

GATEWAY REGIONAL DISTRICT SCHOOL COMMITTEE

REGULAR MEETING MINUTES

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 11, 2015

**Gateway Library
7:00 P.M.**

(A PORTION OF THIS MEETING MAY BE HELD IN EXECUTIVE SESSION)

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

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
Alice Taverna, Pupil Services Director

STUDENT REPRESENTATIVES

OTHERS: _____

7:05 p.m. II. PUBLIC INPUT FOR ITEMS NOT LISTED ON AGENDA (3 Minute Limit) – None

- Mrs. Buikus will be recording the meeting.

III. STUDENT COUNCIL INPUT

- Mrs. Crane read Brennan’s report as he was unable to attend. The junior class is hosting a Paint Night fundraiser; the cost being \$20 with snacks and drinks. Model UN was successful in their NYC trip. Some of our members received awards. The Red Cross Blood Drive is scheduled for March 20. This is the second drive they’ve hosted. There will be a St. Patrick’s Day Spirit Day. Students must have a main green article of clothing. The student store has been successful this year and they are adding new products to the shelves.
- Brennan has been reporting back to the students what is happening with budget. He is requesting on behalf of the student body school committee take every possibility into consideration when deciding on a new budget and that the students come first when making budget decisions.

IV. CONSENT ITEMS 2/11/15, 2/25/15

Mr. Damon made a motion seconded by Mrs. Levreault to approve the minutes of 2/11/15.

Motion Carried (VOTE) Yeas 8 Nays Abstain 5 Absent 1

Mrs. Kennedy made a motion seconded by Mrs. Levreault to approve the minutes of 2/25/15 with corrections.

Motion Carried (VOTE) Yeas 11 Nays Abstain 2 Absent 1

V. PRESENTATIONS/REPORTS/RECOGNITIONS

A. Budget Presentation by Schools/Departments

- Dr. Hopson referred to the budget handout.

VI. BUDGET

A. FY '16 Budget/Budget Adoption

- Mrs. Crane said people should think before they make certain comments. There are community and staff members here and comments should be respectful and allow us to move forward in a positive way. We should be respectful of people with students who have special needs, and you don't know if there is a family here who has a student who has chosen to attend Voke. We have a lot to discuss this evening.
- Dr. Hopson apologized for getting this information out late today. There are copies for everyone here. Dr. Hopson described the handouts. Administrators looked at what they could do with a two year transition; from a deficient to a 3% increase. They are looking at leaving 4th grade at the elementary for 5th and 6th in the main complex. We looked at a transition budget both with and without \$630,000. Without \$630,000 mitigation, we would look to put back things back that are not a deal breaker. We also looked at what we would have to cut if we didn't get \$630,000.
- Darlene McVeigh said assuming we get \$630,000 you aren't cutting teachers; if you don't get the funding you are cutting teachers.
- Dr. Hopson said that is correct. Class size projections with the exception of 2nd grade are within the parameters. We already have teachers who have class sizes of 23 or 24. There are classes at the high school with 7. Mr. Finnie can talk to that.
- Mr. Finnie said they have to have teachers who have class sizes that small, but have larger sizes as well. It is part of scheduling those singleton classes. AP classes are also a part of that. The new schedule helps.
- Mrs. McVeigh pointed out last page line item budget there is a 7 town budget of 482,000 which is an increase. The 6 town budget it is a \$418,000 reduction. The total is \$589,000 reduction with \$630,000 and an \$871,000 shortfall without the \$630,000.
- Adam Dolby asked why there are no cuts in administration first, what is the logic there.
- Dr. Hopson said we are not sure we will get transition money. He said you plan on having other positions, if there is a cut, he can't plan how that is going to impact planning. We have no bus bid; the longer we wait the harder it will be. We are looking at all the options. There is no guarantee and it may only be for one year. We need to plan how that might change the following year. If we don't get mitigation, there is a whole other issue, depending on when school committee adopts and towns vote for or against a budget. If school committee accepts the transition budget with \$630,000, the towns vote on it, and the legislature passes it with \$630,000, we are golden; if not we have to cut. If the towns don't pass with \$630,000 and it comes to school committee and we arrive upon July 1, the commissioner is going to set it at 1/12. No one can tell us for sure. There is one possibility, CVSR and MARS said there is a good possibility that the legal challenge that 9C cuts can't be made will be in our favor and that money will be restored.
- Adam Dolby said it seems like the cuts are in reverse order with the teacher cuts; the one that impacts the students most.
- Dr. Hopson said we are looking ahead 3-5 years. This district can't keep things the same losing students every year. Over the years the most cuts have been in custodian and secretarial work.

