



WHITMAN-HANSON REGIONAL SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEETING
Minutes of April 22, 2020
Held at the Whitman-Hanson Regional High School
600 Franklin Street, Whitman MA
The meeting was held remotely via teleconference

Meeting convened: 7:00 p.m.
Meeting adjourned: 9:11 p.m.
Members present: Robert Hayes, Christopher Scriven, Frederick Small, Jr., Michael Jones, Daniel Cullity, Christopher Howard, Steve Bois, Dawn Byers and Alexandria Taylor
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

The virtual meeting was being held remotely in accordance with the Governor of Massachusetts' March 12, 2020 Order Suspending Certain Provisions of the Open Meeting Law G.L. c. 30A, Section 20. The meeting will be recorded and members of the public are able to access the meeting via live stream audio at www.whca.tv/watch/ and on WHCA's Educational Access Channel 98.

Chair Hayes opened the meeting and announced the School Committee was meeting in a virtual setting, remotely via teleconferencing, in accordance with the Governor's suspension of certain open meeting laws. The meeting was being recorded and broadcast live on WHCA's Educational Access Channel 98.

Moment of Silence

Pledge of Allegiance

Roll Call for Attendance

Roll call was taken. Mr. O'Brien was recorded as absent.

Acceptance of Meeting Minutes

February 26, 2020

VOTE: Mr. Small motioned; Mr. Cullity seconded; voted by roll call to accept the meeting minutes of February 26, 2020, as presented.

Mr. Bois – Yes

Ms. Byers – Yes

Mr. Cullity – Yes

Mr. Howard – Yes

Mr. Jones – Yes

Mr. Scriven – Yes

Mr. Small – Yes

Ms. Taylor – Yes

Mr. Hayes – Yes

The motion passed unanimously.

Meeting minutes of April 8, 2020

VOTE: Mr. Small motioned; Mr. Bois seconded; voted by roll call to accept the meeting minutes of April 8, 2020, as presented.

Mr. Bois – Yes

Ms. Byers – Yes

Mr. Cullity – Yes

Mr. Howard – Yes

Mr. Jones – Yes

Mr. Scriven – Yes

Mr. Small – Yes

Ms. Taylor – Yes

Mr. Hayes – Yes

The motion passed unanimously.

Superintendent's Report

Remote Learning and School Closure Updates

Superintendent Szymaniak reported since Covid-19 crisis began, the district is working to insure prompt and efficient work is being done by staff and students. On April 20th, Governor Baker ordered all school remain closed through the end of the 2019-2020 academic year as a precaution against the COVID-19 pandemic.

Remote learning will continue through the end of the school year, June 15, and will proceed based on Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) guidelines. Commissioner Riley will be releasing additional guidance and recommendations to school districts statewide within the coming days. The Superintendent does not anticipate any major changes in the learning plan and parents should not expect too much modification than what teachers and students are doing already. The focus on standards-based learning will continue and is important for students to have this year, before returning in September. All extra-curricular summer activities are on hold right now as the district awaits additional guidance from the Department of Public Health (DPH) and Governor's Office. It is anticipated there may be an Extended School Year (ESY) program for special education students, and limited building use, as inquiries have already come in for rescheduling of some events. Mr. Szymaniak reported he virtually met with the Superintendent's Council and high school principal on April 21, after the announcement of school closure. A topic of that discussion was high school graduation and other milestone events that occur at the end of the school year for seniors. Graduation will not be held on the traditional date and with more imposed social distancing guidelines, it is unclear what a graduation ceremony will look like. Suggestions for a graduation ceremony were shared. In addition, the students wanted to recognize teachers and administration to let them know they appreciate everything they are doing for students in the wake of the closure. The district is still working to determine how students will retrieve personal belongings and medications during the closure and long range plans of re-entry based on additional guidance from DESE. The Superintendent confirmed the last day for seniors will remain as May 21, 2020 currently listed on the district calendar.

