

**GATEWAY REGIONAL DISTRICT SCHOOL COMMITTEE**

**REGULAR MEETING MINUTES**

**WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 23, 2017**

**Middle School 112/114**

**7:00 P.M.**

All visitors attending the school committee meeting should sign in at the security booth.

**(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  
Diane Dunn

HUNTINGTON

Ron Damon  
Aaron Welch  
Melissa Nazzaro

MIDDLEFIELD

Sarah Foley

MONTGOMERY

Madelyn Austin

RUSSELL

Tara Balboni  
Lyndsey Papillon

SECRETARY

Stacy Stewart

CENTRAL ADMINISTRATION

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

ADMINISTRATIVE COUNCIL

Megan Coburn, Chs,Lit Principal  
Jason Finnie, High/Middle Principal  
Kurt Garivaltis, Pupil Services Director  
Deanna LeBlanc, High/Middle Assistant Principal  
Wendy Long, District Grant Writer

STUDENT REPRESENTATIVES

OTHERS: \_\_\_\_\_

- Mrs. Crane opened the meeting at 7:01 p.m.
- The reporter is recording the meeting.

**7:05 p.m. II. PUBLIC INPUT (3 Minute Limit)**

- Mr. Daley of Chester, also a former school committee member. Read a brief statement. Twenty-nine years ago he served, 10 years later, failure to enact change, he retired. He has come out of retirement to support local leaders to see that students served successfully. He urges school committee to embrace collaborative budget model. Deryck, Darlene, Andy, John, Rene are trying to make Gateway sustainable and preserving what we have. They must have equal vote in contract negotiations and reduce school budget spending. When this happens, he is sure you will find voters who will be supportive. Governor Baker has opened a portal for a community compact grant, which you have entered. He commends everyone for being part of the change. He hopes to find a solution for the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Gateway. He thanked the committee for serving.
- Andy Myers introduced Jeanne LeClaire the new economic development director for the Hilltown Collaborative. He asked everyone to look at the Richmond website, they went to similar problems of losing young people and now they are full.
- Mrs. Balboni asked about her background.
- Jeanne LeClaire grew up on a farm in Missouri raising cows. She went to Boston University and married a New Englander. She worked as the director of finance and business operations at the Boston Public

Market. Adapting to the small business environment. She is a part-time Chester resident and works out of the Huntington town hall.

