

WACHUSETT REGIONAL SCHOOL DISTRICT

HOLDEN ♦ PAXTON ♦ PRINCETON ♦ RUTLAND ♦ STERLING

Minutes

Special Meeting #313
ANNUAL BUDGET RETREAT

Monday, January 25, 2016
7:00 PM

Media Center
Wachusett Regional High School
1401 Main Street, Holden

Committee Members Present:

Lance Harris, Chair	Lauren Maldonado
Robert Imber, Vice-chair	Robert McCarthy (7:04 PM)
Scott Brown	Kenneth Mills
Thomas Curran	Jon Edward Novak
Michael Dennis (7:04 PM)	Steve Porter (7:09 PM)
Matthew Ehrenworth	Barbara Renzoni
Harriet Fradellos	Asima Silva
Susan Hitchcock	Christina Smith
Stacey Jackson	Megan Weeks
Sarah LaMountain	Charles Witkes
Linda Long-Bellil	Adam Young (7:07 PM)

Committee Members Absent:

None

Committee Members Participating Remotely:

None

Administration Present:

Joseph Scanlon, Director of Business and Finance
Jeff Carlson, Director of Human Resources
Rebecca Petersen, Executive Secretary to the Superintendent
Robert Berlo, Deputy Superintendent-elect (7:25 PM)

Student Representatives Present:

Linnea Budd	Liam Fritsche
-------------	---------------

Others present, who desired to be recorded as present (see attached Attendance Sheet – attachment 1).

I. Call to Order

Chair Harris called the Retreat to order at 7:02 PM.

II. Public Hearing

No members of the public wished to address the School Committee.

III. Approval of 2016-2017 School Year Calendar

7:04 PM Member Dennis joined the meeting.

7:04 PM Member McCarthy joined the meeting.

Motion: To approve the 2016-2017 school year calendar, as presented.

(S. Jackson)

(S. Hitchcock)

Discussion ensued about professional development half days, with Superintendent McCall providing historical background of half-days for professional development for the past several years, since implementation of the "Literacy Initiative." When asked why the half-days are all on Thursdays, the Superintendent explained that parents sought consistency in what day of the week might be early release days, for planning purposes. With no objection from the members, Chair Harris asked a question about planning a half-day the Thursday before the Memorial Day weekend. Superintendent McCall explained that day is used by teachers and principals to plan for class assignments for the following year.

Vote:

In favor:

Robert Imber
Scott Brown
Michael Dennis
Matthew Ehrenworth
Harriet Fradellos
Susan Hitchcock
Stacey Jackson
Sarah LaMountain
Linda Long-Bellil
Lauren Maldonado
Robert McCarthy
Kenneth Mils
Jon Edward Novak
Barbara Renzoni
Christina Smith
Megan Weeks
Charles Witkes

Opposed:

Thomas Curran

Asima Silva

Abstained:

Lance Harris

The motion passed 17-2-1.

7:07 PM Member Young joined the meeting.

With no objection from the members, Chair Harris asked if the Student Representatives had anything to share. Student Representative Fritsche reported high school exams had concluded.

7:11 PM Chair Harris turned the meeting over to Superintendent McCall, who was joined at the table by Director Scanlon and Director Carlson. Members were provided with a hard copy of a PowerPoint presentation which would drive the budget discussions (attachment 2). Superintendent McCall explained he would present the PowerPoint, speaking to each slide and information as shown. Members were asked to hold questions until the conclusion of the presentation.

7:25 PM Deputy Superintendent of Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment Robert Berlo joined the meeting.

Presentation of the PowerPoint concluded at 7:35 PM. Chair Harris asked members to identify slides they would like re-addressed/information clarified. Members were given the opportunity to ask questions about the presentation and the budget proposal.

Member Ehrenworth – Slides 5 & 6 – LED lighting to help reduce electric bills

Member Curran – Slide 6 – Investment Income

Slides 7 – 13

Member Renzoni questioned if school choice numbers were included, and it was confirmed they are.

Vice-chair Imber asked if the decline in enrollment is due to less school choice, which the Superintendent confirmed is likely.

Vice-chair Imber suggested listing the actual dollar differences when comparing Wachusett to the higher spending districts.

Member Silva asked how the District/schools would benefit from additional funds (test scores, what are other districts offering that Wachusett is not, due to funding, etc.)

Member Brown asked if town populations have been looked at. Superintendent McCall explained it is very difficult to get firm numbers based on building permits.

Slide 15 – Budget Priorities

Member Mills is pleased with the hiring of the three middle school counselors, and would like the District to consider additional hires for counselor positions.