Committee members also thanked the teachers and staff on the work being done to insure remote learning for all students. The Superintendent confirmed that grading during the closure remains at a credit/no credit status and there is an expectation of continued learning. Mr. Szymaniak provided guidance for parents whose child may not be engaging in remote learning plan of 2 hours at the elementary level and 2.5 hours at the secondary level. He suggested contacting teachers, school counselors and principals for assistance. The Superintendent briefly spoke to the struggles some families may be experiencing and the support the district for providing food services and making sure to stay connected. If there is no engagement with a student at all, the local police department may also do a wellness check.

Mr. Ferro reported a survey is out from DESE to all school districts on infrastructure to handle continued remote support for students. Mr. Ferro also reported the Federal Government is in the process of creating a stimulus package to cover post-closure costs that may arise from COVID-19 related expenses such as the return of the nearly 500 Chromebooks on loan to families that will require technology support, cleaning, re-inventorying, etc. The Superintendent anticipates receiving more specific information on the stimulus package in the near future. Mr. Szymaniak discussed the precautions administration is also taking for staff that may need to physically report

to work in Central Office and District Operations. For the health and safety of our staff, buildings remain closed and only limited essential staff may enter. A considerable amount of technology will continue being handled remotely.

Chair Hayes reported families in both towns are struggling and food pantries are in need of support. The Chair announced the LaMattina family of Whitman is selling Whitman Strong lawn signs in a show of solidarity during the Coronavirus outbreak to support the local food pantry. The signs are \$15 each, of which \$10 of each sale will be donated to the pantry. Already, over 400 signs have been sold and delivered to homes.

Director of Business and Finance finalist interview

Superintendent Szymaniak requested to pass over the interview at this time. He discussed the importance of a business manager as part of the crucial administration leadership team. The candidate pool for a full time replacement was nominal and only three of the eleven candidates were certified under DESE certification for business managers. In addition, surviving without a full time business manager to assist in the current, difficult budget cycle has prohibited the Superintendent and Assistant Superintendent from other areas of business they would normally be focused on. The Superintendent spoke to the latest position cuts in central administration since his hire, which have not been replaced, that include a technology director, assistant director of technology, an assistant superintendent and business office support staff. Mr. Szymaniak will continue to keep the Committee apprised of the status of filling the business director position. He commended Mr. Tuffy for the exceptional work and composure he continues to bring to the District.

Regional Agreement Amendment Committee Report

Mr. Szymaniak reported the Regional Agreement Amendment Committee (RAAC) met last week on April 15 and again earlier today on April 22. The RA Amendment Committee requested having Massachusetts Association of Regional Schools (MARS) consultants involved in the amendment process. Mr. Stephen Hemman and Mac Reid responded to a number of questions prepared by the RA Amendment Committee. Mr. Scriven reported the Amendment Committee was re-organized based on a review composition of RA Amendment subcommittee as voted by School Committee to be ten members. Subsequently, Whitman Town Administrator, Frank Lynam, and Hanson Finance Committee member, Ken McCormick, joined the subcommittee as voting members. The Amendment Committee will discuss objectives at their next meeting. Mr. Scriven thanked the MARS Consultants for their insight in clarifying information.

Mr. Scriven announced the participants of the Regional Agreement Amendment Committee.

VOTING COMMITTEE MEMBERS:

Mr. Christopher Scriven, School Committee Member (Whitman)
Mr. Christopher Howard, School Committee (Hanson)
Mr. Frank Lynam, Town of Whitman, Town Administrator
Mr. Justin Evans, Town of Whitman Board of Selectmen
Mr. Rick Anderson, Town of Whitman Finance Committee
Mr. Christopher George, Town of Whitman Community Member at Large
Mr. Matthew Dyer Town of Hanson Board of Selectmen
Ms. Laura Kemmett, Town of Hanson Board of Selectmen
Mr. Kenneth McCormick, Town of Hanson Finance Committee
Mr. Bruce Young, Town of Hanson Community Member at Large

NON-VOTING COMMITTEE PARTICIPANTS:

Mr. Jeffrey Szymaniak, Superintendent of Schools
Mr. George Ferro, Assistant Superintendent of Schools
Mr. John Stanbrook, Town of Hanson, Town Administrator
Mr. Robert Hayes, WHRSD School Committee Chair
Fred Small was recognized as an alternate for School Committee.