### III. STUDENT COUNCIL INPUT - None

### IV. PRESENTATIONS/REPORTS/RECOGNITIONS - None

#### 7:45 V. UNFINISHED BUSINESS/ACTION ITEM

##### A. FY'18 Budget

- Dr. Hopson said Chester, Huntington and Russell have turned down the budget again. He thanked Mr. Daley for bringing up being collaborative. We have a 15-day extension, so no decision is needed tonight. The committee has put together budget that meets student needs. They can send out another budget that is essentially the same, (just this weekend we lost 2 teachers), or direct to reduce. The budget is up less than \$160,000 from last year. In order to make Russell happy we would have to cut over \$500,000. As Mr. Daley said we need to keep the footprint smaller. This information is from sources that everyone can get to; Mass.gov. The district's per pupil cost is higher than state average, but lower than our peer group. Student numbers really haven't changed dramatically. What we are facing this year is Russell and Huntington have higher populations. Blandford and Montgomery pay significantly more than Russell and Huntington. If we used any other form of assessments, we have two options right now for calculating assessments; the date mandated calculation, the one in our regional agreement, or one talked about in GTAC; a 5 year rolling average. Assessment increases from 09 to 18 are less than 2%. Four towns are paying less than were in 09. From DOR's 09-16 records three towns have a smaller % of their budget then in 09. The average went down. This is more than just a school issue, and the committee is happy to work with the towns. We haven't heard if Chester or Russell are willing to share the cost of a facilitator for the discussion. We have E & D, but most of that money goes back to lower town assessments. Even school choice money we use to in the budget. If we were to use \$500,000 to offset assessments, then they will automatically go up by \$500,000 the next year. Russell will have the school back next year, so we will use some of that next year to keep costs down
- Mr. Welch asked what that would cost.
- Ms. Fisk said \$138,000.
- Mrs. Winer asked about Blandford.
- Dr. Hopson said we have been paying for Blandford. Maybe the towns could work with legislators and the school to get a waiver if towns are using the building for municipal purposes. That would make a significant dent in the budget for Blandford and Russell.
- Mr. Daley asked about the five-year rolling average, is it in discussion.
- Mrs. Papillon believes Southwick uses it.
- Dr. Hopson said it is part of their regional agreement. We can't change the regional agreement until we solve 1 man 1 vote.
- Dr. Hopson said realistically over the years it has been about 2.5%.
- Ms. Fisk said the difference is about \$39,000.
- Dr. Hopson said one of the cuts was to eliminate night security. We are moving a central office staff member who will do her work in the booth, so we can have a night part time monitor.
- Mrs. Crane asked if that person can get their work done while being interrupted.
- Mrs. Balboni asked if there is training for that person for keeping our students safe.
- Dr. Hopson said yes, we have a training scheduled.
- Ms. Fisk said the unknowns are the new staff. Some have waived insurance, but two sped people came in higher salary wise.
- Mrs. Balboni asked if there was incentive to waive it.
- Ms. Fisk said when someone leaves and we have to replace them she budgets at employee plus one.
- Mrs. Crane this is taking version 2 and making real life adjustments for what have happened.
- Mrs. Balboni said other than students moving in or out of district with special needs, are there any major changes.
- Ms. Fisk said no, and we have already taken account for the new bus contract.
- Mrs. Winer asked for an explanation of the bus contract.
- Ms. Fisk said MARS' suggestion was to piggyback with other districts. And this company does this for you. We called Hampshire to do that last year, but they had contract limitations.
- Mrs. Foley asked about contract limitations, is it only one on a bus at a time.

