

GATEWAY REGIONAL DISTRICT SCHOOL COMMITTEE**PUBLIC HEARING - Minutes****WEDNESDAY, MARCH 1, 2017****Gateway Performing Arts Center
7:00 P.M.****I. OPENING OF MEETING**BLANDFORDMichele Crane
Terri GarfieldCHESTERShirley Winer
Martha Otterbeck
Diane DunnHUNTINGTONMIDDLEFIELD

Sarah Foley

MONTGOMERY

Madelyn Austin

RUSSELL

Lyndsey Papillon

SECRETARY

Stacy Stewart

CENTRAL ADMINISTRATIONDr. David B. Hopson, Superintendent
Stephanie Fisk, Business & FinanceADMINISTRATIVE COUNCILMegan Coburn, Chester, Littleville Principal
Jason Finnie Middle, High Principal
Sara Luciani, Chester, Littleville Assistant Principal
Wendy Long, District Grant Writer
Kurt Garivaltis, Pupil Services DirectorSTUDENT REPRESENTATIVES

OTHERS: Ed Renauld, Jerry Long, Ruth Kennedy, Darlene, Bill, Andy Myers, Jason and Kate Forgue, Christina Cortis, Michael Forand, Ruth Harper, Susan Rhoads, Beth Harmon, Amy Thornton, Adair and his wife from Middlefield, a parent/community member and two reporters.

7:05 p.m. II. PUBLIC HEARING – FY '18 Budget

- Dr. Hopson opened the meeting at 7:03 p.m.
- He introduced the administrators and went over the timeline of budget. All information is on the website.
- Budget Presentation.
- Jason Forgue asked how many less student we have then ten years ago.
- Dr. Hopson said about 300 or 25%. He said a better way to look at our cost is by the state average. MARS looked into it and we have done a good job holding costs.
- Dr. Hopson went over assessments.
- Andy Meyers asked if for the previous five years the assessments have balanced out with the five- year rolling average.
- Dr. Hopson said over the last five years it really hasn't balanced out.
- Andy Myers said the increase in students works against the towns. We need to have healthy towns. He thinks that the rolling average would be good, so when there is a 2.5% increase it is across the board.
- Ed Renauld said there is an increase in the budget, but the population is decreasing. The town of Huntington is aging. They are not drawing the young families. This is affecting the town budget. Two years ago they had no free cash. They did last year and will probably again this year. Something needs to be looked at long-term. Eventually the towns aren't going to be able to afford the assessments.
- Dr. Hopson said that is a fair statement. Four of the towns are paying less than they were last year. We need to support small rural schools, because Gateway is not the only school district in this situation. We need to work on Chapter 70 Reform and the small rural schools initiative. If we had 100% transportation reimbursement we would be having a different conversation.
- Ed Renauld asked about the representation of the school committee and when that changes based on student numbers.

- Dr. Hopson said it is not based on student numbers, only voter registration numbers. We have been trying to restructure the school committee for 25 years. 2 members from each town with residency requirements.
- There was discussion on the history of one man one vote.
- Andy Meyers said the real concern is the loss of students. At what point does that threaten Gateway. He talked about repurposing the buildings. We need to save Gateway Regional School District
- Ruth Kennedy said we need to keep numbers.
- Mr. Finnie said he is going to have the same numbers in the high school and will be up 20 in the middle school next year, so it is not happening the way people think it is. We do have small class sizes, but we have so few people we may be able to absorb maybe .25 of a Math teacher.
- Jason Fogue asked why we can't get dual certified teachers.
- Mr. Finnie said they are not out there. Due to the costs and the professional development required. We have one person on the staff that is half math and half science and we would be lost without them.
- Darlene McVeigh we need to continue to look at licensing requirements in Massachusetts. The regulations are getting in the way of common sense. It is hurting small schools.
- Jason Finnie we have transitioned from a 5 to 7 period day to help because the state says you can teach 20% out of your area.
- Darlene McVeigh asked about the FY '16 Audit. It would be nice to have it. The towns have been hearing for the past few years that they aren't going to revenue their way out of this situation. Community cost grant in less than 6 months we are getting a preliminary reports. School committee needs to get serious. In the MARS report it says schools our size have been encouraged to share with other local schools even if you save a little. We need to invest it in the elementary. We knew this prior to 2010 and then in 2014 Worthington left.
- Dr. Hopson we are looking at sharing options. He has been talking with another school district for about 8 months. MARS also said sharing will cost us more money because currently we don't have a curriculum director or a technology director.
- Darlene McVeigh said we need to move forward together.
- Mrs. Winer does DESE know where the money is to share.
- Dr. Hopson said DESE had regionalization money. A couple schools took it and found out it didn't save money. You have to have other schools who will share with you. MARS said to look at sharing things with the towns.
- Mrs. McVeigh said pick up phone and make calls. Worthington did and came up with an agreement.
- Dr. Hopson said they are making money. Hampshire is balancing their budget with Worthington.
- Andy Myers talked about Chester's tax rate. We need to be willing to have difficult discussions.
- Mrs. Otterbeck said we have had discussions about getting students involved in helping towns people with technology - having students give back to the communities.
- Jason Fogue said the dual certification thing is really bugging him. Do we encourage our staff to have dual certification?
- Jason Finnie said we could but we don't.
- Mrs. Dunn explained that dual certification is not that easy.
- Ed Renauld said if school committee doesn't understand their town budget works. They should meet with their selectmen and finance. The towns are struggling.
- Susan Rhoads said teachers at Gateway are the lowest paid.
- Ed Renauld we understand that, but you can't get blood from a stone.
- Mrs. Papillon said what is the school doing? She asked what the towns are doing to improve quality to get people to move into the towns. Russell has had several tries to bring in industry that continues to get turned down.
- Ed Renauld said there are constantly people out there attending meetings to bring things in.
- Amy Thornton how many years do we have left that we owe the state.
- Dr. Hopson said 7 years. In Chester what would you do with the towns?
- Amy Thornton asked if we know if Westfield will renew the lease in Russell for another year.
- Dr. Hopson said it looks like it.
- Ruth Harper asked what percentage of the towns' budget goes to Gateway.
- Dr. Hopson said it depends on the town. We are within the state average.
- Darlene McVeigh said when you add vocational to Huntington it is almost 64%.
- The money from charter schools comes out of Chapter 70 money.
- Adair from Middlefield said an awful lot of the properties had buildings taken down because it was easier to have raw land.

- Darlene McVeigh said we are only as healthy as our unhealthiest town. Russell doesn't have the ability to continue to tax. A 2.5% increase on your budget is not a 2.5% increase on your towns. She said the state will be here tomorrow night at 6 p.m. to discuss economic development.

III. ADJOURNMENT – Meeting adjourned at 8:38 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,
Stacy L Stewart,
School Committee Secretary