



WHITMAN-HANSON REGIONAL SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEETING
Meeting Minutes of February 24, 2021
**Annual Public Hearing/Budget Presentation
School Committee Meeting**
Held at the Whitman-Hanson Regional High School
600 Franklin Street, Whitman MA

Meeting convened: 6:00 p.m.

Meeting adjourned: 7:30 p.m.

Members present: Robert Hayes, Christopher Scriven, Frederick Small, Michael Jones, Christopher Howard, Steve Bois, Dawn Byers, Hillary Kniffen and David Forth, Jr.

Members absent: Daniel Cullity

Administrators present: Jeffrey Szymaniak, Superintendent of Schools
George M. Ferro, Jr., Assistant Superintendent of Schools
John Tuffy, Director of Business and Finance
Lauren Mathisen, Director of Student Services

The meeting was being held 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, and the meeting was also being recorded and broadcast live on WHCA's Educational Access Channel 98.

Pledge of Allegiance

Moment of Silence

Roll Call for Attendance

All votes were taken by roll call.

Annual Budget Presentation and Public Hearing

VOTE: Mr. Small motioned; Mr. Bois seconded; voted by roll call to open the Public Hearing of the FY2022 School District Budget.

Mr. Bois – Yes

Ms. Byers – Yes

Mr. Forth – Yes

Mr. Howard – Yes

Mr. Jones – Yes

Ms. Kniffen – Yes

Mr. Small – Yes

Mr. Scriven – Yes

Mr. Hayes - Yes

The motion carried 9-0-0.

Chair Hayes announced the following upcoming meeting dates.

- March 3, 2021 – Facilities Subcommittee meeting – 5:00 PM High School Library
- March 3, 2021 – School Committee Meeting – 6:00PM – High School Library
- March 10, 2021 – School Committee Meeting – 6:00PM – High School Library
- March 16, 2021 – Negotiations Subcommittee meeting – 4:30 PM High School Library
- March 17, 2021 – School Committee Meeting – 6:00PM – High School Library

The procedure for the public hearing comments through teleconferencing was explained. Participants should use the ‘raise hand’ feature in the Zoom meeting room. The Superintendent announced participants in the public hearing will have an opportunity to speak before and after the budget presentation. There were no questions upon opening the public hearing.

Superintendent Jeff Szymaniak presented the FY2022 proposed school district budget. The presentation began with the budget process schedule as follows:

February 24 – Public Hearing Presentation

March 10 – Budget Detail Session (line by line)

March 17 – Vote Budget (45-day notice for May TM)

April 14 – Budget Session (tentative)

April 28 – Budget Session (tentative)

Mr. Szymaniak reported if annual town meeting dates move to June, the date the School Committee would need to vote the budget may impact the 45-day notice.

The Superintendent discussed a number of items of concern impacting the budget.

- Opening of school in fall 2021 – Direction from the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) Commissioner Riley. The Superintendent reported DESE Commissioner Riley has outlined stipulations and options for remote students through end of this school year. It is unclear if full remote learning will be an option next year. If so, it would impact the FY2022 budget. The current budget proposal does not reflect a remote plan for next school year. Furthermore, mandatory COVID testing is still unclear and not budgeted.
- Contracts for all expiring WHEA bargaining units A/B/C/D – all union contracts are set to expire on June 30, 2021.
- Retirements and contractual obligations - Teachers have until March 1 to notify of retirement in FY2022. There is a bill in the House for early incentive retirement incentive for teachers which may have budgetary impact. Contractual obligations include vendor contracts with First Student transportation, S.J. Service custodial and the SmartCentre copy center. The transportation and custodial contracts expire June 30, 2021.
- State Aid - Chapter 70 actual funding amount is not finalized at this time.
- Transportation reimbursement is not finalized, but anticipated to be about 74%.
- Special education tuitions – Tuitions have been problematic during COVID due to some facilities shutting down. Student regression has been apparent.
- Health and building insurances will increase accordingly.
- Whitman water bill - Negotiations are ongoing to settle an invoice dispute dating back to 2005.

