

GATEWAY REGIONAL DISTRICT SCHOOL COMMITTEE

REGULAR MEETING MINUTES

WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 26, 2015

Middlefield Town Hall

7:30 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
Diane Dunn

HUNTINGTON
Ron Damon
William Hathaway
Jeff Wyand

MIDDLEFIELD
Sarah Foley

MONTGOMERY
Anne Marie Buikus

RUSSELL
Ruth Kennedy
Tara Balboni

SECRETARY
Stacy Stewart

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

ADMINISTRATIVE COUNCIL
Joanne Blocker, Director of Academics
Wendy Long, District Grant Writer
Alice Taverna, Pupil Services Director

STUDENT REPRESENTATIVES

OTHERS: _____

7:35 p.m. II. PUBLIC INPUT FOR ITEMS NOT LISTED ON AGENDA (3 Minute Limit)

- Mrs. Crane opened the meeting at 7:30 p.m.
- Mrs. Buikus is recording the meeting.
- Mr. Mason gave out a GTAC Handout. They are forming a task force as an offshoot of GTAC. Met with two state reps as a committee to put together talking points - included is a mission statement and important issues. They are hoping to roll it out in October. Currently on the task force are Dr. Hopson, Derrick Mason, Joe Kearns, Darlene McVeigh, Tony Vanworkhoven, and Linda smith. They need other towns in the formation and to be part of the process.
- Mrs. Buikus stated that after reading the minutes where we did the reorganization, the school committee did not follow policy. It should have been done by ballot and each vote is supposed to be recognized.
- Dr. Hopson said it was one cast by the secretary because there was only one person being nominated.
- Mrs. Buikus said it should be done by policy and show who voted and how they voted. She asked why we didn't follow policy when it was a big deal with the letter from Tony; now it doesn't matter.
- Dr. Hopson said there was a policy that was not followed how would you like to rectify it.

- Mrs. Buikus read the policy. She stated it is our own policy and it was not followed. She wanted to make mention of it and state we should follow it from now on.
- Mrs. McVeigh suggested we revisit Noreen Suriner's resignation letter. You all have it, but she doesn't and would like to better understand it.
- Mrs. Foley read the resignation letter from Noreen Suriner.

III. STUDENT COUNCIL INPUT - None

IV. PRESENTATIONS/REPORTS/RECOGNITIONS

A. Title I Data/School Year Overview (Enc.) – J. Blocker

All students in the summer reading program had increases in their data. Chester did a reading at home program. Grades 4-8 hooked up with the summer program. Of the 23 who participated, 1 student maintained and all others showed growth. The five that were not there on the test day will get tested later on.

- Several consultants are coming this year. Hampshire collaborative for grades K-6 and two from Westfield state. ELA and Math are in year two of the cycle. DSAC is assisting K-8 with Math.

7:45 - V. OLD BUSINESS/ACTION ITEMS

A. Worthington Withdrawal

- Mrs. Kennedy said the September 17 hearing has been put off because one of the attorneys is not available. She thinks October 15 might be a solid date. October 29 will be a year since she has filed this. She is frustrated.
- Mr. Wyand asked what is the hearing going to be about.
- Mrs. Kennedy said there are several items; they want to dismiss her, the school, and Mr. Mason. They also want to dismiss the lawsuit. It will be the first court date.
- Mrs. Winer asked if there is a sense that this is being delayed or are they normal busy days.
- Mrs. Kennedy feels they are trying to delay this.
- Dr. Hopson said the best case is they grant the injunction and not let the case move forward, or they deny the injunction, or throw out the case all together.
- Mrs. Kennedy said she is very impressed with Attorney Dupere. Attorney Lampke has been very helpful. She feels we are very lucky we have two extremely competent attorneys.
- Mrs. Foley asked if there is any precedence set in the case.
- Mrs. Kennedy said no. She thinks we are pretty solid.
- Mrs. McVeigh said the injunction could take different forms. Hopefully some of these stalling tactics will be helpful.
- Mrs. Foley said October isn't going to be the final decision.
- Mrs. Garfield hopes the judge will decide; a jury trial is going to take years.
- Mrs. Kennedy doesn't think it will take that long.
- Mrs. McVeigh said some of these items that the opposing attorneys want to clear up are; they are stating both Mrs. Kennedy and Mr. Mason have no standing, and the town of Huntington is the child of the state. These kinds of arguments are going back and forth.
- Mrs. Kennedy said Attorney Lampke has had to go back into the law and respond. The judge will come out and see if the arguments have any validity.
- Dr. Hopson asked if we expect to get answers in October or will it be like the Supreme Court and the answers will come down the road.
- Mrs. Kennedy doesn't know.
- Mrs. McVeigh said we should ask Attorney Russell Dupere.

