

**GATEWAY REGIONAL DISTRICT SCHOOL COMMITTEE****PUBLIC HEARING MINUTES****WEDNESDAY, MARCH 5, 2014****Gateway Performing Arts Center  
7:30 P.M.****I. OPENING OF MEETING**BLANDFORDMichele Crane  
Jim KronholmCHESTERMartha Otterbeck  
Shirley WinerHUNTINGTONRon Damon  
William Hathaway  
Jeff WyandMIDDLEFIELD

Sarah Foley

MONTGOMERY

Anne Marie Buikus

RUSSELL

Ruth Kennedy

WORTHINGTONSue Levreault  
Gretchen EliasonSECRETARY

Stacy Stewart

CENTRAL ADMINISTRATIONDr. David B. Hopson, Superintendent  
Stephanie Fisk, Business & FinanceADMINISTRATIVE COUNCILJoanne Blocker, Director of Academics  
Amy Fouracre, Chs, Lit, Ms Assistant Principal  
Jason Finnie, High, Jr. High School Principal  
Wendy Long, District Grant Writer  
Anthony Sabonis High/Jr. High Assistant Principal  
Alice Taverna, Pupil Services Director**II. PUBLIC HEARING – FY '15 Budget**

- Dr. Hopson gave a brief PowerPoint Presentation.
- Ms. Fisk said the next budget to come out will have the March 1, 2014 census figures. We are checking numbers now. Since the first version of the budget health insurance has gone up about \$60,000. It is a change in about 15 members. The premiums have not gone up for five years. We had some qualifying events. For instance, if a spouse loses their job and insurance they can come on, new employees, and open enrollment.
- Dan Jacques said people are asking about the cost to the district and the impact the schools administration has on the bottom line of the budget. What are the positions, what do they do, and how much does it cost.
- Dr. Hopson said the entire administrative team is less than it has been in past years. Before, we had five elementary principals, a high and middle school principal, technology director, and pupil services director. Building principals were doing title and curriculum work. The requirements have increased and so have the responsibilities of administrators. The new evaluation system requires three visits in each classroom as well as a lengthy form. Then we have the new common core curriculum. No administrator in this district has one single job. Essentially we have a director of academics who takes care of home school, mentoring, grants (with the grant writer), and professional development. We are doing curriculum from the teachers up. You get a better end product if the teachers buy into it.
- The principals and assistant principals have the new bullying laws, discipline, MCAS and PARCC.
- Dr. Hopson and Ms. Fisk were saying that regional schools pay for some things that public schools don't. Heating Boston schools is \$20,000 to the school and the city of Boston pays the rest. It is better to compare
- Ms. Fisk said \$870,866 is the total administration cost.
- Bill McVeigh asked which positions are administration?
- Dr. Hopson said building principals, assistant principals, Business and Finance Officer, Pupil Services Director, Curriculum Director and Grant writer.

