

WACHUSETT REGIONAL SCHOOL DISTRICT

HOLDEN ♦ PAXTON ♦ PRINCETON ♦ RUTLAND ♦ STERLING

Minutes

Regular Meeting #1077, Wednesday, May 26, 2004  
7:00 PM

Modular Cafeteria  
Wachusett Regional High School

*Committee Members Present:*

Duncan Leith, Chair	Mark James
Donald Benson, Vice-chair	John Kane
Cynthia Bazinet	Alice Livdahl
Elizabeth Brennan	Norman Plourde
Charles Capparelli	René Rodriguez (7:25 PM)
Clifford Connell	Michael Sherman
Patricia Gates	Margaret Watson
David Gibbs	Patricia Young

*Committee Members Absent:*

Kelly Maxwell	John Nunnari
Natalie Mello	Cheryl Rauh

*Administration Present:*

Alfred D. Tutela, Ph.D., Superintendent of Schools  
Paul K. Soojian, Director of Operations  
Steven Penka, Director of Administrative Services  
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 7:17 PM.

I. Public Hearing

State Representative Lewis Evangelidis addressed the Committee and brought “good news”, reporting that education was a priority for the legislature. An unprecedented joint resolution was passed by the House and Senate agreeing on specific numbers for Chapter 70 Aid, Chapter 71 Regional Transportation Aid, and Circuit Breaker Special Education

reimbursement. These numbers are firm numbers and will not be debated by the two legislative bodies.

Regional transportation reimbursement was originally established by the State and was to be funded 100%. The reimbursement rate had tumbled in the last few years and Representative Evangelidis reported that the legislators representing regional school districts spoke up and convinced the leadership in both houses to increase regional transportation reimbursement. Representative Evangelidis was pleased to report a 44% increase in regional school transportation, or a \$480,000 increase to the District.

Representative Evangelidis reported that the introduction of Circuit Breaker last year was supposed to be a benefit for school districts but was not implemented as presented to the legislature and resulted in significant decreases in special education reimbursements, rather than increases. This year the legislature agreed upon a 70% increase or a \$505,400 increase to the District. Representative Evangelidis also reported that tuition rates will remain frozen, if the Senate version of the budget is adopted.

Representative Evangelidis reported that these funds were as guaranteed as could be. He suggested to the Committee that any veto of these funds by the Governor would be overridden. Representative Evangelidis committed voting to override the Governor's veto on these funds, a measure he does not often do.

Representative Evangelidis reported that the School Building Assistance program will be revised. The Governor proposed one plan and the House and Senate each proposed a variation of that plan. The House debated the plan last week and the House plan would use one cent from each dollar of sales tax. The SBA would also be transferred to the Treasurer's office, away from the Department of Education.

Representative Evangelidis concluded with reporting to the Committee that the recent preliminary recommendation in the Hancock case could be problematic for districts such as Wachusett. Funds are limited and if the SJC determines that poorer districts require increased funds, districts like Wachusett could receive less funding. All efforts to reform the Chapter 70 aid formula or to revise Education Reform in any way have been put on hold until the resolution of the Hancock case.

The Superintendent thanked Representative Evangelidis for addressing the Committee and reported to the Committee and the public that

Representative Evangelidis was there immediately when a moratorium was imposed on future building projects. Through his efforts and those of his area colleagues in the House and Senate, the high school project and the Rutland elementary school project are on the list of projects to be funded through the revised SBA program.

The Superintendent clarified to the Committee that the freeze on special education tuition rates is included in the Senate version of the budget but not the House version. Not until the Conference Committee has completed its work will the Committee know for sure whether rates will be frozen. If the rates are not frozen, the Superintendent is estimating a \$130,000 impact on the District's budget. Representative Evangelidis reported that his best advice to the Committee is that the rates would remain frozen.

The Superintendent also reported that there is a significant difference between the House and Senate versions of the budget regarding Charter School tuition reimbursement, a \$172,000 impact on the District should the Senate version be upheld. Representative Evangelidis requested that the Superintendent write him regarding this issue.

The Superintendent requested Representative Evangelidis's help with a situation the District is in with some special education students. The State will only reimburse through the Circuit Breaker program for students in DOE-approved programs. The District has several students in programs mandated by DOE arbitrators, which are not DOE-approved programs. The District, although ordered to keep the students in the particular program, is not able to apply for reimbursement. If the District's requests are rejected by the DOE, the impact would be approximately \$260,000.