Mr. Howard reported the Amendment Committee will utilize the previously amended agreement, preliminarily approved by DESE, as the base model for amending and subsequently brought to the School Committee for approval.

The following response data points from MARS consultants' experience were introduced for the information of the Committee.

- *Moving from an enrollment-based assessment to the Statutory Assessment method is a rare situation that has been resolved in a couple of districts with a phased-in readjustment of the assessments over a five- or six-year period.*
- *It was reported that MARS consultant opined, because no action had been taken and no budget has been certified to date, the assessment methodology could be changed.*

The validity/compliance of sections of 1991 Regional Agreement, after 1993 Ed Reform, will be a topic of discussion for the next meeting after a review of the materials to be provided to School Committee.

School Committee members will be forwarded the MARS consultants response memo dated April 22, 2020.

Old Business

FY2021 Budget and Local Assessment

Chair Hayes reported an email from Whitman Board of Selectman, Randy LaMattina was sent to Christine Lynch at the DESE Office of Regional Governance, regarding the 1/12th budget process for regional school districts. Ms. Lynch shared the response with Superintendent Szymaniak so all parties receive the same information. The email was read into the minutes.

"Hello Ms. Lynch

I know we spoke previously and you were extremely helpful. Unfortunately as you are aware we are still having issues with our Regional District assessment. It seems as if we are heading towards a 1/12th budget. My question is this, when or if that that happens due to the change in methodology to the statutory method. The town of Whitmans contribution would drop from FY20. I understand that we can not pay less than the previous year, so would we receive our under the assessment under 1/12th and be obligated to pay the difference to make our payment equal to last years. Ultimately giving the District slightly more than 1/12th Level funded budget from the previous year. Just looking for some guidance, I hope this was not to confusing.

Respectfully

*Randy LaMattina
Selectman"*

"From: "Lynch, Christine M (DOE)" <christine.m.lynch2@state.ma.us>

Date: April 21, 2020 at 4:44:46 PM EDT

To: "Lamattina, Randy" <RLamattina@whitman-ma.gov>

Cc: "Szymaniak,Jeffrey" <Jeffrey.Szymaniak@whrsd.k12.ma.us>, "Griffin, Michelle (DESE)" <michelle.l.griffin2@state.ma.us>

Subject: RE: From R. LaMattina Whitman Selectman

Unfortunately many if not most regional school districts will be under a 1/12th budget this year. The Department will be issuing Guidelines soon to help districts as well as member towns navigate this process.

Under a 1/12 budget process the Commissioner will set an interim budget for a district that generally is not less than the previous fiscal year's (FY20) budget. However, member assessments would change from the previous Fiscal year due, for example, to changes in minimum local contributions, enrollment shares, and potential increases or decreases in state aid or other general fund revenues. Assessments may be calculated from the same total budget as FY20, but will be based on updated FY21 factors as noted above. Therefore, if the calculation of your assessment for FY21 based on updated factors results in a decrease from the previous year, you would not be expected to pay the same amount as you did in FY20. Likewise, however if your assessment increases over FY20 based on FY21 factors, you would be expected to pay the increased amount.

I am including the Superintendent on this e-mail, as you have asked a good question and it is important that everyone has the same information on this issue. The guidelines, once issued, hopefully will explain this process more fully.

Please let me know, however, if you have additional questions.

