

A Special Meeting of the Regional School District 14 Board of Education was held on Tuesday, June 12, 2012 at Nonnewaug High School, 5 Minortown Road, Woodbury, Connecticut.

Present: Superintendent Jody Ian Goeler; Board members George Bauer, John Chapman, Maryanne Van Aken, Sophiezzane Bartlett, John Swendsen and Gary Suslavich; Director of Finance and Operations Jim Reese; Administrators Andrew O'Brien, Melinda McKenna, MaryLou Torre, Kim Culkin, Eric Bergeron, Bill Nemec and Jeff Turner; and Board Clerk Debra Carlton

Absent: Board members Charles Cosgriff and Pamela Zmek

Audience included: three members of the press and about ten members of the community

**I. Call to Order**

Mr. Bauer called the meeting to order at 6:35 p.m.

**II. Discussion of 2012-13 Budget/Reductions**

Mr. Goeler thanked his leadership team for their attendance and work behind the scenes this budget season. The restoration of the director of curriculum position, he realizes, has become a lightning rod and although it is necessary to align the district with state standards and to have each grade level build on the previous one, and the lack of that certainly affects students negatively and does not serve them well educationally, he offered a proposal in lieu of the position: Mr. Goeler proposed utilizing the 4 literacy specialists already on staff to develop model units of instruction, as well as to build capacity in teaching staff, and then to backfill with more literacy tutors in order to free up the literacy specialists to do this work. Consultants would also be utilized to properly train teachers. By reducing the budget by the amount earmarked for the curriculum director, but then adding funds for tutors and consultants, the savings would be about \$43,000. The elimination of the 0.5 FTE science teacher for the agriscience program, which would instead be funded by anticipated grant money, and eliminating \$30,000 that was viewed by a board member as money that could be found in a variety of line items in the budget, would bring the total budget to a 1.53% increase over last year. Without the additional tutors and consultant fees, the increase would be 1.17%. Mr. Goeler recommends the scenario that would result in a 1.53%.

Considerable discussion followed.

Ms. Bartlett noted that all districts need curriculum directors but only at risk districts receive funding for them. She supports Mr. Goeler's commitment to that position, as well as his solution in the absence of one.

Mr. Chapman thought his proposal was a good start for discussion. Mr. Bauer agreed that it's a good start but not a low enough for public support. As much as he supports the curriculum position, he believes lower than 1.17% is needed for the budget to pass.

Mr. Suslavich asked what percentage of time literacy specialists would do this work, and was told not more than 50%. He felt there had to be a better way if the savings is only \$43,000 and asked if the literacy specialists are the right group to be doing the work. With declining enrollment, perhaps the assistant principals could at a 40% level.

Mr. O'Brien felt other initiatives require the attention of administrators and that the literacy specialists were chosen because they have the necessary skill set until a curriculum director can be acquired.

Mr. Suslavich felt that, at WMS, the number of students and teachers there suggests that the assistant principal could do this work. He also asked the function of librarians, whom he considers to be quite expensive. Principals explained the various roles and duties of those professionals.

Mr. Chapman's only conclusion is that the budget has not passed and has heard 3 possible reasons for that. He feels that not much has been done with curriculum in 2011-12 and felt Mr. Goeler's proposal is not a bad 1 year solution, but asked if it is sustainable or a quick fix. He fears moving backward and is not happy with the proposal as a long term approach, and believes it could be seen as slow and fractured. Coherence K-12 requires administrative oversight. He asked what would have to happen to get to zero.

Mr. Reese explained that an approximate \$450,000 reduction would get us to zero and, as he has explained previously that the majority of the budget consists of salary, so reductions of that magnitude would certainly involve

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staff. Also, eliminating the requested psychologist will simply result in more outside consultant fees. If the music teacher is eliminated, which was added to support the new strings program, then the program would also go unless the music foundation can continue to fund it. If elementary teachers are cut, class sizes will go up. Electives and AP course offerings at NHS would have to be cut. Fuel and electricity have already been pushed down. It could be that clubs and non-varsity sports teams would have to be cut, too. To reach \$450,000 in budget reductions, he said, very significant cuts would have to be made.

