible savings through retirements and possible supplemental funding using Excess & Deficiency (E&D) account. The Superintendent added that, as far as he knows, E&D transfers to the LEA budget line have only been done to offset budget deficits. The Superintendent noted that neither town has committed to funding the presented budget scenarios. The Superintendent will provide an accurate cost to add four teachers to the required budget at the next meeting.

The Committee debated on moving to vote on an approved budget.

Hanson resident Kara Moser, again, urged the Committee to look at providing above level service. Due to the erosion of services offered at Whitman-Hanson Regional School District, her oldest child will be attending high school out of district next year.

Mr. Howard commented on being in favor of working with the required budget with the understanding that the two towns come to a compromise.

Mr. Small suggested savings on retirements could decrease the cost of four teachers by \$150,000. Mr. Szymaniak stated that is not a guarantee. Also, savings could be utilized to create a BRYT program at middle school level or reinstated other programs that were eliminated.

After heavy deliberation, a motion by Mr. Bois and seconded by Ms. Byers, to set the FY2021 budget at \$55,297,938 was made and withdrawn. A motion by Mr. Small and seconded by Mr. Bois, to set the FY2021 budget at \$55,147,938 was made and withdrawn.

It was the consensus of the Committee to develop local assessment figures for the two budget scenarios, with and without the addition of four teacher positions. The revised figures will also be shared with town officials once processed.

Chair Hayes reported the Regional Agreement Amendment will be on the next School Committee agenda.

Meeting Adjournment

VOTE: Mr. Cullity motioned; Mr. Howard seconded: voted to adjourn the meeting at 10:36 p.m. The motion carried unanimously.

Minutes respectfully submitted by Michelle Lindberg

Signature of School Committee Secretary

Meeting Handouts:

- Agenda for March 4, 2020
- Budget History and Line Item Detail
- YTD Budget Expenditures
- Email from Ms. Byers - Re: A brief history of Chapter 70 local aid to Whitman and Hanson

Additional Handout - Kathleen Ottina handout on enrollment summary in elementary schools