



WHITMAN-HANSON REGIONAL SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEETING
Minutes of July 15, 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: 10:19 p.m.
Members present: Robert Hayes, Christopher Scriven, Frederick Small, Michael Jones, Daniel Cullity, Christopher Howard, Steve Bois, Dawn Byers, Hillary Kniffen and David Forth, Jr.
Members absent: None
Administrators present: Jeffrey Szymaniak, Superintendent of Schools
John Tuffy, Director of Business and Finance

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 at www.whca.tv/watch/ and on WHCA's Educational Access Channel 98.

Chair Hayes announced the next meeting of the Committee is scheduled for June 30. This evening's meeting is being broadcast live video and audio live this evening.

Moment of Silence

Pledge of Allegiance

Roll Call for Attendance

Roll call was taken. All present.

Acceptance of Meeting Minutes

June 29, 2020 School Committee meeting minutes

VOTE: Mr. Cullity motioned; Mr. Small seconded; voted by roll call to accept the meeting minutes of June 29, 2020, as presented.

Mr. Bois – Yes

Ms. Byers – Yes

Mr. Cullity – Yes

Mr. Forth – Yes

Mr. Howard – Yes

Mr. Jones – Yes

Ms. Kniffen – Yes

Mr. Scriven – Yes

Mr. Small – Yes

Mr. Hayes – Yes

The motion passed unanimously.

Superintendent's Report

South Shore Educational Collaborative Board Appointment

Superintendent Szymaniak sought a vote of the Committee to be appointed to the South Shore Educational Collaborative (SSEC) Board of Directors for the 2020-21 school year. Mr. Szymaniak added the Board is a superintendent-based board. The Whitman-Hanson Regional School District joined the SSEC as a member town effective July 1, 2020. Mr. Szymaniak reported tuition rates remain at the 2019-20 rates and eleven students currently participate in the program.

VOTE: Mr. Small motioned; Mr. Bois seconded; voted by roll call to appoint Superintendent Jeff Szymaniak to the South Shore Educational Collaborative Board of Directors for the 2020-21 school year.

Mr. Bois – Yes

Ms. Byers – Yes

Mr. Cullity – Yes

Mr. Forth – Yes

Mr. Howard – Yes

Mr. Jones – Yes

Ms. Kniffen – Yes

Mr. Scriven – Yes

Mr. Small – Yes

Mr. Hayes – Yes

The motion passed unanimously.

Superintendent's Evaluation

Superintendent Szymaniak requested the School Committee members who served during the 2019-20 school year submit their evaluations of the Superintendent no later than August 15. Mr. Szymaniak stated he will also prepare goals for the 2020-21 school year.

Strategic Plan 2020-2023

Superintendent Szymaniak presented the 2020-2023 WHRSD Strategic Plan for the Committees review and input. Mr. Szymaniak reported much of the Strategic Plan's initial development was accomplished during the spring and prior to the COVID-19 outbreak, which limited the Committee's involvement. The Superintendent would like the Committee's input and final approval in mid-August. Mr. Bois asked if a revenue figure could be incorporated in the Plan. Mr. Szymaniak recommended adding "to reduce expenses in select areas" as an action item. Ms. Byers noted in the Outcomes section, 2.1 curriculum and 2.2 instruction were left blank and inquired if the District anticipates adding tuition-free full day kindergarten as a goal. Mr. Szymaniak anticipates establishing a curriculum cycle for full day kindergarten and full day preschool. The Committee discussed failed attempts of offering tuition-free full day kindergarten over the years. There was further discussion on how to engage the community to understand the needs of the District and how the Committee can accomplish its' goals. Mr. Small would like to see an entire meeting dedicated to review of the Strategic Plan. The Committee also discussed maintaining momentum by adding science curriculum or STEM enhanced offerings at the high school. Mr. Szymaniak noted there may be an opportunity to adopt a certification program and bypass programs offered at Massasoit Community College.