Mr. Chapman is not in favor of a budget that will fail, but curriculum is a cornerstone, it is in our mission statement, and if we turn away from curriculum this will harm the district. He accepts the drop-back proposal but does not see it as efficient.

Mr. Swendsen believes cuts need to be made to pass the budget; supports the administration's recommendation, knowing it is a band aid for now. Once the budget passes, the public will need to be educated on the importance of the curriculum position.

Ms. Van Aken also considers the solution a band aid. If the community cannot afford what is being asked, she suggests looking at class sizes. Maybe taking the added grade 5 teacher out at MES but then also taking one at BES because equity in class sizes between the 2 schools was a promise that was made. She felt WMS needed to be looked at, as well.

Mr. Suslavich spoke of estimated surplus, the burner conversion project, and concluded that even a 0% budget is effectively a 3% increase. He stressed that it is both curriculum and instruction that is needed. He said that, effectively, an \$880,000 increase over last year's budget will be moved into the budget and asked if that is not enough.

There was discussion between Mr. Suslavich and Mr. Reese about how Mr. Suslavich's numbers were reached.

Mr. Goeler reiterated that the current level of athletics, music, arts, etc. cannot be maintained at 0%, and Mr. Reese agreed. Mr. Suslavich said that the community is asking for a 0. Mr. Goeler said that we owe it to the community to tell them what that will cause, adding that he cannot support it.

Mr. Suslavich recommended no action tonight and felt the Board should charge the Superintendent with showing what cuts would be involved in a 0% budget.

### **III. Privilege of the Floor**

Jim Crocker, Sr., Woodbury, spoke of the district's ranking among schools in CT, feeling that this is a serious performance issue and that the decline in student test scores has been going on for ten years. He believes the community needs to know that the district's scores are this low; he believes budgets are budgets and that on an ongoing basis we should find out what we are spending money on and sacred cows need to be dealt with.

Wayne Anderson, Woodbury, said the important number now is 0%. If the priority of the board is a curriculum director, show 0% with a curriculum director and what the cuts would be. The pervasive feeling is that it needs to be 0%.

Candace Fernandes, Woodbury, said that, as a parent, she did not know whether she could support a budget without a curriculum director.

Dave Deakin, Bethlehem, agreed that the curriculum director position had become a lightning rod issue, but believes a 1-1.25% increase could pass. He spoke of the reconfiguration of the elementary schools and that this had put the district on a path, a trend toward improvement. Conversation about this need to happen again and the trend of those 4 years needs to be studied because it will show that the administration was on the right track.

Joe Mylie, Woodbury, asked for transparency in the budget, also noting that the agriscience issue has been bugging the towns for years. It needs to be known whether that program costs, breaks even, or makes money and then allow taxpayers to make an informed decision about whether they want it. He asked for building based budgets and also felt transportation is an area of potential savings. He sees buses half empty. He suggests filling them up and letting them run for 50-60 minutes.

**IV. Revision of 2012-13 Budget**

Mr. Bauer suggested waiting for more information on what 0% looks like.

Mr. Chapman asked for several variants: 0%, 1%, 1.2%

Mr. Suslavich asked to have athletics broken out and to have a student activity fee revisited.

Mr. Chapman asked that the risks be identified, as well, as we move closer to 0%.

Ms. Van Aken does not want a 0% with a curriculum coordinator to go down because that would put the board in a difficult spot. She also noted that a lack of cohesion, K-12, is part of the reason for the rankings referred to earlier. Improvements, she said, do not come cheap.

The board agreed to meet on Thursday, June 14<sup>th</sup> at 6:00 pm with the aim of having a third referendum prior to the end of June.

**V. Adjournment**

Mr. Bauer requested a *motion to adjourn*, entered by Ms. Van Aken, seconded by Mr. Suslavich.

**Motion carried 6-0.**

The Special Board of Education meeting adjourned at 8:24 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

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John E. Chapman, Secretary  
Regional School District 14 Board of Education

Recorded and filed subject to Board of Education approval by: Debra W. Carlton, Board Clerk, 6/13/12