

Hamilton-Wenham Regional School District Committee

February 28, 2013

Minutes

CALL TO ORDER AND PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE:

Roger Kuebel opened the meeting at 7:00 p.m. in the Buker Multipurpose Room. The Committee and others present rose for the Pledge of Allegiance.

PRESENT:

Sean Condon, Bill Dery (7:05), Kym Donnellan, Roger Kuebel (chair), Barbara Lawrence, Sheila MacDonald, Ann Minois, Bill Wilson

ALSO PRESENT:

Dr. Michael Harvey, Superintendent; Dr. Celeste Bowler, Assistant Superintendent for Learning; Peter Gray, Assistant Superintendent for Finance and Administration; Kathy Harris, Director of Student Services

ABSENT:

No one

CITIZENS' CONCERNS:

Margo Killoran of Sagamore Farm Rd., Hamilton said the Special Education Parent Advisory Council (SEPAC) plans to appoint a new liaison to the School Committee and hopes to continue to work constructively with the district.

NEW BUSINESS:

R. Kuebel said this special meeting would address selected topics, not the comprehensive standard agenda that is customary at regular meetings.

Response to SEPAC questions by Kathy Harris

Director of Student Services K. Harris responded to questions that had been submitted in writing to the Committee at a previous meeting by SEPAC. (See minutes of Feb. 7, 2013.) She said HWRSD does not currently operate on a model of parallel instruction for regular education and special education, but has practiced inclusion for years; began training last summer to build teachers' skills, capacity and knowledge base to meet the needs of a wider range of students in a classroom; and does not intend to move to a model of full inclusion in the coming school year, but will phase out skills level classes gradually at the high school. She predicted it would take five years or longer to move to a model of full inclusion. She said a Best Buddies chapter has started at the high school. She spoke about development of procedures for teams and committees' work with students who need accommodations, and about positive feedback from parents of students who have moved from skills level to other academic tracks. She described the current special education administrative structure at the elementary, middle and high school levels, the planned consolidation of the existing middle school and high school special education administrators, and why she believes one administrator can effectively

supervise both schools' services. She discussed the district's current employment of a consultant about assistive technology; an existing employee's growing expertise in the area and the plan to have that staff member take on some responsibilities next year that until now the consultant has provided; and the likelihood that the state may within 3 to 5 years require certification of specialists in that field. She said staffing and budget reductions in 2013-14 would not eliminate any programs, and a program for high school age students with cognitive impairments, which was suspended for 2012-13 because no enrolled students required those services, would resume in 2013-14. She talked about the range of special education services the district offers and described programs as the sum of all the services that are specified in individual students' individualized education plans.

She and Dr. Harvey responded to Committee members' questions about the number of teachers who have undergone training so far in differentiated instruction; how many are to participate in programs this spring and summer; whether the district could require the rest of the district's faculty to do so; the impact of differentiated instruction on high-achieving students; and Best Buddies. Dr. Harvey said the new state evaluation system addresses teachers' proficiency in teaching all learners. K. Harris said research indicates all students perform better when all students are in classes together. At K. Harris's suggestion the Committee decided to stop using the acronym "SPED" and instead use the phrases *students with special needs* and *Special Education Department*.

Overview of FY14 Budget Document
by Kathy Harris

K. Harris reviewed data sheets with the Committee that display the 2013-14 proposed special education budget by state Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) categories. (The documents are appended to these minutes.) She said some of the \$912,000 budgeted reduction is due to staffing cuts, but some of the reduction is due to not listing in the FY14 budget some positions that are funded by grants, and therefore should not have been included in the FY13 general operating budget. She said evaluation is underway of whether the district needs all 45 teaching assistants now employed to support students with special needs. She responded to Committee members' questions about what drives decisions about the number of special education classroom teachers and specialists, and the reduction of staff in 2013-14 by one high school special educator and 1 administrator. She and Dr. Harvey said that proposed special education spending in 2013-14 in proportion to the total district budget, roughly 25% of the total budget, is in line with other districts.

