

WACHUSETT REGIONAL SCHOOL DISTRICT COMMITTEE

HOLDEN ♦ PAXTON ♦ PRINCETON ♦ RUTLAND ♦ STERLING

Minutes

Special Meeting #248 Monday, March 3, 2003

7:00 PM

Media Center
Wachusett Regional High School

Committee Members Present:

| | |
|-----------------------------|-------------------------|
| John Rokicki, Chairman | Peter MacDonald |
| Duncan Leith, Vice-Chairman | Kelly Maxwell (7:45 PM) |
| Donald Benson | Natalie Mello |
| Charles Capparelli | John Nunnari |
| Clifford Connell | Julie Scott |
| Carol Esperti (7:36 PM) | Tammy Tod |
| Kimberly Ferguson | Margaret Watson |
| Patricia Gates | Patricia Young |
| Alice Livdahl | |

Committee Members Absent:

| | |
|---------------|------------|
| David Fedeli | Jane James |
| Jeffrey Gibbs | |

Administration Present:

Alfred D. Tutela, Ph.D., Superintendent of Schools
Paul K. Soojian, Director of Operations
Steven Penka, Director of Administrative Services
Philip E. Campbell, Director of Student/Information Services
Peter Brennan, Comptroller
Susan H. Sullivan, Executive Assistant to the Superintendent

Others Present:

Linda Lehans, *The Landmark*
Richard Halloran, *Worcester Telegram & Gazette*
Susan Staudaher, *Sterling Meetinghouse News*
Frederick Goodrich, Chair, Paxton Selectboard

John Malone, Paxton Selectboard
Scott Runstrom, Paxton Selectboard
Joseph Giotta, Chair, Holden Finance Committee
Alan Berg, Holden Finance Committee
Edmond Benoit, Holden Finance Committee
Rich Fenton, Chair, Paxton Finance Committee
Evelyn Lawler, Paxton Finance Committee
Joseph Becker, Rutland Finance Committee
Maureen Floryan, Holden
Larry Floryan, Holden
Elizabeth Brennan, Rutland
David Gibbs, Sterling

I. Call to Order

Chairman John Rokicki called the meeting to order at 7:05 PM.

II. School Committee Policy Discussion Regarding Budget Standards

The Superintendent reviewed the current status of the FY04 budget development with a PowerPoint presentation (attachment 1).

The Superintendent reviewed how the FY04 State Budget process works:

- The Governor submits his budget, called House 1
- The House deliberates and develops the House version
- The Senate deliberates and develops the Senate version
- A Joint Committee is established to develop a common budget (one year this was submitted as late as November; FY03 budget was adopted in July)
- House and Senate vote the budget
- The Governor can line item veto
- Two thirds of the House and Senate voting affirmatively is required to overturn the Governor's vetoes.

The Superintendent reviewed the reductions to the District in the Governor's House 1 budget: a reduction in Chapter 70 Aid, reduction in Minimum Local Contribution from member towns; and a reduction in regional transportation reimbursement. The Superintendent further explained that the School Committee must adopt a budget by March 31st in order for the Treasurer to send the assessment letters to the Member Towns. Regional school districts are prevented by law to increase their

budgets once adopted but the budgets can be decreased. The Superintendent recommended that the School Committee adopt a status quo budget (i.e. increases in *Salaries, Benefits and Insurance*, and *Special Education Tuitions* and separating out transportation), notifying the towns to take no action on the budget until further information is available.

The Superintendent reported that he had contacted two state senators concerning the possibility of expanding the early retirement for teachers. Teachers would be able to earn five more years of service, retire now, and the District would pay the difference between what the teacher would realize from retirement in five years compared to retirement this year. The savings to the District would be dramatic; one hundred employees would be eligible and perhaps fifty would take advantage of the offering. This will be a slow process due to the Legislative action needed but it could certainly help the District during the budget reduction process.

The Superintendent advised the Committee that a final budget is needed by June 15th as employees would get layoff notices by then.