- Mrs. Winer asked if Mr. Mason's standing on this is from the town of Huntington.
- Mr. Mason said he is representing himself as pro se.
- Mrs. Winer said no other towns have taken up at this point.

B. FY '16 Budget

- Dr. Hopson said the legislators are out for August recess. Hopefully they will return and discuss mitigation money in the supplemental budget. Timing will be everything. Towns will probably vote it down again and he doesn't blame them.
- Mrs. Kennedy doesn't know if anyone has read the Country Journal, but she and Mrs. Crane have a difference of opinion. Patricia Hunt suggested we contact DESE they have jurisdiction over regional school districts. MGL 603 41 governs regional school district budgets. According to the law we are supposed to vote on a revised budget. School committee has to vote the budget whether it is the same, higher, or lower. No assessments can go out unless we vote on it. We had to vote. We could have voted to keep it the same, and then it would have been legal. One of the consequences are towns can file a complaint.
- Ms. Fisk quoted the same regulation with regards to when the commissioner sets the interim budget. The updated letters still have minimum contributions. It is still based on a 1/12 budget.
- Mrs. Kennedy said she is covering herself. She knows what she has been told by other agencies and she wouldn't want to go against that.
- Dr. Hopson said what happened if the school didn't vote. This is the same thing that happened two years ago.
- Mrs. McVeigh said the result of not taking a vote is the towns had no recourse but to figure out what numbers and what date to use in the warrant articles.
- Ms. Fisk said they were based on the letter sent on July 27.
- Mrs. McVeigh said this committee should have sent a letter the day after there was no vote. According to Christine Lynch the towns had to go by those numbers. This year you sent the towns nothing. Some towns didn't know they had to set a town meeting. Blandford, Chester, and Huntington are all holding their special town meetings on the September 9. Russell's is on the 10th. This school committee is negligent in their duties. You knew when Huntington held their town meeting there was no budget. You had over 7 weeks.
- Mrs. Crane said Ms. Fisk is doing what she thinks is right so we may have to agree to disagree.
- Dr. Hopson said this is new territory; there is no legal ruling; if we get one it will clarify things. We didn't have a quorum, and didn't meet.
- Mrs. Kennedy read CMR 603 41, it states the treasure shall calculate the assessments and get them to the towns within 7 days. We have to take a vote. It is black and white.
- Mr. Damon said we should have voted that night but there was no quorum.
- Dr. Hopson said Mrs. Kennedy made a motion to hold a meeting knowing we might not have a quorum.
- Mrs. Kennedy said Dr. Hopson was part of waiting for mitigation money. We should protect ourselves if it goes legal.
- Mrs. Garfield hopes school committee members will be at their towns .
- Mrs. McVeigh has sat at meetings; she was here and town officials made the time to scramble. That is the point.

C. Subcommittee Membership

- Mr. Wyand volunteered for policy.
- Mrs. Foley volunteered for superintendent's evaluation.

- Mr. Wyand and Mrs. Buikus volunteered for warrant signing.

D. Finance Subcommittee Focus (Enc.)

- Mrs. Winer said we should decide if it is necessary to have a finance subcommittee. Why are we having a meeting when we could discuss it as one committee and not have to duplicate the information. Some of the benefits of the subcommittee were that members tended to be people who were new to subcommittee and were trying to understanding the budget with the help of Ms. Fisk. If that is what they are tasked with it would be fine.

Mrs. Winer made a motion seconded by Mr. Damon not to have a finance subcommittee.