Questions posed:

What do principals think about library staffing?

Superintendent McCall reported that the majority of principals are satisfied with school libraries being volunteer-operated.

What about paraprofessionals covering libraries, would that give teachers contracted prep time? Superintendent McCall explained paraprofessionals covering for teacher prep time is not an option, contractually.

Technology was the next topic addressed. Superintendent McCall spoke about the aging technology throughout the District, and then commended Supervisor of Information Services Sclar on his ability to acquire much technology on very limited funds. Superintendent McCall reported the District is still waiting to hear from the state what technology will be needed for MCAS 2.0 testing. Member Mills asked about Member Towns approving separate appropriation(s) to “catch up” with technology funding. Member Hitchcock stated she is uncomfortable that there is no technology plan after eighteen months of talking about one.

8:05 PM Member Ehrenworth left the table.

Member LaMountain asked about student purchase and/or lease of Chromebooks. Superintendent McCall referenced the “iPad initiative.”

Member Novak commented that he may be word-smithing, but he feels that the Superintendent stating 150 new computers in schools is misleading. Member Novak noted 150 is a small percentage of the 1,000 (+/-) computers over seven years old, as stated in the spring 2015 technology inventory.

8:08 PM Member Ehrenworth returned to the table.

Member McCarthy requested of Director Scanlon a copy of the technology inventory, which he would want to have for review at the February 11, 2016 Business/Finance Subcommittee meeting.

Member Curran asked if the purchase of Chromebooks is a better way to spend available funds, rather than purchasing desktop computers. Superintendent McCall reported the District is moving toward less desktop computers and more Chromebook (or Chromebook-like) carts. When asked by Member Renzoni, Superintendent McCall clarified there are 30 Chromebooks per Chromebook cart. Superintendent McCall was asked if replacement computers being purchases are new or “less old.” Superintendent McCall explained Supervisor Sclar’s recent purchase of “gently-used” computers. When

he was asked if the District ever purchases “new” computers, Superintendent McCall told the Committee that did not happen very often. Member Hitchcock strongly suggested a technology plan be in the hands of the School Committee by the end of February/beginning of March. Superintendent McCall explained Chromebooks are more affordable, plus wifi is available in the carts. Member Weeks asked about replace of teacher laptops and wondering if replacing with Chromebooks would be wise. When the technology plan is shared with the School Committee, Vice-chair Imber suggested Supervisor Sclar make a presentation to the School Committee on technology. Chair Harris, following up on Member Mills’ question/comment about individual town(s) appropriation(s) for technology, explained District administration is investigating the legality of Annual Town Meeting warrant articles for technology appropriations.

Slide 19 – Member Jackson asked when back-up information would be available. Director Scanlon confirmed that salary numbers are based on current employees.

8:22 PM Member Ehrenworth left the meeting.

Slide 20 – Member Jackson asked about the 17% increase for Health Insurance – Active. Director Carlson explained the number includes new hires.

Slide 23 – Member Jackson pointed out that many of the line items show no increase from FY16 to FY17, and questioned if that is wise planning.

Slide 26 – Member Jackson is concerned that no inflationary factors have been included in tuition lines, also stating there are many unknowns when budgeting special education tuitions. Director Scanlon stated he feels the numbers are reasonable, based on review.

Slide 30 – Member Jackson questioned the very low increase for Special Ed transportation (1%) when Regular Ed transportation has been increased by 11%. Superintendent McCall explained that a deal had been worked with AA Transportation so the District did not pay the full amount in FY16, but will need to make up the underpayment in FY17.

Slide 30 – Member Long-Bellil asked why late bus transportation had not been included in the proposed budget. Superintendent McCall explained the cost for late bus transportation from the high school to the five towns would be \$195,000. If this is a service and a cost the School Committee wants added into the FY17 budget, Superintendent McCall needs direction to do so.

Slide 20 – Member Curran noted Health Insurance – Retired seems low in the FY17 proposed budget. Both Directors Carlson and Scanlon explained the projected number.

8:36 PM Student Representative Budd left the meeting.

Member Dennis went back to Member Jackson’s question about back-up to support information on Slide 19, noting that last year much for the information/back-up was included in the FY16 Budget Book. When asked, Director Scanlon confirmed the FY17

Budget Book will be ready for the February 22, 2016 School Committee meeting, with a preview at the February 11th Business/Finance Subcommittee meeting.

8:45 PM Member LaMountain left the table.

Slide 15 – Budget Priorities – Superintendent McCall spoke about both professional development and class size. His opinion is that class size would best be addressed incrementally. He also spoke about technology, voicing his opinion that he supports the concept of separate warrant article(s) for technology appropriation(s).