Following inquiry, Representative Evangelidis restated that the additional funds for regional transportation reimbursement and Circuit Breaker reimbursement are as guaranteed as possible. Representative Evangelidis reported that the Committee should feel comfortable returning the additional funds to the communities.

Representative Evangelidis reported that the timeline for final approval of the FY05 State budget is moving along and he expects that the Conference Committee will begin work very shortly and that the budget would definitely be completed by the start of the Democratic National Convention, July 26<sup>th</sup>.

The Superintendent distributed a *Scorecard*, which itemizes the impact of various state fiscal year 2005 budget proposals (attachment 2). The Superintendent explained that the biggest difference between the House and Senate versions of the budget is Charter School reimbursement. The Superintendent advised the Committee that the State had estimated 50-55% reimbursement for Circuit Breaker and the Superintendent used the higher 55% in the calculations on the *Scoreboard*. The Superintendent also restated his concerns that the tuition rate freeze is not final and the reimbursement eligibility challenge of several special education students is not resolved. These are concerns that will definitely impact the FY05 budget if they are not resolved in the District's favor.

Representative Evangelidis reported that he believes that the School Committee and the communities are at a crossroads. He told the Committee that the budget deadlock could be resolved and that the Committee has the means to do so.

Edmund Benoit, Holden Finance Committee, read a prepared statement (attachment 3).

## II. Secretary's Report

- A. Approval of the Executive Session Minutes of the WRSD Committee held on March 29, 2004

Chair Duncan Leith reported that Member Natalie Mello has the Executive Session Minutes, which will be provided to the Committee for approval.

- B. Approval of 1076<sup>th</sup> Regular Meeting Minutes of the WRSD Committee held on April 26, 2004 – approved by consensus

- C. Approval of Special Meeting Minutes of the WRSD Committee held on April 29, 2004 -- approved by consensus

## III. Treasurer's Report/Financial Statements

Chair 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 Chair Duncan Leith.

#### IV. Committee Reports

Chair Duncan Leith reported that subcommittees are disbanded until new appointments are made. Chair Leith will send Members information regarding the purpose of each the subcommittees and ask for Members' preferences. School Council liaisons are also appointed by the Chair and preferences from Members would be appreciated.

- A. Student Advisory Committee (C. Brennan, R. Hinson, A. Vaillancourt)
- B. Management Subcommittee
- C. Education Subcommittee
- D. Business/Finance Subcommittee (N. Mello, Chair, C. Connell, J. Kane, D. Leith, M. Sherman, P. Young)

Chair Leith reported that the Business/Finance Subcommittee met on May 20, 2004. Since Business/Finance Subcommittee Chair Natalie Mello was not in attendance, she had requested that Member Michael Sherman report on the meeting. Member Sherman reported that discussion occurred regarding the increases in State funding and policies regarding the use of E&D funds.

Member Sherman reported that the Business/Finance Subcommittee, with a vote of 3-2, voted to recommend to the full Committee to reduce the Member Town assessments by \$900,000 and issue new assessment letters.

Motion: To reduce the Member Town assessments by \$900,000 and issue new assessment letters.

(M. Sherman)  
(A. Livdahl)

Chair Duncan Leith reported to the Committee what had happened and what was reported at Holden's Town Meeting. There were discussions held with the Holden Finance Committee and Holden Selectboard, which lead to a "deal" being struck to resolve the FY05 fiscal dilemma. Chair Leith apologized to the Committee that, as Chair, he did not come forward and clarify to the public that the Holden representatives did not have the

authority to negotiate and that any proposal must be brought to the full Committee for approval.

Vice-chair Donald Benson clarified for the record that it had been made clear to the Finance Committee and Selectboard that it was not a vote of the Committee and that the intent was to bring the proposal to the full Committee. A different impression was given to the Town Meeting body, that a deal had been finalized.

Member Michael Sherman reported that the Business/Finance Subcommittee recommendation did not include the use of E&D funds because the funds are not available until certified by the Department of Revenue.

Discussion continued on the motion, including whether the intent of the motion was to exclude the use of E&D funds.

Member Patricia Gates offered a friendly amendment which was accepted by Members Michael Sherman and Alice Livdahl to change the number from \$900,000 to \$1,000,000, and to add that said funds not to come from E&D

Modified Motion: To reduce the Member Town assessments by \$1,000,000, issue new assessment letters, and that said funds not to come from E&D.

Following suggestions by members that the athletic program had been reduced, Superintendent advised the Committee that the FY05 Appropriation has not been reduced to date and, therefore, athletics and extracurricular activities have not been reduced. The Superintendent restated that if reductions are necessary, the priorities of the School Committee would be used to determine the reductions. If the School Committee desires to change its priorities, it must be voted upon.