Mrs. Otterbeck arrived at 7:33 p.m.

- Dr. Hopson said administration would be more than happy to go with any of the three budgets.
- Mrs. Kennedy would like to see the finance subcommittee go over this with a fine tooth comb, before it comes to the whole committee. Getting this at 4:30 p.m. today is unacceptable. Seeing as everyone in the audience has it they can digest it too and bring comments, questions etc.
- Dr. Hopson supports that. You just got it today because they just finished it.
- Mrs. McVeigh asked for people to speak up, there are people here who want to hear this, so unless you want a complaint filed, everyone needs to be able to hear.
- Mr. McVeigh asked Dr. Hopson to put in newspaper a clear explanation of the configuration suggestion.
- Dr. Hopson said the plan would be that the current 4th will remain in elementary as 5th graders and 6th graders will remain in the middle school building with Mrs. Coburn. The teachers will take time and to see if it is a good configuration to move forward with. The teachers are realizing the impact of cutting 1 million dollars and have been concerned about it.

- Mrs. Levreault said the 6th, 7th, and 8th grade teachers want to work on a plan to work on the development needs. Going forward to understand they may need to support that model because the needs are so different.
- Mrs. Winer asked is it better for the finance or the whole committee to go over the budget?
- Dr. Hopson said next Wednesday is 45 days before the first town meeting. He would suggest posting a special meeting and posting it earlier.

Mrs. Winer made a motion seconded by Mrs. Levreault to hold a special school committee meeting on March 18, 2015 starting at 7:00 p.m. for the purpose of budget discussion.

Motion Carried (VOTE) Yeas 13 Nays Abstain 1 Absent

- Dr. Hopson said if people have questions we can continue discussion.
- Mr. Wyand asked when we would expect to have answers on mitigation funds and those issues.
- Dr. Hopson said hopefully before July 1. Steve Kulik's hope is to have everything approved and on the Governor's desk by July 1.
- Beth Harmon works with a lot of 4th, 5th and, 6th and she is hoping there is a way parents could get the configurations being looked at.
- Dr. Hopson said will have Mrs. Coburn will put something together.
- Mrs. Buikus thinks there are more cuts that need to be made, and she is still pushing for that. She thinks there is money to be saved in the position of the grant writer and the combination from Littleville. She did a new sheet that explores longevity: she would like to see it forgiven for one year and the amount decreased.
- Mrs. Garfield said the grant writer position has come up several times; the grant writer has brought in about 7 million in grants over the years.
- Mrs. Buikus said yes she has earned her salary, but the grants are very few this year.
- Dr. Hopson said we just got grant for \$150,000.
- Mrs. Buikus said then you get \$50,000. You can still apply for grants if you don't have a grant writer.
- Dr. Hopson said if the finance committee wants to put those on the table, the administration would discuss why and what the impact is. Someone saw a letter from Easthampton that says they are cutting staff, but not administration; they have just enough to fulfill state reporting requirements.
- Mrs. Winer said Mrs. Coburn just gave a presentation highlighting all the extra programs we have.
- Mrs. Buikus said those are Title III.
- Mrs. Winer said the grant writer does more than just write grants. She is also community relations; how can we cut when we can never seem to get out enough information.
- Adam Dolby said grant writers can be commission-based rather than salaried. If the position is so encompassing you might want to hire a public relations firm.
- Mrs. Kennedy thought the larger grant we just got was a matching grant.
- Amy Dziejic said the Easthampton school was said to be working with in the legal requirements in administration.
- Dr. Hopson said there are legally required positions; special education director, business manager, superintendent and principal.
- Mrs. Buikus said we have multiple buildings without a principal in each building. Plus we have the grant writer. You could make a cut in that position
- Dr. Hopson said you could cut someone, but the work load on those left becomes too much.
- Amy Dziejic said people don't have to be cut, but salary can be cut.
- Dr. Hopson said only if it is negotiated.
- Amy Dziejic asked if it is the same for teachers.
- Mrs. Suriner said isn't there a clause in the contract for financial exigencies for when we are in situations like this.
- Mrs. McVeigh said as a point of clarification, DESE regulations do not require each and every school to have an administration, there is superintendency and we can outsource many for our positions. You don't need a special education director if your school is of a certain size. There are other ways.
- Dr. Hopson said you still have to appoint someone to do that position.
- Mr. Wyand asked how it is possible for you to reduce the curriculum director but you're saying you can't with the rest; it has to be negotiated.
- Dr. Hopson said you have to negotiate changes to contract language.
- Mr. Wyand said but you did with those other positions.