DESE Reopening Guidance Updates

The Superintendent reported the District must develop a reopening plan under the guidelines and direction of the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE). The preliminary reopening plan is due to DESE on July 31. The plan must include three scenarios for the return to school, as outlined by DESE. Mr. Szymaniak reported COVID teams are in place district-wide and at each building level. Mr. Szymaniak shared the names of the District-wide team (administrators, principals, directors, department supervisors) and requested two School Committee members also participate. The first meeting will take place on July 20. Administrators have already been working on a draft of the reopening plan. Mr. Szymaniak noted DESE's recommendation for students return in the classroom to distance six feet but no less than three feet. Mr. Szymaniak spoke to the analytics to determine the number of students that can fit in a classroom space under those parameters and with the elimination of non-necessary furniture and equipment and at the same time adhering to fire code, egress, etc. The average class may

be twenty-three students and higher at the high school level. Under the current CDC and DESE guidelines, and with budget and staffing constraints, the District cannot commit to a full in person reopening. In addition, reopening plans may need to be bargained with the union under a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). Under a remote plan, there is also an expectation for the number of hours worked by faculty/staff.

The Superintendent reported on funding sources under COVID related expenses. In a notification letter from Senator Brady and Representatives Cutler and Sullivan, the House and Senate recently approved a supplemental budget to provide additional relief for COVID related expenses, including funds for personal protective equipment, field hospitals and contact tracing. Included are a pair of amendments we jointly filed to direct an additional \$400,000 to the towns of Hanson and Whitman for the benefit of the regional school district. One amendment added in the House will provide \$200,000 for the Whitman-Hanson school district to fund remote learning related expenses and another amendment added in the Senate will provide an additional \$200,000 for personal protection equipment for the schools, staff and teaching professionals. These additional funds will help ensure that every Whitman-Hanson high school student will have access to a chrome book and every teacher and staff member in the district can be assured of having an adequate supply of PPE. These amendments will allow our teachers to better support their students and provide the best education possible under these challenging circumstances. The budget is facilitated by federal CARES Act funding in response to the COVID pandemic. The House and Senate bills will be reconciled and then sent to Gov. Baker for his approval. In addition, the Commonwealth announced the allocation of approximately \$200 million from the Commonwealth's federal Coronavirus Relief Fund for costs related to re-opening public schools. Schools are eligible to receive up to \$225 per student for eligible costs incurred due to the COVID-19 public health emergency.

Mr. Szymaniak referred to several options of hybrid models that the leadership team is diligently working. These models would provide cohorts of students reporting on dedicated days with one day of full remote for all cohorts. For instance, in Option 1 at the elementary level, Cohort A reports to schools Monday-Thursday half day morning sessions and the Cohort B reports Monday through Thursday afternoon sessions. Option 2 may look like Cohort A reports full days Monday and Tuesday, Cohort B reports full days Thursday and Friday and Wednesdays for all Cohorts is all remote. Other examples for middle and high school were also discussed.

Mr. Szymaniak noted another challenge is the transportation of students and providing enough bus runs under the current transportation guidelines of only 24 students to a bus whereas a bus run holds 40-60 students. The District will likely send out another survey to parents for more detailed information that will allow hybrid models to be consistent so parents can set their schedules.

The School Committee will help decide on the reopening plan and hybrid model decisions for a comprehensive plan. The priority will be the health and safety of all students and staff. At this time, there is no information or guidance should there be an outbreak at schools. The Commissioner has not yet confirmed any reduction in the number of days on learning from 180 days to 177 days but Mr. Szymaniak was confident that may be a part of it.

As continuous data is received from the state, the Committee will need to consider transportation issues, adhering to CDC health and distancing guidelines among other things. On July 30, the Committee should have a preliminary plan for review. In mid-August, the District should have more information to develop the comprehensive plan. The Committee discussed the impact of the FY2021 budget on any reopening plans. The Superintendent asked for one or two School Committee members to participate the District COVID-19 Team. Ms. Kniffen and Mr. Small volunteered to participate.

Remote Learning Return to School Parent Survey

The Superintendent presented the results of the WHRSD Remote Learning and Return to School Parent/Guardian Survey 2020. Over 1,100 responses were received. The Superintendent highlighted areas of the survey. Results indicated that most families have technology devices and internet reliability for remote learning. Most families indicated parents were home with children, but Superintendent was concerned with 17% that were not available to be home with children. Regarding the number of hours children engaged in remote learning, the Superintendent intends to work with Whitman Hanson Education Association (WHEA) on unilateral consistency. Results for the

amount of online meeting time indicated that parents would like more on line meeting time. The District will follow up with parents on a second survey.