- Mrs. McVeigh said the average administrator salary is between \$88,000 and \$97,000. The average teacher salary is a percentage of administration cost 55% has gone from 48,500 to 50,000. Teachers are getting approximately 60% of what the administrators are getting. She will compare gateway to Frontier, Hampshire, Mohawk, etc. She is not here to say if we are spending too much or too little. She thinks we need to know where our money is being spent. She compared us to comparable schools, so community, GTAC, know where there money is going. She believes it would be better if several people met with her rather than. She would like to know the answer to the administrators, they all work and they have had to take on a lot of responsibility. They are on call. You are not allowed to say wows me to take on more work. Most people do not get 30 vacation days, 2 personal days and get to retire with 80 % of their salary. To stand up in front of us you cannot bring in candidates unless you increase salaries. The people who sit up there in the front should be grateful. She doesn't want to hear anymore about the MCAS test. How are you going to take the 16 million and improve the quality of education for gateway and improve our test scores? She is concerned when people try to sell real estate and it comes up with Gateway's rank. She can't go to Gateways website and see the course of studies. She looks at the budget document, what is the cost of charter, per pupil. She would like to know the administrators, education, qualifications, how many years you have been a teacher, these are things people need to know about how our students are being education. We could be losing an itinerant teacher, I don't see a text book line item in the elementary, she doesn't see the IT budget going up. Why is she looking at a \$42,000 professional development line item on the district page and \$12,000 on the individual schools?
- Dr. Hopson would be happy to provide answers to the questions. Professional Development is in district because it is used for everyone.
- Mrs. Blocker said the increase is through the teachers' contract. They were given an additional full day professional development day which cost \$22,000. That is why there is an increase in the line item. It wasn't built into the calendar in prior years.
- Bill McVeigh asked if we are we keeping teachers beyond the school day.
- Mrs. Blocker said we are doing it during the day, pulling them out, and paying for subs. Some funding comes from Title and some comes from District. Curriculum work comes from title II.
- Mrs. Eliason thanked the administrators and everyone who worked on the budget. The finance committee went over the line item budget. The biggest decrease is in instructional services. There are decreases in nurses, athletics, and IT. There are always benefits to talking about expenses. We do review the budget line items and do try to keep costs under control.
- Mrs. Kennedy said they only have two finance meetings. They got the budget on January 22, and then it was changed to 1.1. We will try to answer any questions we can. We are still working on it.
- Derek Mason said the finance subcommittee has been doing its best. He doesn't think they have adequate time. He also questions whether they have the expertise. Would it be worthwhile to engage a professional CPA or auditor to make it more transparent so the average person can understand it? He believes the school committee has responsibility in this.
- Mrs. Kennedy said it is a great idea; it would be nice to have someone independent. Ms. Fisk is great. It would be worth looking into it.
- Mrs. Eliason seconds the idea.
- Mrs. Winer said that would be a line item in the budget. We do have a professional her name is Stephanie Fisk. We are trying to raise our status with the state that is why costs are going up.
- Dr. Hopson has worked with finance committee in Blandford. Do we hire an outside person in every town?
- Mrs. McVeigh appreciates Mrs. Eliason's comments. She is a finance person and has put together her own analysis. If she looks instructional is going up, but it appears in the salary line item, it might not hold there is no increase in head count. She knows there are teacher negotiations. Finance is planning. It would be informative to the school committee to know the teachers experience; how many years teaching, their schooling, years as an administrators, etc. There should be salary bands for administrators. She would like to forward her questions, to school committee, GTAC, and administrators. A lot of her questions are not for cutting, but are our numbers reasonable and should we increase. There has been a lot of talk about closing our grammar schools. If she thought the numbers were reasonable and they would increase and improve education, she would be the first one to support it. She thinks we spend a lot of money. Dr. Hopson should be comfortable answering questions.
- Dr. Hopson would be happy to answer questions. It is a little hard to say we don't understand out budget, and not everyone. Everyone has the right to retire after 30 years at 80%. She would be happy to answer your questions in a public forum.
- Mrs. Kennedy thanked her for suggestions and questions. One of school committee's jobs is the budget and to understand it thoroughly. She will try until her term ends. We can't just to vote on a budget because we have been given a budget.