- Dr. Hopson said days could be done anytime. What you were talking about last night was administrations, days back. You talked about giving up pay for years of service. By law administrators can't be a union. You could negotiate with all 9 administrators. Generally in negotiations you have to be willing to give something up. Negotiations are a give and take process.
- Mrs. Suriner said there is the contract and the attachment A. Is that a separate group?
- Dr. Hopson said that is part of everyone's contract. The schedule does not impact Mrs. Blocker. The law doesn't allow you to do that.
- Mrs. Suriner said we are facing the potential of not being able to afford our school district and it is looking like 1/3 of cuts are coming from student services. You sir make a total of \$173,000 and we can't afford you.
- Dr. Hopson said administrator cuts are over 10% of your budget, but you've only impacted the budget by 2%. If you look over time, administrators have given back often as incentive for teachers to do the same. This year is the only time teachers opted to give anything back.
- Mrs. Long would rather have a job and do her job. She is more than a little disappointed her position has come up several times and only one school committee member has asked what she does.
- Mrs. Buikus said she asked for what Mrs. Long does.
- Dr. Hopson said he has that for the grant writer, curriculum director and pupil services director.
- Mrs. Levreault said this is difficult and would like to make a recommendation. We are here because we closed elementary schools. Because of how the regional agreement was set up, Worthington has paid more than 6 million dollars more. There have been towns that benefited from it. Looks like this budget should be level services for a million dollars. She knows what Wendy does; all the press that helps families who are concerned as well as school choice. Go with a level services budget and take a year to see what we need to do. She is not sure we did the right thing when we split 5-8. She doesn't think there should be a lawsuit; it is a waste of educational funds. She handed out the school attending children report; it shows where all students in your town are going.
- Mrs. Winer asked if anyone has wondered how much it would cost to contract out what you want to cut.
- Mr. Damon would be leery of a level funded budget. You will have more costs in the following year.
- Mrs. Laurie agrees with what Mrs. Crane said, this is not toward anyone and not personal. She thanked Littleville for responding to the survey. She asked if she could get the results of the Littleville survey. They should be taken seriously. We also seem to have a logger head; administration needs to work with us, and work with the members of the community. I hope this shows we are moving in the right direction. She thanked administration for getting the budget our quickly. Mrs. Laurie read information on security; she looked up openenings on craigslist and people are getting between \$9 and \$10 per hour. Do we need both and how can we pay 50% more per hour.
- Mrs. Crane reminded everyone about Newtown.
- Ms. Fisk said one of the suggestions Littleville had on their list was to charge for preschool; that was a good suggestion two years ago. Now you get reimbursement for everyone; \$3,586 per child in the foundation budget. You'd have to charge that, so it doesn't make sense.
- Sue Luppino said this always happens with Budget. The Western Mass Leaders Coalition needs folks like you. DESE is wasting our money. Between, 1996-2008 the administrators filled out 312 multipage documents a year from 2009-2013 they filled out 1,177 per year. Your administration is spending their time filing out DESE required paperwork.
- Al Vautier said when you check into security comparisons you need to check other schools not someone who works in a parking lot. You need to stop the witch hunt here. It is a state problem not an administration problem. They are not funding the money they owe us. It is the job of the school committee to get the money to school.
- Mrs. McVeigh said now is the time to start attending GTAC and finance meetings. Town officials have open meetings. Please start to attend. There is a Legislator breakfast coming up. It is the same people who continue to volunteer to get you the money you need to survive.
- Ms. Fisk, read her thoughts on what has been happening supporting Gateway's Education, and staff, but also her dislike of comments and actions that have taken place through this process.
- Wendy McCaul is just embarrassed by the actions of this meeting; it feels like a three-ringed circus.
- James Duggan as GTA has to respond to a statement that was delivered. He has no idea where that chastising came from nor was he aware of it.
- Dr. Hopson said this was not the appropriate place to handle this.
- Mrs. Coburn had several teachers come to her.
- Dr. Hopson reminded her that this was not the place to handle this.

