

GATEWAY REGIONAL DISTRICT SCHOOL COMMITTEE

PUBLIC HEARING MINUTES

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 4, 2015

**Gateway Performing Arts Center
7:00 P.M.**

I. OPENING OF MEETING

BLANDFORD

Michele Crane
Terri Garfield

CHESTER

Shirley Winer
Martha Otterbeck

HUNTINGTON

Ron Damon
William Hathaway
Jeff Wyand

MIDDLEFIELD

Sarah Foley
Noreen Suriner

MONTGOMERY

Anne Marie Buikus
Sandra Haas

RUSSELL

Ruth Kennedy
Mary Ann Laurie

WORTHINGTON

Sue Levreault
Gretchen Eliason

SECRETARY

Stacy Stewart

CENTRAL ADMINISTRATION

Dr. David B. Hopson, Superintendent
Stephanie Fisk, Business & Finance

ADMINISTRATIVE COUNCIL

Joanne Blocker, Director of Academics
Megan Coburn, Chs,Lit,Ms Principal
Jason Finnie, High/Jr. High Principal
Amy Fouracre, Chs,Lit, Ms Assistant Principal
Wendy Long, District Grant Writer
Anthony Sabonis, High/Jr. High Assistant Principal
Alice Taverna, Pupil Services Director

STUDENT REPRESENTATIVES

OTHERS: _____

7:05 p.m. II. PUBLIC HEARING – FY '16 Budget

- Budget Hearing March 4, 2015
- Dr. Hopson opened the meeting and gave a brief budget presentation. Presentation will be on the website.
- Darlene McVeigh, Huntington Finance Chair said there are other remedies besides the school committee having to pass the budget; there is a 1/12 budget. According to Jeff Wulfson DESE, it will be adjusted for Worthington’s withdrawal. She wouldn’t encourage anyone in this room to think we will get the \$630,000. She would like to see some of these numbers reworked now that we have an understanding of the towns’ minimum contributions. The towns need to have an understanding of their assessments without any cuts. The school committee needs to continue to move forward with negotiations with Worthington and what they will pay to leave the district: OPEB and Hampshire Retirement.
- Dr. Hopson said our revenue does include Gateway’s share of the pay as you go insurance. We haven’t figured out how to handle the OPEB.
- Mrs. Kennedy said if we don’t vote for the budget there are no consequences. We keep working on it until we can come up with one. If by June 30 we don’t have one, we request a 1/12 budget from last year’s working budget. We have until December 1 before DESE will come in and help us. They won’t take us over, they will just help us. She won’t vote for a budget without having all the numbers.