Kindergarten and Preschool Tuitions

The Superintendent discussed procedures for collecting preschool and kindergarten tuition. In the event of another school closing or remote only learning environment, a decision to continue collecting tuition will be needed. As the Committee knows, last spring, tuitions were refunded during the COVID closing which led to a deficit in the budget. The level of service to preschool and kindergarten students needs to continue but would again, run a deficit if there is no tuition revenue. Staffing is dependent upon tuition and the District will need to let parents know if they can opt out of the programs. The goal is to at least provide half day in person learning, socialize get into a school routine. Integrated preschool is mandated. The finances are of concern if revenue is not available if parents opt out. Based upon the plan, the Superintendent is not sure if the District can offer a full day program, may split into two sessions but will need tuition so parents will need to be able to opt out if the situation arises or offer some sort of waiver. Committee discussed challenges with not offering full day programs and charging tuition should it be necessary to go to a remote or modified plan due to COVID. The Superintendent will discuss tuition refunds at the next School Committee meeting. A number of decisions will be based on finances.

Unfinished Business

Whitman Middle School Feasibility Study

The Committee was presented the final Q&A on the Whitman Feasibility Study information sheet developed for website and as a community handout. The Superintendent reported after speaking with the Whitman Town Moderator, an onscreen presentation would not be allowable but the Superintendent will request the document be a handout at Whitman Town Meeting.

Whitman Middle School Building Committee

Mr. Small, Mr. Cullity and Mr. Scriven were appointed to the Whitman Middle School Building as well as the Superintendent. Whitman Town Administrator, Frank Lynam, notified the District the following Whitman officials were appointed to the Building Committee at a recent Board of Selectmen's meeting:

- Randy Lamattina, Board of Selectman
- Lisa Green, Assistant Town Administrator
- John Galvin, Finance Committee
- Robert Curran, Building Commissioner

The initial meeting of the Whitman Middle School Building Committee has not yet been scheduled. A number of the Building Committee member appointments have been established. Mr. Small suggested some additional few bullet points be added to the Q&A.

School Budget Discussion

Prior to the budget discussion, Mr. Small requested to make a statement. Mr. Small referred to the continuous assessment issue discussion over the last school year. Mr. Small reported in 2016, he was approached by a Whitman resident who felt the Town of Whitman may be paying \$300,000 – \$400,000 too much annually in the operating assessment. Mr. Small suggested the resident contact then Superintendent as the best person to clarify his concern stating he thought it may have to do something with transportation. Mr. Small then referred to the Regional Agreement Amendment Committee meetings held in 2017-2018 whereas the MA Association of Regional Schools (MARS) was hired to assist in amending and updating the Regional Agreement and bringing the Agreement into compliance and current legal standards. In March of 2019, Mr. Small was asked by a Whitman Board of Selectmen which assessment methodology was being used to calculate the operating assessment. He contacted the then Director of Business Services to confirm which assessment methodology was being used (alternative or statutory). Mr. Small indicated he did not receive a prompt response from the Business Manager so he contacted Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) directly via email. Simultaneously, he was told by the then Director of Business Services and the DESE representative that the statutory method of assessment was being utilized. Mr. Small reported he subsequently reported this information to the Whitman Selectmen. Mr. Small also attended a Selectmen's meeting in Whitman and offered the same information at that

public meeting. Over the course of the next few months, it was determined the statutory method was not being utilized. The District learned that the statutory method was not being utilized and an alternative method was being used to calculate operating assessments to the towns. In order to explore these findings, District administration placed then Director of Business Services on leave. Mr. Small mentioned a number of presentations and discussions, including DESE representatives at School Committee meetings, that took place all year on the assessment methodology and possible compromises that continue to this day. In January 2020, an executive session meeting was held whereas the Committee was notified a separation with the Director of Business Services was agreed upon with an end date of March 31, 2020. Mr. Small indicated he objected to a separation agreement. Mr. Small stated that the towns have been partners for many years and this is a situation where no blame should be placed. Mr. Small reported there was a discussion at a recent Whitman meeting to report some of this information the Attorney General. He added this started in a prior administration and what is needed now is to be as transparent as possible. Mr. Small asked that the towns find a way to come together and think about the students. He regrets not being more vigilant during the language discussions in those previous Regional Agreement Committee meetings and offered the citizens of Whitman and Hanson his most sincere apology.