The Superintendent presented ‘Plus’ budget items in the proposed level service budget.

- Minimally support our educational and operational needs

- Maintains current staffing levels PreK-12
- Addresses anticipated regression due to COVID-19
- Provides special education programming to retain students with in-district programs.
- Restores a high school science teacher - this position was cut in FY2019
- Begins a refresh cycle for outdated Chromebooks. This was mentioned in the technology infrastructure assessment at the last school committee meeting on February 10.

Additions to Level Service

Mr. Ferro spoke to intervention practices for the regression of students during the pandemic. The focus is on math and literacy. As data is collected and reviewed, interventions will be determined and implemented at the school level. The following is proposed staffing for intervention/regression.

Intervention/Regression Program (4 staff)

- 2 Elementary interventionists
- 1 Middle School interventionist
- 1 K-5 sped facilitator
- iReady read and middle school math diagnostic

Mr. Ferro reported Chromebooks will be at their end of life, meaning the operating system can no longer receive updates and will not be able to accept the MCAS assessment software. This will require a refresh cycle to keep Chromebooks current.

Special Education – Director of Student Services, Lauren Mathisen, presented information on special education and comprehensive continuum programs which support modifications and additional programs as needed.

- Whitman Middle School Special Education Inclusion (equitable with Hanson Middle School)
- Elementary Language Based Learning Program (expand to grade 5 at Hanson Middle and grade 4 at Indian Head and eventually elementary)
- Hanson Middle School classroom for students with emotional and behavioral challenges - a BRYT (bridge for resilient youth in transition) and TLC (therapeutic learning center) combination
- English Language Teacher- add one full time EL teacher (four EL teachers currently servicing six buildings)
- Level service increases – includes transportation costs increased under COVID restrictions (limited van occupancy, annual student tuition increases and increased cost to home services due to several facility shutdowns)

Strategic Plan Objectives that are covered in the FY' 22 level services plus budget

Superintendent Szymaniak noted the following Strategic Plan Objectives covered in the FY2022 level services plus budget proposal.

- Social Emotional District-wide programs (ExSEL)
- Continued implementation of assessment schedule K-5; Emphasis on Middle School and K-8 regression program
- Increased number of mobile devices and educational software (purchased this year) for student learning and engagement with an end goal of becoming a 1:1 district

Mr. Szymaniak noted that Strategic Plan initiatives not included in the FY 2022 proposed budget are tuition-free full day kindergarten, foreign language restoration at the middle schools and adjustments to school start and end times.

Mr. Szymaniak presented historical data on the school budget from 2014 through 2020.

<u>FY Year</u>	<u>Approved Budget</u>	<u>% Increase</u>
2014	\$44,576,361	

2015	\$45,318,587	1.6%
2016	\$45,688,067	.08%
2017	\$47,079,141	3.0%
2018	\$48,688,028	3.4%
2019	\$50,523,181	3.76%
2020	\$52,425,738	3.76%
2021	\$55,320,238	5.5%

Mr. Szymaniak noted that per pupil spending in 2019 has slightly increased for Whitman-Hanson to \$13,403 but remains below the state average of \$16,618. The Superintendent noted that compared to surrounding school districts, Whitman-Hanson Regional is one of the high local school districts receiving Chapter 70 aid in 2020 at \$24,776,700.

Abington	\$8,933,994
Bridgewater-Raynham	\$22,061,362
Duxbury	\$5,340,535
East Bridgewater	\$10,847,253
Hanover	\$7,023,879
Hingham	\$7,695,110
Marshfield	\$14,664,853
Pembroke	\$13,608,752
Rockland	\$13,843,235
Scituate	\$5,863,240
Whitman-Hanson	\$24,776,700

The Superintendent reported on FY2021 staff FTE's or full time equivalent. There are 304 full-time teacher equivalents. There is a total of 498.6 FTE employees. Just over twenty (20) of the 498.6 employee salaries are funding through grants and not the LEA budget.

Line items increases were reported as follows representing an increase of \$2,635,750 in the budget over the current school year.