Following inquiry, the Superintendent reported that House 1 does not include credit for excess debt to the Member Towns; therefore, there is no mechanism for the District to recover excess debt.

The Superintendent advised the Committee, following inquiry, that the student teacher ratios could be discussed if reduction in staff was necessary. Staffing is an administrative function but class size is a policy function.

The Superintendent recommended that transportation be treated as a separate portion of the budget and that the cost for transporting students who live less than one and one-half miles (or two miles, should the Committee desire) from their respective schools be requested from the towns as a separate warrant article. Discussion continued regarding the costs for transportation, implementation of a fee schedule similar to FY03, or presenting a separate warrant article to the Member Towns.

Motion: That the District provide transportation to those eligible students beyond two miles with transportation available to all students on a transportation fee basis to be paid by families electing to receive such services

(N. Mello)
(M. Watson)

Motion to Amend: To change two miles to 1.5 miles

(D. Benson)
(A. Livdahl)

Discussion continued. The Superintendent advised the Committee that if two miles were adopted, the School Committee policy must be changed.

Roll call vote:

In favor:

John Rokicki
Donald Benson
Clifford Connell
John Nunnari
Julie Scott

Opposed:

Duncan Leith
Charles Capparelli
Carol Esperti
Kimberly Ferguson
Patricia Gates
Alice Livdahl
Peter MacDonald
Kelly Maxwell
Natalie Mello
Tammy Tod
Margaret Watson
Patricia Young

(Motion failed 5-12)

Substitution Motion: That the District shall send to the towns a warrant article which requires the town to pay the state reimbursement rate for students living 1.5 miles from the school

(P. Gates)
(C. Esperti)

The substitution motion was withdrawn.

Member John Nunnari left the meeting at 9:18 PM

Roll call vote on the main motion: That the District provide transportation to those eligible students beyond two miles with transportation available to all students on a transportation fee basis to be paid by families electing to receive such services

In favor:

John Rokicki
Duncan Leith
Donald Benson
Charles Capparelli
Carol Esperti
Alice Livdahl
Natalie Mello
Julie Scott
Margaret Watson

Opposed:

Clifford Connell
Kimberly Ferguson
Patricia Gates
Peter MacDonald
Kelly Maxwell
Tammy Tod
Patricia Young

(Motion passed 9-7)

John Nunnari returned to the meeting at 9:36 PM.

Motion: That a status quo budget be prepared to present to the towns

(N. Mello)
(D. Leith)

Roll call vote:

In favor:

John Rokicki
Duncan Leith
Charles Capparelli
Clifford Connell
Carol Esperti
Kimberly Ferguson
Patricia Gates
Alice Livdahl
Peter MacDonald
Natalie Mello
John Nunnari
Margaret Watson
Patricia Young

Opposed:

Donald Benson
Kelly Maxwell
Julie Scott
Tammy Tod

(Motion passed 13-4)

Chairman John Rokicki reminded the Committee and the public that the budget adopted by the School Committee is preliminary as the Superintendent meets with town officials and more information is received from the State. Chairman Rokicki allowed public comment from one representative from each of the Member Towns present.

Scott Runstrom, Paxton Selectboard, spoke against the action of the School Committee on the budget.

Joseph Giotta, Chair, Holden Finance Committee, urged that all interested parties meet.

III. Executive Session

THE EXECUTIVE SESSION WAS NOT HELD.

IV. Adjournment

Motion: To adjourn

(C. Capparelli)
(J. Scott)

Vote:

In favor:

John Rokicki
Duncan Leith
Donald Benson
Charles Capparelli
Clifford Connell
Carol Esperti
Kimberly Ferguson
Patricia Gates
Alice Livdahl
Peter MacDonald
Kelly Maxwell
Natalie Mello
John Nunnari
Julie Scott
Tammy Tod
Margaret Watson
Patricia Young

Opposed:

None

(Motion passed unanimously)

Respectfully submitted,

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

ADT:ss

schoolcommittee/minutes