- Ms. Fisk said there is no reimbursement. If their contract doesn't say share services they probably won't because they lose money. The challenge is to only keep 8 kids on the bus. This contract holds its prices for 3 years. All special education.
- Mrs. Foley said the person in the booth is going to be so many other jobs. Are they going to keep the students safe? What levels are the special education losses in?
- Dr. Hopson said kindergarten and high school. We have been dropping steps on the teachers' contract. So at some point we are going to have to do something to keep salaries competitive.
- Mr. Damon said we need E & D, but we are using it to reduce the budget as requested by the towns, what happens if we don't have that money in tact and we have a leaky roof in the middle school. We are going to wish we had it. He is concerned about maintaining the same level of education to our students. He is opposed to reducing the budget.
- Dr. Hopson said for every three teachers laid off you have to lay off another.
- Mrs. Otterbeck asked if the loss of those staff affects this budget.
- Ms. Fisk said no, that was in the last budget. Hopefully they will be filled before the last meeting before we need to vote.
- Mr. Baldasaro said some of the things that have happened over the past few months have been very positive. We still have some pain to go through. Mr. Damon's comment to just leave it the way it is just isn't going to fly when we have a budget failed on the floor. Two of the towns can't afford it.
- Mrs. Crane said to keep in mind that three towns passed the budget.
- Dr. Hopson said part of the reason for the budget was for lack of cooperation. We cut \$106,000 in this budget.
- Mr. Baldasaro said the people felt that nothing was done. It is not financial for Chester this year. But we've been there before. We need to find a way to pull all of us together.
- Dr. Hopson said we did do something. Maybe we just haven't communicated enough, but we did reduce the budget by \$106,000. We have been reducing electricity costs. You have to give us some credit, because we have been trying to keep the budget down. Andy suggested at the last GTAC meeting.
- Mr. Baldasaro asked for the school committees thoughts.
- Mrs. Winer said what people voted down is a misconception on what money is spent on. Some of the comments are not true anymore.
- Mrs. Papillon said when Gateway cuts \$106,000 that is only \$26,000 spread across each town. Russell only recommended \$500,000. That \$279,000 cut is a \$600,000 cut to our students. She is a Russell school committee member, a Russell resident, and an educator, and she is just not willing to do that to our kids. It is going to be a long process.
- Mrs. Otterbeck said she wants her children and all the others to have access to course studies so they can still move along in school. They are in competition with other students. We only offer 1 or two AP courses. People have always talked about wanting small schools. We can't close Chester. Building up the town as said by Mr. Myers is hard to do if we cut offerings. We only have a few sports. We are going to lose students if we don't have anything to offer. Last year at the Chester town meeting, the finance was in favor and agreed it was reasonable but they wanted to give a message to the state. We did that, and tried to be responsible communities, but they didn't offer much. Now this year's message is we were not cooperative, it was hard to hear as a member. She participated in 2025, there were some good ideas, but there were very few people including Chester parents. It's the same way at budget meetings. There are a lot of issues, but we need to look at the big picture.
- Mrs. Garfield said the school committee just can't seem to shake this perception that there is wasted spending. She doesn't know where we can go from here. There have been talks about cutting athletics over the years, she would have moved because it was important to her kids. We need to remind people we are level 1 and two schools. Student's get a great education here.
- Mrs. Dunn agrees with Mrs. Otterbeck that it is difficult to hear. There is no waste, and she is on the warrant signing committee. \$600,000 in cuts would be devastating. We have good schools it will effect accreditation. There is negative PR. Let's say that we are trying to get this done so we can move on. We can legally cut softball and baseball, but can not cut mandated services to special needs students.
- Mrs. Nazzaro said there needs to be an increase in communication. There also needs to be an increase in communications to incoming families. As the newbie she likes what has happened in Richmond. We need to work on school choice openings. She works with the city of Springfield. For a long time there was a bad working relationship with the people who work for the city and the city council. Over time it had changed. She likes budget for dummies. It's the things people assume that hurt us. Maybe it's a reminder for why things are the way they are. Maybe there is a way to shake up the delivery to increase trust. Huntington like Chester wasn't making the decision because it was financial, they wanted some assurance. Could there

be efficiencies by regional service sharing. Chester got feedback fy18 is going to be a process, but FY '19 is here we are.