Member Smith voiced her view of wanting more for the Wachusett District, but seeing the presentation as being a budget to “keep the doors open.” She listed what she considers priorities, noting they are not in any particular order:

- ✓ Late buses
- ✓ High school class size/course offerings, not just Advance Placement courses
- ✓ Expansion of guidance – social/emotional at the elementary level, and also expanding counselors at the middle school level
- ✓ Library media staff – certified library media specialists

8:49 PM Member LaMountain returned to the table.

Slide 23 – Instructional Support – Dollar amount for Instructional Materials is low. Member Hitchcock noted that the Instructional Materials budget is a pittance of the overall budget. Member Hitchcock would be in favor of Instructional Materials being increased to \$750,000 - \$1M.

8:53 PM Member Smith left the table.

General discussion about Guidance Counselors v Adjustment Counselors, two very different positions.

8:55 PM Member Smith returned to the table.

If looking at hiring counselors at the elementary level, decision must be made about positions to be filled guidance or adjustment. Member Smith added there is a movement to change school counselor to guidance counselor, but a school adjustment counselor is a very different position in terms of education and services provided. Member Renzoni voiced her disappointment in the administration with regard to the hiring of the middle school counselors. She explained she had asked the question early in the process if the positions would be guidance counselors or adjustment counselors, and she was told they would be guidance counselors. Superintendent McCall explained that the positions posted/advertised were for Middle School Counselors. Brief discussion continued about the position posting and the interview process. Member Curran spoke briefly about course work/curriculum for both guidance and adjustment counselor certifications. To conclude the discussion, Chair Harris asked that the middle school counselor job description, SchoolSpring postings, and a list of who has been hired to work at Thomas Prince School/Chocksett Middle School, Paxton Center School/Central Tree Middle

School, and Mountview Middle School be provided to the School Committee as a request for information in Google Drive.

Slide 24 – Member LaMountain asked what projects will be covered by the Maintenance budget on this slide. Director Scanlon explained this listing will be provided to the Business/Finance Subcommittee at the February 11, 2016 meeting.

Slide 23 – Member LaMountain questioned if the Print Management budget should be level funded. Director Scanlon does not anticipate costs increasing. Member LaMountain feels the budget should be increased, as a buffer.

Member Mills asked the process to provide Superintendent McCall with a list of priorities.

9:17 PM Student Representative Fritsche left the meeting.

Slide 25 – Pupil Services – Member Weeks gave her list of priorities for this category:

- ✓ Athletics
- ✓ Late buses
- ✓ Class size
- ✓ One guidance counselor per middle school
- ✓ Library staffing

9:20 PM Member LaMountain left the meeting.

Member Smith showed the Committee books she took off the WRHS Media Center shelves, to make the point that the budget for textbooks must be increased:

- 1994 SAT book
- 2004 4-year College Guide

When developing the FY16 budget, Member Brown recalled the School Committee being provided with three budget proposals and asked for similar information while developing the FY17 budget:

- Budget to open the doors
- Budget to include School Committee priorities
- “Grand” budget

9:25 PM Member Maldonado left the meeting.

Chair Harris will ask the Business/Finance Subcommittee to review the FY17 budget proposals/scenarios and to plan to make a recommendation to the full School Committee on the scenarios between the February 22, 2016 Annual Budget Hearing and the March 14, 2016 regular School Committee meeting, when the full School Committee will vote on the FY17 budget.

Member Long-Bellil asked for the cost to add late buses at the middle school level. When discussing late buses, Member Renzoni suggested an option to look at might be providing late bus service three days per week v five days per week, as a cost savings.

Member Hitchcock asked that principals, administrators, and department heads be asked for their priorities.

Slide 34 – Member Novak asked what a 5.1% increase will mean to the Member Towns. He also asked if late buses could be offered for a fee.

Motion: To adjourn.

(T. Curran)
(M. Weeks)

Vote:

In favor:

Lance Harris
Robert Imber
Scott Brown
Thomas Curran
Michael Dennis
Harriet Fradellos
Susan Hitchcock
Stacey Jackson
Linda Long-Bellil
Lauren Maldonado
Robert McCarthy
Kenneth Mils
Jon Edward Novak
Steve Porter
Barbara Renzoni
Asima Silva
Christina Smith
Megan Weeks
Charles Witkes
Adam Young

Opposed:

None

The motion passed unanimously.

The meeting adjourned at 9:34 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Wachusett Regional District School Committee
Special Meeting Minutes - Retreat
January 25, 2016
Page 9

Darryll McCall, Ed.D.
Superintendent of Schools

DM:rlp