

WACHUSETT REGIONAL SCHOOL DISTRICT

HOLDEN ♦ PAXTON ♦ PRINCETON ♦ RUTLAND ♦ STERLING

Minutes

Regular Meeting #1073, Monday, March 8, 2004
7:00 PM

Modular Cafeteria
Wachusett Regional High School

Committee Members Present:

Duncan Leith, Chair	Alice Livdahl
Donald Benson	John Nunnari
Elizabeth Brennan	Norman Plourde
Charles Capparelli	René Rodriguez (7:25 PM)
Clifford Connell (7:05 PM)	Julie Scott
David Dickman	Michael Sherman
Patricia Gates (7:08 PM)	Tammy Tod
Mark James	Margaret Watson
John Kane	Patricia Young

Committee Members Absent:

Natalie Mello, Vice-Chair

Administration Present:

Paul K. Soojian, Director of Operations
Steven Penka, Director of Administrative Services
Peter Brennan, Comptroller
Susan Sullivan, Executive Assistant to the Superintendent

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

Chair Duncan Leith called the meeting to order at 7:04 PM.

Chair Duncan Leith addressed Item V B Presentation of *Proposed FY05 Appropriation*.

Director of Operations Paul Soojian presented the *Proposed FY05 Appropriation* via a PowerPoint presentation (attachment 2). Chair Duncan Leith entertained questions from the Committee.

Following inquiry, Director Soojian reported the number of students leaving the District through School Choice for FY04 is 81.5 and for Charter Schools is 53. The District has 26.5 students coming to the District through School Choice.

Director Soojian reported that the District was recently notified by the Department of Education that Choice and Charter students should be included in the District's enrollment figures for the purposes of assessment. The Superintendent had requested input from the Member Towns because the enrollment figures for assessment did not include these students in the past. No input was received from the representatives from the Member Towns at the meeting.

Director Soojian explained to the Committee that the student/teacher ratios include guidance, speech therapists and school psychologists. Director Soojian explained that class size is the number of students in one classroom with one teacher. Staffing ratios are used to allocate staff in the schools.

Following inquiry, Director Soojian reported that the category *Special Education* does not include salaries; salaries associated with special education are included in the *Personnel, Salaries* category, along with all District staff. Comptroller Peter Brennan reported that salaries for special education personnel for FY04 is projected to be \$6,543,471 and is projected to be \$6,776,129 for FY05.

Director Soojian reported that the increase in Salaries is broken down as follows:

- \$900,000 increase for collectively bargained pay raises, including step and lane increases;
- \$300,000 reduction due to projected retirements; and
- \$450,000 increase for fifteen new positions, eight teachers and seven paraprofessionals.

Following inquiry, Comptroller Brennan reported that funds received for School Choice are deposited into a revolving account and that the funds may be used for any educational purposes. Prior to FY04, the District did not participate in School Choice. The School Committee voted to participate in School Choice on a limited basis, grades K-5 only. The funds received will serve to offset the students opting to leave the District under School Choice. The District will receive \$4,160 per student for school choice, an amount determined by the Department of Education.

Following inquiry, Director Soojian reported that IntraDistrict students are counted as students from the town where they reside.

An inquiry was made regarding the use of the word "policy" at the bottom of page 8. Director Soojian reported that he will bring the concern to the Superintendent,

who was the author of the Proposed FY05 Appropriation narrative and will report back to the Committee the intent of the use of the word “policy”.

Following inquiry, Director Soojian reported that newly appointed Special Education Administrator Steven Kaplan is still acquainting himself with the practices of the District and that a report on possible savings in special education for the District is not expected in the near future. Director Soojian also reminded the Committee that a special Task Force has been appointed by the Superintendent, which includes members of the community, to review special education costs. Director Soojian will report back to the Committee on the status of the Task Force and the efforts of the newly appointed Special Education Administrator.

Chair Duncan Leith read a prepared statement (attachment 3).

I. Public Hearing

Chair Duncan Leith limited public comment to five minutes per speaker.

Edwin Meyer, Holden, read a prepared statement (attachment 4).

David Gibbs, Sterling, read a prepared statement (attachment 5).

II. Secretary’s Report

A. Approval of 1072nd Regular Meeting Minutes of the WRSD Committee held on February 23, 2004 – approved by consensus, noting those not in attendance at the meeting (Members David Dickman, Patricia Gates, and Rene Rodriguez).

III. Treasurer’s Report/Financial Statements

Chairman Duncan Leith reminded the Committee that if there were questions regarding the Comptroller’s report, that members should contact the Superintendent; if there were questions regarding the Treasurer’s report, members should contact Business/Finance Subcommittee Chair Natalie Mello.