Increases included in FY 2022 Budget

Salary Lines	\$1,071,450 subject to negotiations
PCEA Pension	\$116,700
Health Insurance	\$100,000
Regular Day Transportation	\$90,000 subject to negotiations
Custodial Services	\$42,600 subject to negotiations

Gas & Electric	\$40,000
Water	\$* TBD - subject to negotiations
Trash	\$5,000
HS Science Teacher	\$75,000
Intervention/Regression Program*	\$375,000
Student Services and Special Ed Programs* (EL/New Programs/Level Service Increases)	\$570,000
Technology Refresh for Chromebooks	\$150,000
Required Total:	\$2,635,750

FY-2021
Current Budget \$ 55,320,238

FY-2022
Preliminary Budget \$ 57,955,988

Increase: \$ 2,635,750 or a 4.76% budget increase

Mr. Szymaniak reported the budget represents salaries and expenses for a total of \$57,955,988. Expenses include transportation, technology, unfunded and underfunded mandates, curriculum and special education costs. Mr. Szymaniak noted regional school district budgets are unique from other town department budgets because they include employee benefits and other supports (utility costs, unemployment cost, property and casualty insurance costs and worker’s compensation costs) in their budgets. Nearly \$10 million of last year’s budget covered the costs outside of normal departmental budgets.

Mr. Szymaniak reported on anticipated revenue sources for the FY2022 proposed budget. Revenue sources are made up of grants, local receipts, state aid, circuit breaker and the local assessments.

State aid	\$25,951,287	(41.67% of budget)
Local receipts	\$90,693	(0.21% of budget)
Circuit Breaker	\$600,000	(1.04% of budget)
Local Assessments	\$31,314,008	(54.03% of budget)

Mr. Szymaniak presented preliminary local assessment figures based on the proposed budget using the statutory method of assessment. It was noted that State Aid is decreasing and is less than half of Whitman-Hanson’s revenue. The preliminary Department of Revenue Cherry Sheet, based on the Governor’s budget, calls for “Net State Aid” (Education Aid plus Offset Receipts less Estimated Charges) of \$1,102,103.00. The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education’s preliminary minimum contribution amount of \$21,150,892.00 is based on the Governor’s budget. If the school committee voted the preliminary budget with no changes and if the legislature

voted for the Governor's proposed Chapter 70 State Aid amount the FY 2022 Whitman Hanson Assessments would be:

Operating assessment to the Town of Hanson \$13,114,756

Operating assessment to the Town of Whitman \$16,827,516

The above assessments do not include non-mandating busing or capital costs.

Mr. Szymaniak reported on the Congress approved financial support for districts through the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund (ESSER). Mr. Szymaniak stated \$1,001,000 is scheduled to be allocated to the Whitman-Hanson Regional District in ESSER II grant funds. The Superintendent described how the funds may be spent. \$10,000 of the grant funds must be earmarked to support the delivery of mental health services (social/emotional) for the return of students to school. Mr. Szymaniak noted there is some debate and lack of clarity if the ESSER II funds may be used to support Minimum Local Contribution (MLC). There is some discussion that 75% of the remaining funds will go to the towns to support MLC. Each town would get a portion of the remaining \$990,000. This may provide an additional \$242,000 in grant funds that the Superintendent hopes to utilize for any unanticipated costs when re-opening next school year. The Superintendent anticipates providing additional information regarding ESSER II grant funding at a subsequent meeting.

The Committee commented on the budget presentation. In terms of any return on investment (ROI) for the necessary special education programs, the Superintendent projected the district could save money over time, housing certain programs in-house and eventually realize specific cost saving measures on out-of-district placement costs. The Superintendent will work to quantify estimated statistics.

The Superintendent recommended the Committee review the proposal in anticipation of a more in-depth, detailed discussion at the March 10 School Committee meeting.