- Dr. Hopson said Hampden and Hampshire counties are very different. Why as a blue ribbon school you are going to regionalize, they'd lose their autonomy. There is no interest in regionalization. The only interest is the small rural schools which he serves on. They are looking at shared services. It would be hosted at UMASS so no one loses their jobs or insurance. What Gateway has done, is as administrators leave we haven't replaced them. Team leaders have been established to take on some administrative responsibility. We have tried to share a curriculum director and food services director, which didn't work out. We are currently looking at another business office that might be interested in sharing. The superintendent is interested and going to bring it to their school committee.
- Ms. Fisk said some sharing has happened with school and towns. We volunteered to help Montgomery with maintenance and A/C work. That might be better to look at rather than a regional school district.
- Mrs. Balboni said at Russell Town meeting they are very angry at administrative costs, yet the MARS study said you are not spending enough. People are getting third part information. She loves people being here. She gets peppered with questions from her town's people. Russell had 70 people at their meeting and only Three of them have been to school committee meetings.
- Mrs. Crane agrees with her colleagues there are no more places to cut. We have great ideas to add things but we can't do those. Those here tonight have extended an olive branch and we are happy to do so as well and work together, but negative, hurtful, unproductive comments are not going to be tolerated. The things in the paper that are said about us is unfair. Our mandate is to service the children who are too young to vote.
- Mr. Baldasaro said fair or not fair you have to let it roll off your back. They are here to find solutions. The select board and people are going to be huge supporters. Chester and Russell have vocal people He knows you are doing your job and you wouldn't be doing this if you weren't. You are in a conundrum, like us. Russell is angry and Huntington is pent up. Chester is just an angry town. Maybe this year is the year we knock the E & D money down. He is not talking about cutting services.
- Ms. Fisk said E & D as of June 30 is done. We did use \$30,000 more this year. We are at the 39,000 is now, but. We also have 25 kids each in both kindergarten classes.
- Ms Crane asked if the \$39,000 includes security.
- Dr. Hopson said it would be \$17,000 if we didn't do that move.
- Ms. Fisk said it is certainly a trial, she is okay in security. Is it perfect? No. Maybe we will have to add it back.
- Mr. Welch thanked John for explaining what an olive branch is. He asked what is in E & D.
- Ms. Fisk said last year it was \$579,000.
- Mr. Welch said if this doesn't pass because people are cutting off their nose to save face, it would be great if you could help us with what you want that isn't going to cut services.
- Mr. Myers last year at the MARS meeting it was suggested we should we consider repurposing two buildings. Could we get forgiveness, it could be proposed. At what point could we move some of the brick and motor money on students and programs. The ground has shifted and the culprit is the economy. He is hoping the meetings will be a 10 year plan to see the light at the end of the tunnel. We need exceptional schools to have growth. Could we have a senior center a Chester, it is a possibility and a huge need.
- Mrs. Crane wants to give Dr. Hopson and Ms. Fisk a direction. Where do we want to go, what do we want to do.
- Mrs. Nazzaro asked if this forgiveness can be put in place this year. Could it be an olive branch if there was a need to close a school in the future?
- Ms. Fisk said we are more than halfway through 14 years.
- Mrs. Crane said we a direction to go in for the next meeting, where we are supposed to start working together on the FY 19 budget. But we are marred again.
- Dr. Hopson asked if they want to move forward with services we have right now. It doesn't make sense to go below.
- Mrs. Nazzaro said the budget is up less than 1%. Every 1/12 budget you're looking at level funded. \$160,000. If you could get it to \$80,000 what that would mean. You'll know, you'll In budget bring
- Dr. Hopson said if the towns don't vote a budget by December 1, DESE will set a budget. If DESE makes cuts it we will have to make cuts. If we cut \$80,000 and identify people, those people are gone. It is very hard to fill positions. He would be happy to have administrators come and explain what those cuts would mean.
- Ms. Fisk said we lose students because people are scared.

- Dr. Hopson said we will bring back a \$39,000 budget back and have the administrators explain what \$80,000 would look like/means to our kids. We looked at furloughs. But there are only 4 full-year administrators.
- Mrs. Balboni asked if we would bring what the forgiveness process looks like for both the schools and the towns.
- Mr. Senecal said the towns should offer an invite letter to Russell. He never ever thought this committee wasn't working hard. It's not so much what it is happening, it's how it's happening. It is a matter of how it is presented. He is in favor of making it short and sweet.
- Ms. Fisk asked if the towns would let us know when votes come up.
- Mrs. Huntoon from Chester said they do want to understand and want to learn. She as what is an itinerant teacher is. They want to know what the state mandates are and what they can do.
- Dr. Hopson said an itinerant teacher is one that is shared between buildings. He hopes the joint budget process will get this type of information out to the towns.

## **B. School Committee Goals/Strategic Planning**

*Mrs. Otterbeck made a motion seconded by Mrs. Foley to Approve the School Committee Goals/Strategic Planning.*

*Motion Carried (VOTE) Yeas 11 Nays Abstain 1 Absent (Roll Call Vote)*

Yeas: Madelyn, Tara, Ron, Diane, Sarah, Terri, Melissa, Lyndsey, Martha, Aaron, Shirley, Michele  
Abstain: Melissa

## **8:00 - VI. NEW BUSINESS/ACTION ITEMS**

**8:30 p.m.**

### **A. Fall Grant Approval**

- Mrs. Papillon said if we have a team of three they will go and get trained and come back to do training
- Mrs. Long said yes.