- Dr. Hopson said what Mrs. Kennedy is saying is correct, but his concern is that the towns can't vote on a budget until the school committee votes for a budget. But, yes, we will have a budget one way or another.
- Mrs. Suriner thought the school committee voted on a town budget.
- Dr. Hopson said you did, we won't know what the revenue figure is.
- Mrs. Suriner said how could we vote on a budget if we don't know what the revenue is.
- Dr. Hopson said this year isn't any different regarding revenue then any other year. As of today the DOR has our Chapter 70 based on 6 towns not 7 towns. This is new information today.
- Mrs. Buikus said once the committee passes the budget it becomes the budget until we can agree.
- Dr. Hopson said it is still a proposed budget until the towns vote for it.
- Darlene McVeigh said the Cherry sheets are not quite correct.
- Ms. Fisk said they had Worthington Chapter 70 in Worthington, but they had the school choice and charter figures in ours still. We need to get that corrected.
- Darlene McVeigh is requesting estimated local contributions, based on the latest six town budget without cuts. This way the towns would have a better understanding of the impact. Huntington is not excited about passing a 2 ½ override.
- Linda Smith said we spend an awful lot of time looking at finance figures. Sincerely, to the school committee, there isn't a person she knows who wants to hurt the children. If the towns have tax impacts that affect the community, they aren't going to be able to afford it. We are six towns that have the power to send a message to the state. We should be able to come up with a resolution.
- Ms. Fisk said, as we work through the budget she is concerned about three major accounts; regional transportation (need to figure out the configuration of the school and grades), MSBA payback, (once we open the buildings, the payback should be forgiven for Worthington and Russell. She has been in contact with DESE to speed it up), and then refinancing our 9 million dollar bond. We need a good bond rating and we need to know who will be in the district. These are big unknowns.
- Laura Fisk thanked the school committee for their time, and passion. She spoke on behalf of the students. Most changes are due to budget reductions. We are about to lose our identity and our school.
- Jim Duggan read a statement on behalf of the teachers.
- Matt Bonenfant supports athletics and the other extracurricular activities.
- Dr. Hopson was glad the teachers took the furlough, but the administrators took 6 and 7 furlough days, and the paraprofessionals and secretaries took most of the cuts. School committee asked the administration to come up with two in between budgets.
- Dawn Piers-Gamble spoke about her family's success being attributed to their experience at Gateway.
- Sue Luppino is here because of the anticipated budget shortfall. She hopes school committee makes every decision with the students in mind. She and Dawn Piers-Gambe spoke in support of the district, all it's staff, education, and the support needed from parents and community. They also spoke on behalf of the 7th and 8th grade.
- There will be a PARCC presentation given by the state here at Gateway on April 11
- Susan LeBarron is a parent of four children in the district. There are not a lot of good options. She works at the Gateway Family Center and parents shop around for where there kids will go to school, they don't just go to Gateway anymore. Anything that has been proposed is going to impact her children. How do we keep up with what is happening?
- Dr. Hopson said everything is on the website and there is a superintendent's blog where people can share comments and questions.
- Derrick Mason, Russell finance and co chair of GTAC said we've been dealing with this for several years now. We also have a huge political problem. Our legislators and DESE need to hear from us; they are starving our communities and our kids educationally. They are still preparing the results of our hearing last fall. We need to make our district sustainable so our kids get the education they deserve.
- Pat Diefendorf asked how long it took to put the current restructuring proposal in place.
- Dr. Hopson said just in the past several weeks, when the school committee said to look at cutting \$600,000. We've looked at different configurations over the years.
- Sue Luppino is part of a group called Protecting the Promise of Public Education – they need parents to show support.

- Cheryl Wright, high school Math teacher said all are affected by the loss of the middle school. The push back had to come but it is coming from the teachers and it's not the right place. It would be better coming from others. These cuts are heartbreaking; but how many are necessary, maybe all of them. She would like to see more input from the teachers. The budget needs to go back and we need to start from the beginning.
- Dr. Hopson said for many years, he has been dismayed by the lack of parents who come out to things like this; especially town meetings. For 20 some odd years, it is a little scary that the decisions are made by the minimum number of people in each town.
- Kayla Brady, Chester Kindergarten teacher read her statement of support.
- Rachel Millin is concerned about the impact on her child and other children.
- Dawne Piers-Gamble said brining Juniper Park seems like a good idea; will Russell students want to choice in.
- Dr. Hopson said there is barely enough room for those students.
- Mrs. Winer asked how do we get buy in from the towns and how do we get the towns to rearrange things to allow them to afford this.
- Renee Boylan, Preschool teacher said parents want options and a strong education, if there are people who are willing to pay big bucks to send their kids to places like Williston; we need to start educating people.
- Linda Smith is concerned about buy in, it is not a question of buy in, the towns are critically concerned and it is critical for the town of Blandford. The number of parents who can afford Williston are very rare. She doesn't want the teachers to think they aren't supported. We need to go after to people who created this problem.
- Darlene McVeigh said when the school funding formula committee came out it was clearly evident the state wanted to continue to go down the same road they have been going down. They can't continue to ask people to pile on work in the same amount of time. She applauded everyone who came tonight.
- Mrs. Kennedy thanked the teachers that came out tonight. She read an email from Mrs. Buikus suggesting cuts to the grant writer, relook at administrator entitlements, health insurance and longevity. Mrs. Kennedy went to a session on PARCC. It takes 38 days to train for PARCC. Jason Stewart will be coming out to discuss PARCC April 11 at 1:00 p.m. She feels PARCC is set up to fail. It is up to the school committee whether we accept PARCC or not.

XIV. ADJOURNMENT at 8:49 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted
Stacy L Stewart
School Committee Secretary