The Superintendent also advised the Committee that the information being discussed regarding the additional funds from the State is not new information. The information was provided to the Committee immediately upon receipt by the Superintendent, along with a recommendation from the Superintendent to pledge to Member Towns the increased funds to the Member Towns less any incremental costs. The Superintendent also advised the Committee that if he knew in

March when the budget was presented what he knows now, the special education tuition expense line item would have been increased to cover the anticipated special education tuition rates and the denial of reimbursement eligibility of certain students.

For the record, Vice-chair Donald Benson stated that it was not his intent to use E&D funds to reduce assessments to Member Towns. Vice-chair Benson also reported that the Holden Finance Committee voted at its May 25, 2004 meeting to not recommend reducing the municipal budget at all.

Motion: To table the motion, which reads, "To reduce the Member Town assessments by \$1,000,000, issue new assessment letters, and that said funds not to come from E&D."

(N. Plourde)

(M. James)

Roll call vote:

In Favor:

Duncan Leith  
Cynthia Bazinet  
Elizabeth Brennan  
Charles Capparelli  
David Gibbs  
Mark James  
John Kane  
Norman Plourde  
Margaret Watson  
Patricia Young

Opposed:

Donald Benson  
Clifford Connell  
Patricia Gates  
Alice Livdahl  
René Rodriguez  
Michael Sherman

(Motion passed 10-6)

Motion: That the Business/Finance Subcommittee meet with representatives from each Member Town to talk about the Town's commitment to a \$900,000 reduction in assessment and their support of the School Committee budget, without an

override should the reduction in assessment be reduced by that amount.

(M. Watson)

(M. James)

Discussion continued with concern being expressed that representatives from the Town of Holden did not accept this same offer prior to Holden's Annual Town Meeting. Concern was expressed that the idea of compromise does not seem to be part of the Member Towns' vocabulary. The position remains the same, the municipal budget is set and will not be reduced.

Members Charles Capparelli, Clifford Connell and Michael Sherman left the meeting at 9:15 PM.

Roll call vote:

Duncan Leith  
Cynthia Bazinet  
Elizabeth Brennan  
David Gibbs  
Mark James  
Norman Plourde  
René Rodriguez  
Margaret Watson  
Patricia Young

Opposed:

Donald Benson  
Patricia Gates  
John Kane  
Alice Livdahl

(Motion passed 9-4)

E. Building Committees

1. High School

Chair Duncan Leith reported that Committee Members will be receiving invitations to the groundbreaking for the high school project, which is scheduled for June 2, 2004 at 4:30 PM in the main parking lot.



Chair Leith also reported that many of the donations from Intel may not be able to be used because they are not energy efficient and, therefore, would affect the rate of reimbursement for the project.

The Superintendent reported that he had been told at a conference for school district leaders that the State has increased allowable square footage amounts substantially.

2. Rutland – Naquag/Central Tree
3. Rutland – Elementary School – John Nunnari

The Superintendent reported that the bids are out for the main contractor and for the subcontractors.

Members Charles Capparelli and Michael Sherman returned to the meeting at 9:18 PM.

4. Sterling

The Superintendent reported that work on the parking lot is to begin following the end of school in June.

- F. School Council Reports: Central Tree Middle School, Chocksett Middle School, Davis Hill Elementary School, Dawson Elementary School, Houghton Elementary School, Mayo Elementary School, Mountview Middle School, Naquag Elementary School, Paxton Center School, Thomas Prince School, and Wachusett Regional High School.

V. Superintendent's Report

- A. Discussion of Report

The Superintendent advised the Committee that invitations are being mailed to the School Committee for the high school graduation, which is taking place this year at the Centrum Centre. Committee Members are asked to respond so that seats can be reserved.

- B. School Improvement Plan Review Schedule

The Superintendent advised the Committee that Friday, June 11, 2004, has been designated as the day for School Improvement Plans to be reviewed by the School Committee. The Superintendent requested that School Committee Members sign up for available times to review the School Improvement Plans for the District schools (attachment 4). The Superintendent advised the Committee that there are thirty days from receipt of the plans for review. If the plans are not rejected, they are automatically accepted.

C. *Amended FY04 Appropriation*

Motion: To adopt the *Amended FY04 Appropriation*, as presented by the Superintendent (attachment 5).