IV. Committee Reports

A. Student Advisory Committee (C. Brennan, R. Hinson, A. Vaillancourt)

No students were in attendance.

- B. Management Subcommittee (D. Leith, Chair, N. Mello, D. Benson, C. Capparelli, P. Gates, A. Livdahl, J. Nunnari, J. Scott)

Chair Duncan Leith reported that the next Management Subcommittee meeting is scheduled for Monday, March 15, 2004, at 6:30 PM in the Curriculum Center at the Central Office.

- C. Education Subcommittee (J. Scott, Chair, E. Brennan, M. James, J. Nunnari, N. Plourde, R. Rodriguez, M. Watson)

Education Subcommittee Chair Julie Scott reported that the Education Subcommittee met prior to the School Committee meeting. The Subcommittee reviewed AP3311.1 **Policy Relating to Education *Graduation Requirements*** with Wachusett Regional High School Principal Thomas Pandiscio. The Committee is recommending that the policy be deferred until the April 12, 2004 School Committee meeting.

1. AP3311.1 **Policy Relating to Education *Graduation Requirements*** – first reading

The policy has been deferred until April 12, 2004.

2. DP3510 **Policy Relating to Education *Class Size*** – second reading

Motion: To adopt DP3510 **Policy Relating to Education *Class Size***, for the second reading, waiving the reading
(J. Scott)
(N. Plourde)

Vote:

In favor:

Duncan Leith
Donald Benson
Elizabeth Brennan
Charles Capparelli
Clifford Connell
David Dickman
Patricia Gates
Mark James
John Kane
Alice Livdahl

John Nunnari
Norman Plourde
René Rodriguez
Julie Scott
Michael Sherman
Tammy Tod
Margaret Watson
Patricia Young

Opposed:
None

(Motion passed unanimously)

Education Subcommittee Chair Julie Scott reported that the next Education Subcommittee meeting will be held on April 5th at 6:30 PM in the Curriculum Center. The agenda will include review of policies in the 6000 series, as well as a review of the *Indicators of Effectiveness*, as a part of the Superintendent's evaluation. Subcommittee Chair Scott reported that following a review of the 3000 series, there were no recommended revisions.

Member David Dickman requested information on the difference between State and District class sizes.

- D. Business/Finance Subcommittee (N. Mello, Chair, C. Connell, D. Dickman, J. Kane, D. Leith, M. Sherman, P. Young)

Chair Duncan Leith reported that the Business/Finance Subcommittee met on Thursday, March 4, 2004, with representatives from the Member Town Selectboards and Finance/Advisory Committees. Director of Operations Paul Soojian presented the *Proposed FY05 Appropriation* via a PowerPoint presentation, which was shared with the Committee at the beginning of the meeting.

There was some discussion regarding the recent publicity surrounding the Superintendent's reimbursements for expenses.

Motion: To remove employee reimbursements from the *Pre-Approved Vendor List*

(M. Sherman)
(J. Scott)

Chair Duncan Leith explained the process for the *Pre-Approved Vendor List*. The Committee votes annually on a *Pre-Approved Vendor List*, which allows the District to take advantage of discounts on such categories as electricity, telephone, etc. Employee reimbursements have been included on the list because there are times when there is a considerable amount of time between the employee expense and School Committee approval.

A suggestion was made to suspend all employee reimbursements until guidelines have been established by the School Committee. The Committee was reminded that the Superintendent is the School Committee's employee and that guidelines should be addressed towards him and not all employees.

An amendment to P4714 **Policy Relating to Budget/Finance Periodic Reports** was proposed to the Business/Finance Subcommittee to review and make a recommendation. The Subcommittee discussed the amendment but did not vote on a recommendation to the full Committee. Further review will take place at a future meeting of the Business/Finance Subcommittee.

Motion to Amend: To add "and to suspend all meal reimbursement, except for out of town conference meals, until the amended policy has been adopted."

(P. Gates)

(D. Dickman)

Director Soojian explained that there are contractual issues, both with collectively bargained and individual contracts. Director Soojian advised the Committee to move cautiously in this area.

Member Gates offered a friendly amendment to limit the suspension of meal reimbursements to only the Superintendent. This friendly amendment was accepted by member David Dickman.

The Committee was reminded that Members Michael Sherman and Clifford Connell of the Business/Finance Subcommittee had volunteered to review and recommend an improvement in the process of approving the Superintendent's reimbursements.

Roll call vote on the Motion to Amend, which reads: To add "and to suspend the Superintendent's meal reimbursement,

except for out of town conference meals, until the amended policy has been adopted.”