- Mrs. Kennedy said an example of not having a subcommittee is the result of the non-vote. They could have figured something out. She doesn't think there is a school committee that doesn't have a finance subcommittee. We are running into a couple of years where this is important. We don't have time on the school committee to discuss, insurance, budget, lawsuit, etc.
- Mrs. Winer said we don't do that anyway. There isn't much point in duplicating the discussion. She doesn't know if Mrs. Kennedy is right about other school committees. If you have the idea that we can do what the administrators and Ms. Fisk does; we can't.
- Mr. Damon said if this committee wanted to we could have as many meetings as we need if we are willing to commit the time. A duplication of effort is not accomplishing things effectively. He would rather have the whole committee participate.
- Mrs. Kennedy said it's our fiduciary responsibility; our elected and appointed responsibility to look at the budget. The superintendent enforces it.
- Mrs. Garfield said we went through this same discussion last year. There didn't seem to be a lot of meetings. There weren't a lot of minutes produced.
- Mrs. Kennedy said we didn't get to accomplish what we wanted, we didn't have enough time.
- Ms. Fisk said one was a snow day and two we didn't have a quorum. She asked for clarification.
- Mrs. Kennedy said we had one meeting before the budget hearing.
- Dr. Hopson said you received a line item budget in January. To say you didn't have time is misleading.
- Mrs. Winer said the discussions the subcommittee has are important and they leave the rest of the school committee out. Worthington withdrawal was very distracting. Some of the discussions were above and beyond the budget, but they are important.
- Mrs. Garfield agrees we have a huge responsibility. She feels comfortable asking Ms. Fisk on the budget line items at a school committee meeting. Then everyone has the questions answered in a group.
- Mrs. Dunn said because the budget is so important perhaps the whole school committee should act as the subcommittee; we should all be here as part of budget discussion.
- Mrs. Garfield said that is what we did last year.
- Mrs. McVeigh said this board would not allow an open discussion. The job of a finance subcommittee is to vet and approve, ask questions and identify alternatives. Then the subcommittee recommends a budget to the board. That is what other schools do. The whole board does not get the budget until the finance subcommittee is comfortable with it.
- Mrs. Winer said we have functioned many years without one.

Mrs. Winer made a motion seconded by Mr. Damon not to have a finance subcommittee.

Motion Carried (VOTE) Yeas 7 Nays 4 Absent Abstain

Mrs. Buikus made a motion seconded by Mr. Hathaway for a roll call vote on all school committee votes.

- Mr. Mason said as a town official he would strongly urge votes to be public. They elect delegates for each town and they have the right to know how their officials vote.
- Mrs. Crane stated you have the right to know. Our votes are always public. We never take votes in secret.

Mrs. Buikus made a motion seconded by Mr. Hathaway for a roll call vote on all school committee votes.

Motion Carried (VOTE) Yeas 9 Nays 2 Abstain Absent

E. School Committee Team Building

- Mrs. Crane said Ms. Fisk had found a survey originally used by Taunton, and we thought it was a nicer survey and a little more in tune with what we were looking for. She has had trouble getting MASC to cooperate with us and that survey. They really want us to use the one they currently have.
- Mrs. Winer asked what would happen if we took the evaluation ourselves.
- Mrs. Kennedy said this is still not settled for MASC, so she is not surprised we are not getting answers. All the information is on the MASC website. They have discussed it at many of the meetings.
- Mrs. Winer said it would be interesting but we would be reinventing the wheel.

Mrs. Winer made a motion seconded by Mrs. Garfield to go with the Taunton survey if it looks good.

- Mrs. Kennedy said as a school committee we have to follow MASC.
- Mrs. Crane will send out the survey to the committee to look at it.
- Mrs. Winer retracted the motion and Mrs. Garfield was okay.

F. School Committee Travel Reimbursement (Enc.)

- Mrs. Crane said the current paperwork was included in the packet.

Mrs. Buikus made a motion seconded by Mrs. Winer to reimburse school committee members for expenses incurred attending the MASC conference per district operating protocol.