(N. Plourde)

(M. James)

Roll call vote:

In Favor:

Duncan Leith  
Donald Benson  
Cynthia Bazinet  
Elizabeth Brennan  
Charles Capparelli  
David Gibbs  
Mark James  
Alice Livdahl  
Norman Plourde  
René Rodriguez  
Margaret Watson  
Patricia Young

Opposed:

Michael Sherman

Abstained:

Patricia Gates  
John Kane

(Motion failed 12-1-2, as two-thirds of the Committee Membership, or fourteen members, must approve an appropriation, per Massachusetts General Laws, Chapter 71, Section 16B)

Motion: To reconsider the prior motion

(J. Kane)

(R. Rodriguez)

Roll call vote:

In Favor:

Duncan Leith  
Donald Benson  
Cynthia Bazinet  
Elizabeth Brennan  
Charles Capparelli  
Patricia Gates  
David Gibbs  
Mark James  
John Kane  
Alice Livdahl  
Norman Plourde  
René Rodriguez  
Michael Sherman  
Margaret Watson  
Patricia Young

Opposed:

None

(Motion passed unanimously)

Roll call vote on motion, which reads: “To adopt the *Amended FY04 Appropriation*, as presented by the Superintendent”

Roll call vote:

In Favor:

Duncan Leith  
Donald Benson  
Cynthia Bazinet  
Elizabeth Brennan  
Charles Capparelli  
Patricia Gates  
David Gibbs  
Mark James  
John Kane  
Alice Livdahl  
Norman Plourde  
René Rodriguez

Margaret Watson  
Patricia Young

Opposed:  
Michael Sherman

(Motion passed 14-1)

- D. Request to Continue the Business/Finance Subcommittee for Approval of Warrants

Chair Duncan Leith agreed to temporarily appoint the same members to the Business/Finance Subcommittee, until appointments have been made for all subcommittees.

- E. DP3321.1 *Policy Relating to Education **Field Trips Involving Late Night or Overnight Travel***

Motion: To refer DP3321.1 *Policy Relating to Education **Field Trips Involving Late Night or Overnight Travel*** to the Education Subcommittee.

(D. Benson)  
(J. Kane)

Vote:

In Favor:

Duncan Leith  
Donald Benson  
Cynthia Bazinet  
Elizabeth Brennan  
Charles Capparelli  
Patricia Gates  
David Gibbs  
Mark James  
John Kane  
Alice Livdahl  
Norman Plourde  
René Rodriguez  
Michael Sherman  
Margaret Watson  
Patricia Young

Opposed:  
None

(Motion passed unanimously)

Following inquiry, the Superintendent reported that the Administrator of Special Education had resigned, with no reason given. The Superintendent was asked if the identity of the Holden resident who requested similar information to that requested by the Inspector General is public information. The Superintendent will report to the Committee in the next report if such information is public.

F. Middle/High School Graduation Assignments

Chair Duncan Leith requested volunteers to provide a brief greeting from the School Committee at the middle school graduations, which are scheduled for Friday, June 18, 2004, at each of the middle schools. The following Members are tentatively scheduled (attachment 6):

Central Tree Middle School	Elizabeth Brennan
Chocksett Middle School	David Gibbs
Mountview Middle School	Michael Sherman
Paxton Center School	Alice Livdahl
Thomas Prince School	Clifford Connell

Chair Duncan Leith will represent the School Committee at the Wachusett Regional High School graduation.

VI. Public Hearing

Kenneth O'Brien, Holden Selectboard, commended the Committee for the discussion regarding the FY05 budget. He reported that he ran for Selectboard as a supporter of schools. He reminded the Committee that this is a difficult financial time.

VII. Unfinished Business

VIII. New Business

A. Policy Recommendation from Member Margaret Watson

Member Margaret Watson presented the Committee with a proposed policy regarding the budget process (attachment 7).

Chair Duncan Leith referred the proposed policy to the Management Subcommittee.

Member Norman Plourde asked that information obtained through a survey from Houghton Elementary School Council to parents be referred to the Education Subcommittee (attachment 8).

IX. Adjournment

Motion: To adjourn

(C. Capparelli)  
(R. Rodriguez)

Roll call vote:

In Favor:

Duncan Leith  
Donald Benson  
Cynthia Bazinet  
Elizabeth Brennan  
Charles Capparelli  
Patricia Gates  
David Gibbs  
Mark James  
John Kane  
Alice Livdahl  
Norman Plourde  
René Rodriguez  
Michael Sherman  
Margaret Watson  
Patricia Young

Opposed:

None

(Motion passed unanimously)

The meeting adjourned at 9:52 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

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