In favor:

Charles Capparelli
David Dickman
Patricia Gates
Alice Livdahl
Norman Plourde
Julie Scott
Michael Sherman
Tammy Tod
Patricia Young

Opposed:

Duncan Leith
Donald Benson
Elizabeth Brennan
Clifford Connell
Mark James
John Kane
John Nunnari
René Rodriguez
Margaret Watson

(Motion failed 9-9)

At the request of a Committee Member, Director Soojian reported that he would mail the Minutes of Business/Finance Subcommittee Meeting of March 4, 2004 to the Committee.

Substitute Motion: To remove the Superintendent's reimbursements from the *Pre-Approved Vendor List*

(J. Nunnari)

(J. Scott)

Roll call vote:

In favor:

Donald Benson
Elizabeth Brennan
Charles Capparelli
Clifford Connell
David Dickman
Patricia Gates

Mark James
John Kane
Alice Livdahl
John Nunnari
Norman Plourde
René Rodriguez
Julie Scott
Michael Sherman
Tammy Tod
Patricia Young

Opposed:

None

Abstained:

Duncan Leith
Margaret Watson

(Motion passed 16-0-2)

The next meeting of the Business/Finance Subcommittee is scheduled for Thursday, March 11, 2004 at 6:30 PM in the Curriculum Center at the Central Office. Any additional meetings will be scheduled as needed.

E. Ad-Hoc Subcommittees

1. Community Outreach (M. Sherman, Chair, E. Brennan, C. Capparelli, C. Connell, A. Livdahl)

The next meeting of the Ad-Hoc Subcommittee is March 17, 2004 at 6:30 PM in the Curriculum Center at the Central Office.

Ad-Hoc Subcommittee Chair Michael Sherman reported that the informational sessions at the schools began last week. Presentations will continue on March 9th at Mayo and Mountview at 7:00 PM. On March 10th presentations will take place at Naquag and Thomas Prince. The high school presentation is scheduled for March 16th, the presentation at Paxton Center School is March 17th, and at Central Tree on March 18th. Member David Dickman reported that he would not be able to attend the presentation at Mayo. Chair Duncan Leith will attend

with Margaret Watson. Member Donald Benson will attend the presentation at Mountview with Member Michael Sherman.

F. Building Committees

1. High School

Chair Duncan Leith reported that Building Chair Michael Tsotsis and Chair Leith will be meeting on March 11th at 4:00 PM with Dennis Lipka, Director of Growth Management for the Town of Holden, regarding fees for the high school project, which could be in excess of \$255,000. Some are fees for inspections and the Building Committee does not want to see the Town of Holden lose money, but the Building Committee would like to see some consideration. Chair Leith advised the School Committee that the fees are not reimbursable.

Chair Leith reported that the groundbreaking will probably be sometime in mid-April. Employees of the various contractors are having CORI checks done by the District and will wear photo identification badges.

2. Rutland – Naquag/Central Tree

Nothing to report.

3. Rutland – Elementary School – John Nunnari

Member John Nunnari reported that the Rutland Building Committee met on March 4th. The architect reported that the project has been approved by the Conservation Committee. There was discussion regarding whether a septic system should be used or to hook up to the Town sewer system. The Department of Education, School Building Assistance has indicated that the sewer hook-up would probably be considered reimbursable. There was also discussion regarding the water supply to the school. The Committee is still in the process of hiring a Clerk of the Works. The Building Committee will begin meeting weekly.

4. Sterling

No report

- G. School Council Reports: Central Tree Middle School (J. Nunnari), Chocksett Middle School (C. Capparelli), Davis Hill Elementary School (J. Scott), Dawson Elementary School (M. James), Houghton Elementary School (N. Plourde), Mayo Elementary School (M. Watson), Mountview Middle School (D. Benson), Naquag Elementary School (E. Brennan), Paxton Center School (A. Livdahl), Thomas Prince School (C. Connell), and Wachusett Regional High School (N. Mello, T. Tod).

Member Julie Scott reported that Davis Hill entered several teams in the *Destination Imagination* competition held in West Springfield. Two teams will advance to the State finals at WPI. Member Scott reported that there were also teams at the competition from Mayo, Naquag, Central Tree, Mountview, and the high school.

Member Mark James reported that the Dawson School Council met and discussed the issue of snacks. Member James reported that snacks are sold at recess and at lunch only and that there is no chocolate and no soda. The revenues support the cafeteria at the school. Member James reported that there is informal monitoring at the school to assure that students do not substitute snacks for lunch. The School Council felt that this is a parental issue and that pre-paid lunch is available, should parents be concerned. Member James provided written information for the public regarding snacks at Dawson (attachments 6 and 7). Member James also reported that the School Council discussed the upcoming District-wide School Council Meeting on April 7th at Davis Hill.