Discussion and Vote Regarding
Use of Certified E&D Funds to
Reduce the FY14 Budget Assessment

P. Gray detailed the Excess and Deficiency balance certified by the state several days prior to this meeting, which projects an FY13 excess of \$896,187 that when added to the net balance expected to remain in the current year's E&D account would total \$1,493,664 at the close of FY13. The Committee discussed whether to return some of these funds

to the Towns, and if so, when, and what sum. Discussion touched on topics including the Committee's previous decision to target an E&D balance of 3 percent; anticipated and unanticipated expenses for which E&D funds might be used; future deliberate budgeting to provide 3% E&D at year's end; and the procedure for requesting additional funds from the Towns if E&D funds are insufficient to meet unanticipated expenses.

LARRY SWARTZ MADE A MOTION THAT THE HW REGIONAL SCHOOL COMMITTEE AMEND THE FY14 NET ASSESSMENT BY UTILIZING \$450,000 OF EXCESS AND DEFICIENCY FUNDS TO REDUCE THE NET ASSESSMENT TO THE TOWNS OF HAMILTON AND WENHAM TO A COMBINED TOTAL AMOUNT OF \$ \$23,864,256. THE DISTRICT TREASURER SHALL DETERMINE THE AMOUNT APPORTIONED TO EACH TOWN AND SHALL CERTIFY SUCH AMOUNT TO THE TREASURERS OF EACH TOWN. KYM DONNELLAN SECONDED THE MOTION.

Richard Boroff of Moynihan Rd., Hamilton requested permission to speak from the audience, and was recognized by the chair. He said the Committee's fiscal responsibility is to save funds for district use in an emergency; he urged the Committee not to return funds to the Towns if E&D would fall below 3%.

THE MOTION PASSED 7-2-0-0.

Communications Plan for SC-Voted
FY14 Budget

K. Donnellan said she and Dr. Harvey agreed the district's former practice of publishing "The Connection" to disseminate information about proposed budgets was financially inefficient. She and Dr. Harvey described the plan to send postcards soon to all residents to inform them how to view budget documents online, or printed copies at the library, district office, town halls and schools. They briefly outlined plans for news releases and budget presentations to community groups.

OLD BUSINESS:

Discussion of Next Steps for
Facilities Master Plan

R. Kuebel recapped the steps to date regarding a facilities master plan. He said all Committee members agree something should be done, but do not yet agree on how broad a plan should be. Members discussed topics including the possible nature and features of such a plan; its relation to a strategic plan; who should draft a request for quotes (RFQ); and the appropriate timing and extent of Town officials' involvement. Dr. Harvey said the strategic plan he is now crafting would be completed before the facilities master plan, and that he thinks that although there would be overlap, both are important; he said a longer-range facilities master plan would be helpful in the development of future 5-year strategic plans.

Hamilton Selectman Jeff Stinson spoke from the audience and said the districts' independent development of a facilities master plan is causing tension; he said the two Towns and the district would have overlapping master plans.

The Committee informally agreed that K. Donnellan, A. Minois, B. Dery and Dr. Harvey would work together to draft revised goals for a facilities master plan.

ADJOURNMENT:

KYM DONNELLAN MADE A MOTION THAT THE HAMILTON-WENHAM REGIONAL SCHOOL COMMITTEE VOTE TO ADJOURN. SHEILA MACDONALD SECONDED THE MOTION. THE MOTION PASSED 8-1-0-0.

The meeting adjourned at 9:43 p.m.

**DOCUMENTS AND EXHIBITS
USED AT THIS MEETING:**

Projected Excess & Deficiency Balance June 30, 2013, updated version dated Feb. 28, 2013 (1 page)
Suggested Plan to communicate Superintendent of Schools budget as SC approved, undated (1 page)
HWRSD Special Education Budget by DESE Categories (1 page)
HWRSD FY14 Budget District Special Education Programs dated March 1, 2013 (2 pages)

Respectfully submitted,
Ann Sierks Smith, School Committee recording secretary