Motion Carried (VOTE) Yeas 10 Nays Abstain 1 Absent (Roll Call Vote)

Yeas: Shirley, Diane, Tara, Ron, Terri, Sarah, Anne-Marie, Bill, Jeff, Michele

Abstain: Ruth

- Ms. Fisk said you would increase the line item when developing next year's budget.
- Mrs. Foley asked if it is sticky talking about our own financial reimbursement.
- Dr. Hopson said the policy is to pay reimbursement.
- Mrs. McVeigh said you may need to change the policy to include school committee.

VI. NEW BUSINESS/ACTION ITEMS

A. Update on "Gateway 2025"

- Dr. Hopson is getting ready to pilot a survey with a handful of people. We will take response and create focus groups in October and have a total district meeting again in November to look at data from focus groups and surveys which will be forwarded to school committee for consideration. It will be electronic for the whole community. No individual information will be shared. We will have entire survey results and then they will be broken down by focus group. Hope to have a report out by the beginning of January.
- Mrs. Winer asked if there were things that we have left out from the last survey.
- Dr. Hopson said he will put something together.
- Mrs. Kennedy asked if it includes taking our level three school and moving it up.
- Dr. Hopson said no, this was the result of 2015 work where they looked at important things to put into place in the district. He said MCAS it is still an overall importance in the district.
- Mrs. Dunn asked who will write the survey.
- Dr. Hopson said it is already written; we pulled information from a lot of different resources.
- Mrs. Dunn asked if the test group will have input. She asked how we will let the community know it is out there so we can get the information out there.

Mr. Damon left the meeting at 9:05

- Dr. Hopson said the hope is to test it over the next couple of weeks. You will have to take the survey twice to have your input included.

B. Update on “GTAC Sustainability Task Force”

- Mrs. McVeigh said it is important to get school committee participation. They are forming the task force because the towns need the schools and the schools need the towns. We are facing a lot of issues. The school budget for Huntington is over 63%; four line items. It is critical, they are not just focusing on the schools looking for sustainable solutions. The towns filed for a grant that is specifically targeted for education. The six towns can file but the schools can't. Town officials met with Smitty Pignatelli and he indicated there is always a possibility of future mitigation funds, but the communities and the school need to work together to show a good reason and show progress. He is from Lee and they have formed these task forces already; we are behind the wheel. It is important that we all recognized without the towns you don't have the school and without the school the towns won't prosper.
- Mrs. Buikus said that is one of the things they discussed; finding people to go on the first team. They are hoping for one representative from each of the towns to be on the GTAC task force working along with one of the selectmen or assessors or finance people from each town.
- Mr. Wyand asked if there were concerns with a quorum.
- Dr. Hopson said this is also looking at ways the towns can work collaboratively. One of the biggest things is how do we develop economically in the towns. Whether it is mitigation or something else.
- Mrs. Crane asked about the frequency of the meetings.
- Mr. Mason said there is no timeline yet, but they feel pressure we need to show significant progress or it won't look favorably for this district. Community impact is only one piece.
- Mrs. Garfield said we have school committee, finance, GTAC, town meetings. Could GTAC work as part of the 2025. She appreciates your efforts for sustainability. Can we figure a way to blend and work together.
- Mrs. McVeigh said that is the point of the task force; some issues are similar, but some are different.

- Dr. Hopson concurs with Mrs. McVeigh. 2025 is looking at Gateway and the task force is looking at overall picture of how the towns and schools work together for economic sustainability. We are looking at a couple meetings with a lot of work in between. Each entity is going to have to move forward separately. We have lacked integration over time as school and town. We don't even have a definition of sustainability. He said 55% is the state average district cost to towns, so Gateway is high at 62%.
- Dr. Hopson said Blandford was at 63% and now it is at 53%. They have been careful with their money and had a 2 1/2 override for multiple reasons. We need to reach a decision we can all move forward with.
- Mrs. Dunn volunteered for Chester
- Mrs. Buikus volunteered for Montgomery.
- Mrs. Buikus said this is one of the things we've been talking about, working with the towns. If we don't work together all we are doing is butting heads.
- Mrs. Kennedy said the only school committee members who go are she, Mrs. Buikus, and Mrs. Winer has been to a few. She fully supports 1 per town. This is a very positive thing.
- Mrs. Foley cannot be part of it. Her personal time does not allow for it. She won't be able to give it the time it deserves. She asked if minutes could be published.