It was suggested the Superintendent provide student enrollment and class size reports for the next meeting and to include any impact student enrollment may have on class size next year. Mr. Szymaniak reported trends in enrollment will be provided. The District also contracted the New England School Development Council (NESDEC) for enrollment projections. It was suggested to poll home-schooled families to gauge the intent for full in person return for 2021-22 school year. Superintendent intends on querying families but will hold off until after the return to in-person learning this school year, so as not to confuse families.

The current therapeutic learning center (TLC) program throughout the district was discussed. Lauren Mathisen also confirmed there is a summer program (intervention) for eighth grade regular and special education students in place. Mr. Szymaniak added if there are available ESSER II funds, a portion may be used intervention/regression. Lauren Mathisen clarified that the Therapeutic Learning Center program is a district-wide program, and will be available at every level and in each town, but not necessarily housed in every school. There is also a procedure in place to determine where a student should be placed. Most recently, during the COVID pandemic, a number of students were identified needing the program at the Indian Head School. Ms. Mathisen explained the deliberate process for developing programs based on student need, location, staffing and cost savings. Ms. Mathisen will provide a report on the cost savings since joining the South Shore Education Collaborative (SSEC). Ms. Mathisen briefly discussed the protocol for identifying students in need of a therapeutic learning center program. The Superintendent suggested that if a family concerned about student services, they follow chain of command starting with the building principal to recognize those potential service needs.

Mr. Szymaniak reported CARES funding (Municipal reimbursement program - Coronavirus Relief Fund) has been exhausted. The Superintendent is optimistic additional stimulus funding may become available. Mr. Tuffy confirmed there are 20 positions funded outside of the proposed \$57 million appropriated budget. There was a brief additional discussion on the technique and process the district utilizes for intervention and if it is sufficient for the current and future needs in the district. Ms. Byers requested information on the shifting revenue source

related to school choice and charter school reimbursement. Mr. Tuffy explained the supplementary assessments to the towns under non-mandated busing and capital. Mr. Tuffy reported the Town of Hanson informed the District they will adjust their payment schedule for the HVAC/Tech capital and the assessment will be adjusted to reflect the new schedule accordingly.

Public Hearing questions/comments

Whitman Finance Committee member, Rosemary Connolly, discussed concerns of students in Title I schools not on Individualized Education Plans (IEP's). Ms. Connolly recommended a review of students at the elementary level requiring individualized education plans.

Whitman Finance Committee member, John Galvin, asked for clarity with regard to the revenue sources listed in the pie chart. Mr. Tuffy noted the local receipts do not include items in revolving accounts, such as building use. Those line items will be available in the line item detail at the next budget meeting.

Whitman Board of Selectmen member, Randy LaMattina, asked if the district was aware of any additional grant funding or reimbursement opportunities. Superintendent Szymaniak noted ESSER II grant funds as discussed earlier (\$1,001,000). Again, CARES Act funding is depleted.

Chair Hayes indicated a comprehensive line item detail budget will be presented at the March 10, 2021 School Committee meeting.

VOTE: Mr. Bois motioned; Mr. Small seconded; voted by roll call to close the Public Hearing of the FY2022 School District Budget.

**Mr. Bois – Yes
Ms. Byers – Yes
Mr. Forth – Yes
Mr. Howard – Yes
Mr. Jones – Yes
Ms. Kniffen – Yes
Mr. Small – Yes
Mr. Scriven – Yes
Mr. Hayes - Yes
The motion carried 9-0-0.**

Adjournment:

VOTE: Mr. Small motioned; Mr. Bois seconded; voted by roll call to adjourn the meeting at 7:30 p.m.

**Mr. Bois – Yes
Ms. Byers – Yes
Mr. Forth – Yes
Mr. Howard – Yes
Mr. Jones – Yes
Ms. Kniffen – Yes
Mr. Small – Yes
Mr. Scriven – Yes
Mr. Hayes - Yes
The motion carried 9-0-0.**

Minutes respectfully submitted by Michelle Lindberg

Signature of School Committee Secretary

Meeting Handouts:

- Meeting agenda for February 24, 2021
- Whitman-Hanson Regional School District FY2022 Budget Presentation