- Michael Crochiere welcomes Mrs. McVeigh's enthusiasm, but he disagrees with the micromanaging of our administrators. He as a taxpayer is not interested in the years of experience.
- Mrs. Blocker talked about her experience. She believes people have the right to know experience. To the general person they have no idea why people need professional development, and curriculum. Things are changing all the time. One of the best things that have happened with professional development funds is having the teachers collaborating together. When teachers create and own something it is more effective on student learning.
- Mr. McVeigh said one of things he is most proud is that 99 % of our teachers teach 100% in the area they are certified. We had a sped teacher who wasn't worth it. He remembers as a kid looking up to teachers. It used t be published in town records.
- Course offerings in the high school have gone down, but they want to continue to offer online classes. She hasn't understood how the past retirements came up in this budget in reference to Worthington withdrawal.
- Mr. Finnie said we changed vendors for online course offerings because there was more teacher to student collaboration. There is an increase from about 10 to 15 students taking online courses. There are more in the languages. Some are in gaming design, entrepreneurship, and computer design. AP is going through a transition for online because it requires more lab time.
- Ms. Fisk said the line item for retiree health insurance, and there is a GASAB requirement. OPEC –
- Darlene the other six towns would be looking for the OPEC money to be paid by Worthington. She would suggest it gets put into a fund to pay for health and retirement benefits.
- Dr. Hopson said when a town wants to get out of the district; the other six towns will need to pay that.
- A man in the audience said with regards to online learning as a father of 4 slowly working their way up who teaches at the college level. Who or how we pay for online learning, and who oversees it to make sure it is worthwhile.
- Dr. Hopson said the school pays for it, and Mr. Brown the librarian oversees it. We only allow courses that are vetted by the high school administration.
- Mr. Finnie said students are not taking courses online that are offered here. There are other things that are being done to prepare students for online learning at the college learning. He said the course of studies is on the website.
- Mr. Finnie said if you are looking at a reduction in the course of studies that was over a long period of time. They have actually added courses over the past two years.
- Dr. Hopson said in 2003 we lost 1.8 million and cut 38 staff, part of it was we went to a 4 by 4 block. As things change with MCAS and time we've gone to a five block schedule, should we be fortunately to increase the blocks in the schedule we will add back classes. What Mr. Mcveigh said is our teachers only teacher in their subject area. An example would be school committee wants to add a business class; we could have a math teacher teach a business class. The core subjects will still be taught by certified teachers.
- Mrs. McVeigh would encourage school committee to look at the online line item, if we are trying to enhance course offerings.
- Dr. Hopson said Ms. Fisk tries to use a three year average if we aren't spending what we currently have we try to cut back a bit.
- Asked about the Worthington withdrawal
- Mrs. Eliason said the school committee had a vote and took an official position opposing the withdrawal. That was the last time it was addressed.
- Mr. Jacques said there have been a number of meetings of other select boards and six select board chairs signed a letter asking for a meeting with the DESE commissioner. Under the home rule petition, the commissioner has the final say. They have also met with various Representatives and Senators. They are willing to meet with them. The goal is to try and work together with the seven towns.
- Mrs. Hague is pleased with what she is hearing, the questions being answered, and that people care about the school district. The more questions that are answered and the feedback. We should be proud, what we are doing here tonight is going to benefit. She is happy to be part of this process.
- Dr. Hopson agrees with what Pandora is saying. It is nice to have questions. There is probably more on the Gateway website on budget than any other school.
- John McVeigh asked what we are doing to keep vocational kids here.
- Dr. Hopson said there are a large number of reasons. You have to have enough people in the district interested in an offering. He would love to offer more vocational program. It is important to look at both chapter 74 and non-chapter 74 programs. Woodworking is now at full capacity, same with welding and STEM. The aviation program was Dr. Nicoletti's field of dreams. The program never really got off the ground. The key is to have some of our STEM teachers start teaching green energy and then bring in

resources and transition into a chapter 74 program. Even if it is not chapter 74, you are preparing them for a two year program. Computer technology might be another one. We will need flexibility in schedule.

- Mrs. McVeigh said vocational transportation costs and tuition is not in this budget.
- Mr. Finnie said building a chapter 74 program may take a major capital investment. We are trying to expand our hands on. In addition he is trying to get more students in internships.
- Mrs. Hague said we why don't we talk about these things at our town meeting. It would be a perfect time to talk about where our money is going.
- Mr. Mason said there is a lot of interest in adding more hands on. There are adults who might be interested. You want to find ways to keep kids from choring out for economic and community reasons. Teachers and administrators are looking that way. He would like to see and advisory committee from the community put together.
- Dr. Hopson would say he should bring that to the school council.
- Mr. Jacques said there is a lot of good feedback. What Derek just said is important. Community involvement; talk to your neighbors and community members to get them interested in coming to these things more information. It shouldn't be done at town meeting, but if that is the only opportunity then maybe we should do it at a town meeting.
- Mrs. Eliason said the school committee has a couple of initiatives this year. Certain school committee members have become liaisons to the schools. Another goal is for school committee member to hold town open house meetings. They are trying to create the opportunity for the town to be informed. The budget primer is also online.
- Mrs. Kennedy thanked Dr. Hopson for presenting the budget this way.

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### **III. ADJOURNMENT Meeting Adjourned at 8:50 p.m.**

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**Respectfully Submitted,  
Stacy L Stewart,  
School Committee Secretary**