### **B. FY'19 Budget Process**

- Dr. Hopson asked Blandford and Chester to look at the timeline. He wants it to be a free flowing.
- Mr. Myers said it has taken a long time to get here and we really need to look at long term.
- Dr. Hopson said we have never done long term. That probably won't happen in this budget process. He believes that will be part of the facilitated discussion. We've already gone outside of the box, we need to partner on this dance. You can't just keep saying you need to something different. We've done things differently over the past 15 years.
- Mrs. Crane said it might be important for town officials to get in the building when kids are here. Maybe we can set up tours for town officials.

## **VII. CONSENT ITEMS 7/12/17**

*Mr. Damon made a motion seconded by Mrs. Otterbeck to approve the minutes of 7/12/17.*

*Motion Carried (VOTE) Yeas 9 Nays Abstain 3 Absent (Roll Call Vote)*

Yeas: Madelyn, Tara, Ron, Diane, Lyndsey, Martha, Aaron, Shirley, Michele  
Abstain: Sarah, Terri, Melissa

## **VIII. COMMUNICATIONS**

**A. School Committee - None**

**B. Chairperson – None**

**C. Superintendent**

Central Office Update

- Dr. Hopson said thought we were all staffed until the week. We also have a new elementary assistant principal, Darlene Rehor and a new middle and high school assistant principal, Deanna LeBlanc.

**D. Business Manager**

- Ms. Fisk said she has one replacement Tasha Hartley will be replacing Wendy McCaul in October.

**E. Administration**

- Mrs. Long said today was the last day for the Title I summer program. In years past they were embedded in Shannon Madden's program. It was a challenge. There were about a dozen kids who attended.
- Dr. Hopson said this is mandated, they don't have to come, but we have to offer.
- Mrs. Otterbeck asked if we ever see that coming back.
- Mrs. Long said we have some options we are looking into. Once you are taken off the funding cycle the collaborative could write for us again

**IX. COMMITTEE REPORTING****A. Superintendent's Evaluation**

- Met tonight and they will have recommended goals for next time.

**B. Legislative Liaison – None****C. Policy Subcommittee**

- Policy needs to get organized, there are some things we need to work on.

**D. Building Liaisons**

Update list of members and who they'd like to meet with.

- Mrs. Crane said when the building liaison program that was working, she met with Mr. Garivaltis and maintenance.
- Ms. Fisk said the facilities guys really like meeting with school committee.

**X. OTHER BUSINESS/ITEMS FOR NEXT AGENDA****Future Agenda Items****XI. INFORMATION****Information**

School Committee approved new budget  
 Superintendent's Corner June 29, 2017  
 Gateway Ed Foundation wins funding  
 Superintendent's Corner July 10, 2017  
 School Committee undergoes annual reorganization  
 Superintendent's Corner July 20, 2017  
 August School Committee meeting  
 Superintendent's Corner July 31, 2017  
 Superintendent's Corner August 7, 2017

The warrant signing committee had reviewed the following warrants, found them to be in order, and approved them.

**Warrants**

FY '17

AP# 1101 \$147,668.87

PR# 001 \$93,847.47

AP# 1102 \$74,462.05

PR# 002 \$89,943.93

AP# 1103 \$2,228.21

PR# 003 \$92,965.22

AP# 1104 \$178.49

PR# 004 \$83,561.04

FY '18

AP# 1105 \$271.26

AP# 1004 \$202,830.34

AP# 1006 \$28,737.17

**8:35-9 p.m. XII. EXECUTIVE SESSION**  
**or earlier**

**XIII. ADJOURNMENT**

*Mr. Damon made a motion seconded by Mrs. Otterbeck to adjourn at 8:59 p.m.*

*Motion Carried (VOTE) Yeas 12 Nays Abstain Absent (Roll Call Vote)*

Yeas: Madelyn, Tara, Ron, Diane, Sarah, Terri, Melissa, Lyndsey, Martha, Aaron, Shirley, Michele

---

Respectfully Submitted,  
Stacy L Stewart,  
School Committee Secretary