School Budget Discussion

Mr. Szymaniak asked Mr. Tuffy to speak on the one-twelfth budget. Mr. Tuffy reported the District is officially on a one-twelfth budget effective July 1, 2020. He discussed how the monthly assessment would be computed relative to 1/12th of the previous years' budget and revenue assumptions for FY2021. Mr. Tuffy talked of a reduction in cash flow during the summer months and reported the first warrant in July is just over \$2.1 million. Mr. Tuffy reported he does not anticipate any issues through July and August. Mr. Tuffy reported he has been in conversation with District Treasurer, David Leary, to manage the cash flow and measure against spending and see how that balances out.

The Committee discussed the upcoming dates of Annual Town Meeting on Monday, July 27 for the Town of Whitman and Wednesday, July 29 for the Town of Hanson. In the event of the budget articles do not pass, the Committee has an opportunity to respond and produce a revised budget to present at a subsequent meeting. If a super or 'districtwide' becomes necessary, the statutory method of assessment must be utilized. The Committee continued discussing consequences of not passing a budget and remaining on a one-twelfth. The Committee will schedule a follow up meeting on July 30 to discuss the annual town meeting results. Mr. Szymaniak reported he is attending a Whitman Finance Committee meeting on July 21 and will post as a joint meeting so that Committee members may attend.

Regional Agreement Amendment Committee

Consideration of revisions to amended Regional Agreement (from Town of Whitman)

Superintendent Szymaniak requested the Committee consider the revisions to the proposed amendment to the Regional Agreement as proposed by the town of Whitman. The Superintendent reported the Hanson Selectmen had no further revisions but did confirm the revised proposed Amended Regional Agreement would be placed on the Warrant. Superintendent recommended a vote to accept the revisions by the Town of Whitman to the proposed Amended Regional Agreement.

Proposed amended language

E. Apportionment of Operating costs

(1) Apportionment of Operating Costs for Whitman-Hanson Regional School District Pre-Kindergarten-12 for FY 2021

(a) The apportionment of operating costs for the 2021 fiscal year shall be determined by the sum of sections (i) and (ii) below:

(i) Fifty percent (50%) of the operating costs for FY2021 shall be apportioned between and assessed to the member towns using the statutory method (MGL c. 70, section 6) Each member town's assessment of its share of said 50% of the operating costs for FY2021 shall be an amount

calculated based on the ratio which such member town's minimum local contribution to the regional district bears to the sum of minimum local contributions of all member towns to the regional district.

(ii) Fifty percent (50%) of the operating costs for FY2021 shall be apportioned between and assessed to the member towns based on respective pupil enrollments calculated as follows: each member town's assessment of its share of said 50% of the operating costs for FY2021 shall be an amount calculated based upon computing the ratio which such member town's pupil enrollment in the regional district on October 1 of 2019 bears to the total pupil enrollment from all the member towns in the regional district school on October 1, 2019.

(2) Apportionment of Operating costs for FY 2022 and thereafter will follow the statutory methodology as defined in 603 CMR 41.00 as follows:

- (a) The apportionment of operating costs to a member town will equal the the member town's Minimum Local Contribution as determined by the Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education (the "Commissioner") and the member town's share of any other operating costs above the Minimum Local Contributions, referred to in this section as "Above Minimum Contribution.", such share to be calculated as provided in Section E (2)(d), hereinafter.
- (b) The aggregate Above Minimum Contribution for all member towns is arrived at by subtracting from the Operating Budget the following: Chapter 70 aid, the Aggregate Minimum Local Contributions of all member towns, and other general revenue sources to the District.

(c) This formula is illustrated below:

Operating Budget (which excludes capital, debt, and transportation)
- (minus) Chapter 70 aid (as calculated by DESE)
- (minus) Aggregate Minimum Local Contributions
of all member towns (as calculated by DESE)
- (minus) Other general revenue sources to the
District
= (equals) Aggregate Above Minimum Contribution for all
member towns

(d) Each member town's proportionate share of the Aggregate Above Minimum Contribution for all member towns shall be determined based on the ratio that pupil enrollment in grades Pre-kindergarten through twelve residing in such member town, including out-of-district pupils, bears to pupil enrollment in grades Pre-kindergarten through twelve residing in all member towns in the District, including out-of-district pupils, on October 1 of the preceding fiscal year for which the apportionment will be assessed (the "Enrollment Formula").