Member Margaret Watson reported that the School Council at Mayo met. Discussion was held regarding security at the school, following a parental concern. The School Council did not want the front door locked but thought perhaps a video camera could be considered. Member Watson reported that the School Council reviewed the policy on class size and favored the policy as a matter of protocol. Member Watson reported that Principal John Locke has had experience with multi-age classrooms, which is an option to relieve pressure on large classrooms.

Member Norman Plourde reported that the Houghton School Council met and reported that there are no soft drinks and no snacks sold at the school.

Following inquiry regarding the items still remaining on the Dawson punchlist, Director Soojian reported that the Building Committee voted to disband. The District would have to assess the need and if deemed necessary to repair would incur the expense. The District would first attempt to work with vendors.

V. Superintendent's Report

A. Discussion of Report

A concern was raised regarding the notification from the Department of Education on the high school project (attachment 28). It reminds the District that a revised form must be filed with the Department of Education, School Building Assistance if construction is to begin prior to reimbursement. Director Soojian will look into this and advise the Committee in the next Superintendent's report.

Following inquiry regarding the use of the Davis Hill fields by the high school teams during the renovation project at the high school, Director Soojian reported that the District is still awaiting input from the Town of Holden. Director Steven Penka reported that the use of the fields is needed in the fall of 2004 not the spring of 2004.

B. Presentation of *Proposed FY05 Appropriation*

Chair Duncan Leith reported that at the Business/Finance Subcommittee meeting Member Towns reported that the *Proposed FY05 Appropriation* had a major impact on some of the municipal budgets:

- Holden – \$2.3M
- Paxton -- \$1.99 M
- Princeton -- \$3.3M (although verbally \$1.5 M)

The Committee agreed to continue discussion on the *Proposed FY05 Appropriation* under New Business.

C. Regional Agreement Amendment

1. Motion: To amend Section 9 ANNUAL REPORT of the Amended Wachusett Regional School District Agreement by deleting Section 9 in its entirety which reads:

Section 9 ANNUAL REPORT

The Regional District School Committee shall submit to each of the member towns an annual report containing a detailed financial statement and a statement showing the methods by which the annual charges assessed against each town were computed, together with such additional information relating to the operation and maintenance of such school as may be deemed necessary by the Regional District School Committee or by the Selectmen of any member town.

and by substituting therefore the following:

Section 9 ANNUAL REPORT

The Regional School District shall submit to each of the member towns an annual report containing a detailed financial statement and a statement showing the methods by which the annual charges assessed against each town were computed, together with such additional information relating to the operation and maintenance of the Regional School District as may be deemed necessary by the Regional School District or by the Selectmen of any member town.

and recommend said amendment for approval by the member towns.

(J Nunnari)
(C. Capparelli)

Roll call vote:

In favor:

Duncan Leith
Donald Benson
Elizabeth Brennan
Charles Capparelli
Clifford Connell

David Dickman
Patricia Gates
Mark James
John Kane
Alice Livdahl
John Nunnari
Norman Plourde
René Rodriguez
Julie Scott
Michael Sherman
Tammy Tod
Margaret Watson
Patricia Young

Opposed:
None

(Motion passed unanimously)

- D. Motion: To transfer \$45,613, the indirect cost value of State and Federal grants to professional development revolving account, delineated as follows:

140 Title II Part A Teacher Quality	\$ 11
160 Enhanced Education Through Technology	\$ 415
240 IDEA – Sped Entitlement	\$35,025
262 Early Childhood Education	\$ 2,011
302 Title V – Innovative Program	\$ 507
305 Title I	\$ 6,889
331 Safe & Drug Free Schools	\$ 755
Total	\$45,613

(J. Nunnari)
(C. Capparelli)

Roll call vote:

In favor:

Duncan Leith
Donald Benson
Elizabeth Brennan
Charles Capparelli
Clifford Connell
David Dickman
Patricia Gates
Mark James

John Kane
Alice Livdahl
John Nunnari
Norman Plourde
René Rodriguez
Julie Scott
Michael Sherman
Tammy Tod
Margaret Watson
Patricia Young

Opposed:

None

(Motion passed unanimously)

- E. Motion: To approve the Treasurer's recommendation for the sale by the District of a one-year \$556,000 Bond Anticipation Note (BAN) from Eastern Bank with a net interest cost (NIC) of 1.65%

(M. Sherman)

(J. Nunnari)

Director Soojian distributed the Treasurer's recommendation (attachment 8). Following inquiry, Comptroller Brennan reported that this is a renewable bond.