Chris Lynch

Christine M. Lynch

Director

Office of Regional Governance”

Chair Hayes reiterated that the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education will be issue Guidelines to help regional school districts with the 1/12th budget process. Chair Hayes will schedule a School Committee meeting for next Wednesday to continue discussions.

Superintendent Szymaniak stated the Committee still needs to vote a budget. The guidance will address the budget process for towns that have been forced to reschedule their town meetings to June or July due to Coronavirus outbreak. The Superintendent reported on a conference call that was cancelled that was to address providing preparation guidelines for the 1/12th budget process for regional school districts. Mr. Szymaniak will prepare budget information on projected current savings during the closure to present at the next meeting. Mr. Szymaniak also reported there may be some federal relief through a grant that may cover COVID related costs such as restocking personal protective equipment (PPE) items and building cleanings, which may offset the depreciation in revenue this year. Currently, there is a lack of preschool and kindergarten tuition revenue since the closure. It was reported through negotiations with North River Collaborative, van drivers will be furloughed and costs pro-rated at 50%, enabling some transportation cost savings. It was noted that relief could be forthcoming under both federal and state levels. Mr. Tuffy reported that like conversations have also begun at the Department of Revenue (DOR) for potential grant funding through FEMA funneled through state grant opportunities. Chair Hayes reported he received communication from MARS they will continue to work with DESE in navigating the budget process for districts that have not had the opportunity to get budgets approved due to many municipalities not being able to hold town meeting due to the COVID pandemic. A DESE guideline will be issued Friday, April 24. There is a Zoom conference call Monday, April 28 at noon.

The Superintendent discussed any savings in the current budget and re-appropriation to next year's budget. Once the FY21 budget is certified, any remaining funds from FY20 may be rolled over to Excess & Deficiency (E&D) to appropriate to the FY21 budget, depending how the Committee wishes to utilize the excess. Projections in savings reported will be updated to reflect the savings through June 15. It was reported transportation reimbursement for FY21 was projected at 80% but could be reduced to as low as 70% due to state revenue impact.

Mr. Szymaniak reported the Food Services workers will be place on furlough effective April 28, 2020.

Per the Committee's request, the Superintendent will quantify any cost savings associated with the school closure at the next meeting.

Chair Hayes proceeded with the budget and local assessment discussion. He reminded the Committee of the proposed required budget of \$55,040,238 and recommended budget addition of four teachers of \$55,320,238.

The Superintendent spoke to the budget impact of anticipated student education remediation and social/emotional concerns as a result of the closure. Students in class sizes of 40 in a class will be challenging. Mr. Ferro added that Commissioner Riley wanted to districts to begin thinking of the long-range re-entry plans. And, although guidelines are unknown at this time, to consider having to keep students six feet apart and how that will work physically in a classroom.

Mr. Szymaniak stated a 1/12th budget would mean laying off between 35- 37 employees. Moreover, due to the responsibility of the district's full share of unemployment costs, that number translates to 47-48 employee cuts. Losing such an enormous number of staff was considered to be devastating to the school district. Mr. Szymaniak discussed the need for the four additional teachers and technology support is now essential in next year's budget.

The Committee heavily debated concerns on voting to set the budget or holding off until the towns reach a compromise to fund the local assessment. The impact of a \$1 million assessment increase to the Town of Hanson was of concern for a number of Committee members. Imposing a 1/12th budget and 48 position cuts was also a major concern for a number of Committee members, if a budget is not set to be voted at town meeting. The Committee discussed their charge as elected school district officials. They also discussed the responsibility of each town to determine how they fund their budgets.

Ms. Byers motioned and Mr. Bois seconded to set the FY2021 school district operating budget at \$55,320,238 to include the four additional teachers, as discussed. Superintendent Szymaniak explained the implementation of a 1/12th budget using FY20 figures would mean a shortfall of \$2.6 million to the school budget next year.