VII. CONSENT ITEMS 6/24/15 (Enc.), 7/8/15 (Enc.)

Mrs. Foley made a motion seconded by Mrs. Garfield to approve the minutes of 6/24/15

Motion Carried (VOTE) Yeas 7 Nays Abstain 3 Absent 1 (Roll Call Vote)

Yeas: Ruth, Tara, Terri, Sarah, Anne-Marie, Jeff, Michele

Abstain: Shirley, Diane, Bill

Absent: Ron

Mrs. Dunn made a motion seconded by Mrs. Kennedy to approve the minutes of 7/8/15 with corrections.

Motion Carried (VOTE) Yeas 7 Nays Abstain 3 Absent 1 (Roll Call Vote)

Yeas: Shirley, Ruth, Diane, Tara, Terri, Sarah, Michele

Abstain: Anne-Marie, Bill, Jeff

Absent: Ron

VIII. COMMUNICATIONS

A. School Committee

- Mrs. Kennedy volunteered to be the liaison for Ms. Taverna in pupil services.
- Mrs. Buikus for Mrs. Blocker in curriculum.
- Mrs. Foley said the band boosters attended the Middlefield fair to help raise money for transportation to the big E they will be at the Blandford fair too.
- Mrs. McVeigh said girls' state representative, Ursula Barth met with the historical society.
- Mrs. Kennedy will try to set up tables at as many functions as she can make she would also like to set up different jars for the band, show choir, etc. for donations. There are a lot of things she wants to see if it is feasible. As school committee we should support all these things.

- Ms. Fisk said we have a procedure for fundraising we have a form that needs to be filled out.
- Mrs. Foley feels soliciting money for committees as a school committee member is not a good idea. How can you choose?
- Ms. Fisk said where it gets sticky is when boosters fundraise at the same time.
- Mrs. Balboni feels the intention is noble, but what if I come up and say what about my science club, and every other club, why one over another. We are not donned to choose one club over another. There would be a million jars on the table.
- Mrs. Long feels the intention is good but if feels sticky.
- Mrs. Foley is uncomfortable as a parent of a student who is on many committees.
- Dr. Hopson said if it went through the foundation, it could fund anything.

B. Chairperson – None

C. Superintendent -Central Office Update (Enc.)

- Mediation is set for September 14.

D. Business Manager

- All assessments came in on time for the first quarter based on a 1/12th budget.

E. Administration - None

IX. COMMITTEE REPORTING

A. Superintendent's Evaluation

- Next meeting is September 9th.

B. Finance Subcommittee - none

C. Legislative Liaison - none

D. Policy Subcommittee

- Nothing now, but there are a number of policies that need to be reviewed.

E. Building Liaisons

- Mrs. Dunn volunteered for Chester Elementary.
- Mrs. Balboni volunteered for middle school and Littleville.
- Mrs. Foley and Mrs. Garfield volunteered for the high school.
- Mrs. Crane volunteered for Maintenance and Business Office.

F. Community Curriculum Committee - None

X. OTHER BUSINESS/ITEMS FOR NEXT AGENDA

Future Agenda Items

XI. INFORMATION

Information

Warrant

AP#1102 \$132,713.36
AP#1105 \$47.14

PR# 001 \$92,912.55
PR#002 \$92,539.93

AP#1106 \$31,399.11
AP#1001 \$25,693.04
AP#1005 \$138,165.97
AP#1006 \$131,432.75

PR#003 \$92,633.49
PR#004 \$91,343.19

**9:00-10 p.m. XII. EXECUTIVE SESSION - None
or earlier**

- A. Union Negotiations
- B. Litigation

XIII. ADJOURNMENT:

Mrs. Buikus made a motion seconded by Mrs. Kennedy to adjourn.

Motion Carried (VOTE) Yeas 10 Nays Abstain Absent 1 (Roll Call Vote)

Yeas: Shirley, Ruth, Diane, Tara, Terri, Sarah, Anne-Marie, Bill, Jeff, Michele

Absent: Ron

Respectfully Submitted,
Stacy L Stewart,
School Committee Secretary