Roll call vote:

In favor:

Duncan Leith
Donald Benson
Elizabeth Brennan
Charles Capparelli
Clifford Connell
David Dickman
Patricia Gates
Mark James
John Kane
Alice Livdahl
John Nunnari
Norman Plourde
René Rodriguez
Julie Scott
Michael Sherman

Tammy Tod
Margaret Watson
Patricia Young

Opposed:
None

(Motion passed unanimously)

Motion: To extend the meeting for thirty minutes
(J. Scott)
(M. James)

Vote:

In favor:

Duncan Leith
Donald Benson
Elizabeth Brennan
Charles Capparelli
Clifford Connell
David Dickman
Patricia Gates
Mark James
John Kane
Alice Livdahl
John Nunnari
Norman Plourde
René Rodriguez
Julie Scott
Michael Sherman
Tammy Tod
Margaret Watson
Patricia Young

Opposed:
None

(Motion passed unanimously)

VI. Public Hearing

Alan Berg, Holden Finance Committee, asked if the Bond Anticipation Note had a premium. He also expressed concern regarding the limit of

gifts for elected officials in regards to a meeting with a state representative in Boston.

VII. Unfinished Business

There was no unfinished business.

VIII. New Business

Motion: To conduct an Impact Analysis based on a cut of \$1.14 million and to request that Member Towns submit Impact Statements to do the same

(D. Benson)
(C. Connell)

Director Soojian reported that Member Towns were requested to provide impact information on FY04 reductions and possible FY05 reductions and report those impacts at the March 11th Business/Finance Subcommittee meeting.

A friendly amendment was offered by Member Donald Benson and accepted by Member Clifford Connell to ask for two impact statements, one for \$600,000 in reductions and one for \$1.14 M in reductions.

The Committee was reminded that, pursuant to Massachusetts General Laws, the School Committee's appropriation, once adopted, cannot be raised but can be lowered.

Director Soojian advised the Committee that perhaps the Business/Finance Subcommittee could ask Member Towns if the towns would be willing to provide impact analysis and then once all agree, the request could be made to the Superintendent.

Motion: To extend the meeting fifteen minutes

(M. Sherman)
(D. Benson)

Vote:

In favor:

Duncan Leith
Donald Benson
Elizabeth Brennan
Charles Capparelli
Clifford Connell

David Dickman
Mark James
John Kane
Alice Livdahl
John Nunnari
Norman Plourde
René Rodriguez
Julie Scott
Michael Sherman
Tammy Tod
Margaret Watson

Opposed

Patricia Gates
Patricia Young

(Motion passed 16-2)

Motion: To move the question

(T. Tod)
(P. Young)

Roll call vote:

In favor:

Donald Benson
Clifford Connell
David Dickman
Patricia Gates
Alice Livdahl
John Nunnari
Norman Plourde
Tammy Tod
Patricia Young

Opposed:

Duncan Leith
Elizabeth Brennan
Charles Capparelli
Mark James
John Kane
René Rodriguez
Julie Scott

Michael Sherman
Margaret Watson

(Motion failed 9-9)

Further discussion was held.

Roll call vote on the Main Motion, which reads: To conduct an Impact Analysis based on cuts of \$600,000 and of \$1.14 million and to request that Member Towns submit Impact Statements to do the same

In favor:

Donald Benson
Clifford Connell
David Dickman
Patricia Gates
Alice Livdahl
John Nunnari
Tammy Tod
Patricia Young

Opposed:

Duncan Leith
Elizabeth Brennan
Charles Capparelli
Mark James
John Kane
Norman Plourde
René Rodriguez
Julie Scott
Michael Sherman
Margaret Watson

(Motion failed 8-10)

IX. Adjournment

Before accepting a motion to adjourn, Chair Duncan Leith commented that the high school boys basketball team won the District title this week. Also noted were all the accomplishments detailed in the Superintendent's report. Chair Leith commended the students for their accomplishments.

Motion: To adjourn

(C. Capparelli)
(N. Plourde)

Vote:

In favor:

Duncan Leith
Donald Benson
Elizabeth Brennan
Charles Capparelli
Clifford Connell
David Dickman
Patricia Gates
Mark James
John Kane
Alice Livdahl
John Nunnari
Norman Plourde
René Rodriguez
Julie Scott
Michael Sherman
Tammy Tod
Margaret Watson
Patricia Young

Opposed:

None

(Motion passed unanimously)

The meeting adjourned at 10:50 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Alfred D. Tutela, Ph.D.
Superintendent of Schools