- Mrs. Winer said the school committee purview over positions is limited to the superintendent. The superintendent is hired to staff the school administrators, teachers, principals, etc. If you want to do it you can, it doesn't hold any particular sway. Cutting out administrators is one thing but you cannot say which ones.
- Mrs. Laurie heard you say school committee has control over pupil services, business manager and the superintendent, so we are not the boss of everyone.
- Dr. Hopson said you do set policy.
- Dr. Hopson always agrees with Mrs. Levreault when it comes to budget. We should create a budget for what is needed. MASC was out for a training and Pat Corriera said if you are here for the kids, you should be here, if for the finances for your town you shouldn't be here you should be on your town's finance committee. If you don't chose some budget at some point it is going to make it hard for the teachers and principals to plan, and the custodians to do their work. If you wait till July, it will be too late.
- Adam Dolby said the numbers are interesting and accurate. Blandford enrollment is decreasing.
- Dr. Hopson said numbers are dropping by 21%. We did drop in secretaries and custodians.
- James Duggan asked if the numbers include teachers that were replaced.
- Dr. Hopson said yes; we haven't laid off anyone.
- Cheryl Wright said teachers have chosen to take the brunt of the budget cut through salaries. They have negotiated. She was part of the executive board up until this year. In her experience there has never been an executive board member who said you can't have a conversation with administrators.
- Dr. Hopson said part of what is coming out of finance, had come out of negotiations, since he has been on the school committee. The school committee didn't authorize pay. If the finance committee wishes to bring teachers up. We've been cutting for years to reduce to assessments to towns.
- Coming up with a transitional budget without cutting 1 million and having staff have input.
- Mrs. Laure asked how many we are losing in the transitional budget.
- Dr. Hopson said two.
- Mrs. Crane said we need to put together a budget to forward to the towns that each one of us feels good about for the kids knowing what our kids can and cannot do. As far as she is concerned we could do without the meeting next week. This is a good budget for the situation we are in. The kids are most important. This is not completely on us. They may turn it down. We would be in a better position to put forth a budget that we need and see what happens in the towns.
- Mr. Dolby said the budget line item is transportation have you done a study about having the schools open at the same time.
- Dr. Hopson said that came up at Littleville last week.
- Ms. Fisk said on some routes you could get away with all on one route. She said in a perfect world she would do three tiers but we have 205 square miles.
- Ms. Fisk said for anyone who has looked the cherry sheets don't because they are wrong.
- Mrs. Smith said there is no easy solution. There is a large component we are overlooking. She would beg school committee to bring the six towns together with open meetings. Our voice as a group is a lot louder than just a few. She would also beg the teachers beat a drum on the very people who are telling you have to do this.
- Sue Luppino said it is the parents that have the ability to stop it not the teachers.
- Mrs. Kennedy said GTAC is the place for everyone to get together.
- Ms. Taverna said she is one of the positions they have been talking about cutting. She would be very cautious. There was a part- time person who worked for future that was here when she took the position. They let a lot of slide, but here was only so much they could do. It took her 6-8 months to catch up and they have on out if district placement as a result. Having a director is personal, but contracting out is impersonal, you need to be cautious.

VII. COMMUNICATIONS

A. School Committee

- Ms. Laurie asked about 9C cuts left in regional transportation as discussed in superintendents' update from Feb 11.
- Dr. Hopson said we should have something coming up on that.
- Mrs. Levreault said student population numbers are in the School Attending Children report. It tells you about in state private and parochial as well.
- Mr. Damon made copies of an article regarding the Western Massachusetts Education Leaders' Coalition.
- Dr. Hopson said one of Wendy's interns is working on this. It has been an ongoing process with Mrs. Levreault, Mrs. Long and her intern.