(e) The total operating costs assessed to each member town will consist of the member town's Minimum Local Contribution and the town's share of Above Minimum Local Contribution calculated under the Enrollment Formula.

- (3) Special operating costs include costs unique to a particular town for maintaining programs or services. These costs will be borne by the particular member town.

VOTE: Mr. Howard motioned; Mr. Scriven seconded; voted by roll call to accept the revisions (the amendment to the amendment) by the Town of Whitman to the proposed Amended Regional Agreement.

**Mr. Bois – Yes
Ms. Byers – Yes**

Mr. Cullity – Yes
Mr. Forth – Yes
Mr. Howard – Yes
Mr. Jones – Yes
Ms. Kniffen – Yes
Mr. Scriven – Yes
Mr. Small – Yes
Mr. Hayes – Yes

The motion passed unanimously.

The FY2021 budget and assessment figures were discussed. Mr. Howard confirmed the operating assessments using FY2021 Cherry Sheet with the proposed amended Regional Agreement (50/50 compromise) as outlined in the WHRSD Assessment modified statutory method worksheet is an assessment to the Town of Hanson of \$11,214,176.70 and an assessment to the town of Whitman of \$15,367,391.75. The Committee discussed the town's ability to vote the budget up or down at the annual town meeting.

Executive Session

To discuss strategy with respect to collective bargaining or litigation if an open meeting may have a detrimental effect on the bargaining or litigating position of the public body as the chair so declares: (Whitman DPW water bill)

Chair Hayes entertained a motion to go into executive session to discuss strategy with respect to collective bargaining or litigation if an open meeting may have a detrimental effect on the bargaining or litigating position of the public body as the chair so declares.

Chair Hayes stated that upon the conclusion of executive session, the Committee will not return to open session.

VOTE: Mr. Small motioned; Mr. Cullity seconded; voted by roll call to go into executive session at 9:40 p.m. to discuss strategy with respect to collective bargaining or litigation if an open meeting may have a detrimental effect on the bargaining or litigating position of the public body as the chair so declares: (Whitman DPW water bill)

Mr. Bois – Yes
Ms. Byers – Yes
Mr. Cullity – Yes
Mr. Forth – Yes
Mr. Howard – Yes
Mr. Jones – Yes
Ms. Kniffen – Yes
Mr. Scriven – Yes
Mr. Small – Yes
Mr. Hayes – Yes

The motion passed unanimously.

VOTE: Mr. Cullity motioned; Mr. Bois seconded; voted by roll call to come out of executive session at 10:18 p.m.

Mr. Bois – Yes
Ms. Byers – Yes
Mr. Cullity – Yes
Mr. Forth – Yes
Mr. Howard – Yes
Mr. Jones – Yes
Ms. Kniffen – Yes
Mr. Scriven – Yes

Mr. Small – Yesf
Mr. Hayes – Yes
The motion passed unanimously.

Adjournment

VOTE: Mr. Small motioned; Mr. Cullity seconded; voted by roll call to adjourn the meeting at 10:19 p.m.

Mr. Bois – Yes
Ms. Byers – Yes
Mr. Cullity – Yes
Mr. Forth – Yes
Mr. Howard – Yes
Mr. Jones – Yes
Ms. Kniffen – Yes
Mr. Scriven – Yes
Mr. Small – Yes
Mr. Hayes – Yes
The motion passed unanimously.

Signature of School Committee Secretary

Meeting Handouts:

- Meeting agenda and memo for July 15, 2020
- Meeting minutes of June 29, 2020
- SSEC Information for School Committee
- 2020-2025 WHRSD Strategic Plan
- Remote learning parent survey
- Letter from Representative Cutler, RE: The House and Senate have recently approved a supplemental budget to provide additional relief for COVID related expenses, including funds for personal protective equipment, field hospitals and contact tracing. Included are a pair of amendments we jointly filed to direct an additional \$400,000 to the towns of Hanson and Whitman for the benefit of the regional school district. One amendment added in the House will provide \$200,000 for the Whitman-Hanson school district to fund remote learning related expenses and another amendment added in the Senate will provide an additional \$200,000 for personal protection equipment for the schools, staff and teaching professionals.
- Copies of Considerations to the proposed RA amendment from Town of Whitman previously sent to Committee
- Whitman Middle School Feasibility Q&A
- Warrants signed 6-30-2020 through 7-15-2020