The Committee continued deliberating the responsibility to provide all with students a sound education along and apprehension of the financial impact of the assessment increase to the Town of Hanson. It was suggested to place a discussion to rescind the FY21 assessment methodology vote of statutory method on the next School Committee meeting agenda. The discussion of a compromise between the two towns to fund their assessments continued. The potential of having a 1/12th budget imposed by the Commissioner of Education and loss of nearly 40 employees was also a major discussion of concern.

VOTE: Ms. Byers motioned: Mr. Bois seconded; roll call voted to set the FY2021 school district operating budget at \$55,320,238 to include the four additional teachers, as discussed.

Mr. Bois, Yes

Ms. Byers, Yes

Mr. Cully, Yes

Mr. Howard, No

Mr. Jones, No

Mr. Scriven, No

Mr. Small, Yes

Ms. Taylor, Yes

Mr. Hayes, No

The motion did not pass, 5-4-0.

Chair Hayes presented a FY20 vs. FY21 budget comparison on selected budget lines. It was reported this illustration was at the request of Whitman Board of Selectman, Justin Evans.

Whitman-Hanson Regional School District

Budget Comparison

	FY 2021	FY 2020	\$ Change	% Change
Benefits & Insurance	8,805,821	8,446,821	359,000	4.3%
Debt & Interest	927,519	890,983	36,536	4.1%
Facilities	2,004,384	1,950,384	54,000	2.8%
Legal	90,000	90,000	0	0.0%
Supplies & Services	3,129,968	2,871,058	258,910	9.0%
Salaries	30,311,394	28,962,886	1,348,508	4.7%
Tuition	5,457,290	5,268,745	188,545	3.6%
Utilities	1,435,000	1,383,000	52,000	3.8%
Transportation	2,878,861	2,561,861	317,000	12.4%
	\$55,040,237	\$52,425,738	\$2,614,499	5.0%

The Committee highlighted items the transportation line increase of 12.4%, which represents a majority of special education needs, and the salaries line increase of 4.7%, which represents contractual obligations under steps and lane changes in collective bargaining units.

VOTE: Mr. Small motioned; Mr. Bois seconded; roll call voted to set the FY2021 school district operating budget at \$55,040,237.

Mr. Bois, Yes

Ms. Byers, No

Mr. Cullity, Yes

Mr. Howard, No

Mr. Jones, No

Mr. Scriven, No

Mr. Small, Yes

Ms. Taylor, Yes

Mr. Hayes, No

The motion did not pass, 4-5-0.

The Committee sustained a divisive debate about setting a budget, and setting a budget under the statutory assessment methodology that could have financial reparations on one town. It was requested to add the assessment methodology to the meeting agenda for April 29. It was learned that recently, some districts have established a special education stabilization account to set aside funds for specific special education needs, transportation, therapies and out-of-district costs. Mr. Tuffy will research the details for setting up such an account.

Warrants Signed by Chairman Hayes

Accounts Payable Warrants

042620NY \$64,439.65

042620AP \$33,158.59

Payroll Warrant

P42320 \$1,196,816.01

The next meeting was scheduled for April 29, 2020 at 7:00 p.m.

Adjournment

VOTE: Mr. Cullity motioned; Mr. Bois seconded by roll call vote adjourn the meeting at 9:11 p.m. to review.

Mr. Bois – yes

Ms. Byers – yes

Mr. Cullity – yes

Mr. Howard – yes

Mr. Jones – yes

Mr. Scriven – yes

Mr. Small, Yes

Ms. Taylor, Yes

Mr. Hayes – yes

The motion passed unanimously.

Minutes respectfully submitted by Michelle Lindberg

Signature of School Committee Secretary

Meeting Handouts:

- Meeting agenda for April 22, 2020
- Meeting minutes of February 26 and April 8, 2020
- Application Packet for Thomas Tatro, finalist for Director of Business and Finance
- FY20 vs. FY21 Budget Comparison with selected line items