- Mrs. Kennedy said it is nice to be validated that she has been right all along.

B. Chairperson - None

C. Superintendent - None

D. Business Manager - None

E. Administration

- Mrs. Long said we were awarded a \$5,000 grant from United Bank's The Education Foundation.

VIII. COMMITTEE REPORTING

A. Superintendent's Evaluation

- The committee will receive the current question and answer sheet in your next packet.

B. Finance Subcommittee

- Mrs. Suriner said this has been frustrating for those on the committee. They requested some cuts in administration, which is not reflected in the budget. When figures were distributed they realized teacher salaries are the lowest and the superintendent is 3rd highest. They feel like they are not being heard. This district's life is on the line. It may have seemed cruel. She is frustrated with the high salaries of the leadership and the low salaries of the teachers.
- Dr. Hopson would prefer they pick on him directly rather than on his administrators. Part of his concern is that administration is a broad bush.
- Mrs. Otterbeck said it is important to clarify how many people are on the committee and how long they have been on this committee. We as this committee have not been here to make a lot of decisions that were made. These decisions were not made by everyone here.
- Mrs. Buikus said once you on the school committee you are responsible.
- Mrs. Otterbeck we are all trying to make the right decisions and this is stressful.
- Mrs. Suriner said as a new person trying to do due diligence, and understand, it is very frustrating.
- Mrs. Crane said it is not fair to put all this blame on the superintendent. When he retires we might get to know what it is like to have a cheap inexperienced superintendent.
- Mrs. Kennedy said that it is insult to Dr. Gazda.

C. Legislative Liaison - None

D. Policy Subcommittee - None

E. Building Liaisons

- Mrs. Winer went once in November and then they stopped sending her a schedule.
- Mrs. Crane reminded principals to send that out.
- Mr. Wyand visited the wood shop and students were engrossed in their projects. They lack a lot of products, supplies, and equipment. The teacher has donated some of his own supplies. That program has a waiting list.
- Mrs. Otterbeck met with Mrs. Blocker in the fall and it was overwhelming.

F. Community Curriculum Committee

IX. OLD BUSINESS/ACTION ITEMS

A. Worthington Withdrawal

Separation Agreement

B. District Local Technical Assistance Project

- Dr. Hopson said PVPC is concerned with the lawsuit; they withdrew the grant.

C. Superintendent's Goals

- Mrs. Crane said we have had discussions on this and there were concerns that one of Dr. Hopson's goals was more of a school committee goal. Some people believed it should come out of Dr. Hopson's goals and put into school committee goals. It could go either way; it shows a willingness to move forward working together.

Mr. Damon left the meeting 9:21p.m.

- Mrs. Winer doesn't see why some of the goals can't be the same; we are both in the same boat.
- Dr. Hopson said one of the common goals is to set up meeting in each town. Why would you dock the superintendent if the school committee doesn't hold a meeting in their town?

Mrs. Suriner left at 9:24 p.m.

Mr. Wyand made a motion seconded by Mrs. Kennedy to move the school committee related goals off the superintendent's goals.

Motion Carried (VOTE) Yeas 8 Nays Abstain 2 Absent 2

X. NEW BUSINESS/ACTION ITEMS

XI. OTHER BUSINESS/ITEMS FOR NEXT AGENDA

Future Agenda Items

XII. INFORMATION

Information

Superintendent's Corner February 13, 2015

Blood drive at Gateway March 20

Spring sports tryouts

High School Talent Show March 13

March Calendar highlights

March School Committee

New Nurse Practitioner at School-Based Health Center

Superintendent's Corner March 2, 1015

Warrants

AP#1066 \$35,089.70

PR# 17 \$350,861.76

AP#1068 \$41.44

PR# 18 \$375,067.22

9:00-10 p.m. XIII. EXECUTIVE SESSION

or earlier

A. Union Negotiations

B. Litigation

XIV. ADJOURNMENT *Mrs. Kennedy made a motion seconded by Mr. Wyand to adjourn at 9:28 p.m.*

Respectfully Submitted,

Stacy L Stewart

School Committee Secretary