

A District Meeting-Public Hearing of the Regional School District 14 Board of Education was held on Monday, April 6, 2009, at 7:00 p.m. in the Nonnewaug High School Auditorium, 5 Minortown Road, Woodbury, Connecticut.

Present were Board Chairperson Linda Bulvanoski, and Board Members Scott Baider, Deborah Corsico, Charles Cosgriff, Monica Gati, Carla Juhas, Stephen Paluskas and Stephen Sordi. Also present, Superintendent of Schools Robert Cronin; Director of Finance and Operations Jay Hubelbank; Director of Special Services Christopher Quirk; Principals Dawn Hochsprung, Alice Jones and Melinda McKenna, Interim Principal Kimberly Gallo; newspaper reporters and about 10 members of the community.

I. CALL TO ORDER

Ms. Bulvanoski called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.

II. APPOINTMENT OF MODERATOR

Ms. Corsico requested a motion to appoint a moderator. Mr. Paluskas made a *motion to appoint Michelle Ecsedy moderator of the Budget Hearing*. Mr. Cosgriff seconded the motion, and the motion carried 8-0.

III. APPOINTMENT OF MEETING CLERK BY THE MODERATOR

Ms. Ecsedy appointed Debra Carlton to serve as meeting clerk.

IV. CALL OF THE MEETING

Ms. Ecsedy noted the following call: To present and receive questions about the Regional School District 14 Board of Education's proposed budget for 2009-10 in the amount of \$29,777,916.

V. PRESENTATION OF THE REGION 14 BUDGET FOR THE 2009-2010 SCHOOL YEAR

Dr. Cronin made some opening statements regarding the budget including the need for current curriculum documents, use of curriculum and evaluation of its success, providing professional development and using all resources to meet students' needs. In preparing the budget he worked with assumptions, among them that economic conditions have worsened, existing programs and contractual obligations must be maintained, class size guidelines will be followed, curriculum must be continuously improved, strides in technology will be continued and developed along with teaching and learning, and plans for improvement of facilities will be continued. His priorities include maintaining programs and strengthening them with the use of coordinators, funding PD at its present level, purchasing world language textbooks for the middle school, restoring the guidance position at WMS and funding capital improvements. To bring more resources directly to the classroom he wants to add a 7-12 english/social studies coordinator and a 7-12 math/science coordinator as well as an elementary math specialist.

Mr. Hubelbank then gave a thorough explanation of the budget, prefacing that by saying that the administrators had agreed to an amendment to their contract which would result in no pay increase for next year, and bringing the budget increase down to 0.87%.

VI. PUBLIC COMMENT

Ms. Ecsedy invited public comment, asking that each person have an opportunity to speak once before anyone took subsequent turns.

Susan Scherf, Bethlehem, commented on decreasing population, less teachers, and calculated the money saved by cutting staff to be \$695,000; yet these savings were not seen in the budget. Dr. Cronin responded that the costs savings are, in fact, reflected in this budget.

Gary Suslavich, Woodbury, asked about the number of staff that would be eliminated and the unemployment compensation involved in that. He also asked why the budget makes a distinction between stimulus and grant funding.

Mr. Hubelbank explained that citizens vote on that which is funded through the towns.

Mr. Suslavich asked if the security system was installed yet and was told that the funding had been held up and the money had been received this past Friday. Bidding will begin soon, as will the work. Mr. Suslavich felt it irresponsible not to have done that work if it had been deemed necessary. He also complained about diesel/fuel oil costs, suggested using a different consortium, and was told that since the 1990s, this consortium has saved the region money over time.

Pam Gengenbach had questions regarding per pupil cost as well as about the speech therapist and psychologists and whether they would work with preschoolers. She was told most of their time is spent in the middle/high grades. She feels the cost estimate for moving the preschool covers staff, but that materials, playground, etc. could eat up the savings. It was explained that the region paid for supplies at the other site, too, and that transportation and play equipment have been considered. Mr. Quirk added that the region is bringing much of the supplies it owns with it to MES. Ms. Gengenbach argued that a peer group doubling its size would require more supplies, and she was told that the tuition cost includes consideration of that and that the region is comfortable with cost estimates. She asked if transportation costs for the preschool are true costs and was told they are. She questioned BoE public relations increases and it was explained that the mailed publications and newspaper features are intended to reach those who do not have children in the schools but who are vital for supporting public education. She was assured that the public reaction to these has been favorable.

Tom Arras, Woodbury, raised questions about agriscience figures, out-of-district tuition, and a perceived shortfall. Mr. Hubelbank reiterated that direct costs of the agriscience program are approximately \$1.7 million and revenue is approximately \$2.3 million.

Duncan McDougal, Woodbury, questioned the cutting of paraprofessional staff, understanding aides to be required by law. Dr. Cronin explained changes in legislation calling for an inclusive model as opposed to pull out or one-to-one services. Mr. McDougal felt a line item budget would show distinction between floaters and specific assignments. He complained about reconfiguration as intended to group students together better; yet the preschool will be housed in the school with grades 3-5. Also, he feels cost effectiveness has not been shown. Dr. Cronin reminded him that he has provided monthly progress reports on the transition of this program into the schools, to which Mr. McDougal countered that the public has not been informed. Dr. Cronin noted that his reports have been given during public monthly meetings of the Board. Mr. McDougal said that an exorbitant fee was quoted him for the documents he wishes to review. Mr. Hubelbank noted that

April 6, 2009

the document Mr. McDougal requested is 60 pages long and would involve a fee to reproduce, which is why he has been offered the opportunity to review it at central office.

Art McNally, Woodbury, thanked the Board for working to reduce the budget by about \$25,000 because he feels more work will need to be done to lower it. He recommended not removing the portables at MES for the \$50,000 cost savings there. He spoke of assessed values of homes, inaccurate re-evaluations, and that he is personally suffering in this economy. He believes teachers should also take a pay freeze. Mr. Hubelbank disagreed with the idea of leaving the portables, as they are leaking, rotting, dangerous and a safety hazard.

Ms. Scherf asked the cost of football compared to other sports and was told it requires more coaches, totaling approximately \$14,000. The booster club and gridiron club pick up all supplies, equipment, and travel. The region pays for the ambulance to be present at games.

Ms. Gengenbach asked if landscaping the area where the portables are removed will be part of preschool costs, as she supposed that area would become a play area for them. Mr. Hubelbank estimated grading and seeding to run about \$10,000. She personally took a pay cut and was glad to see the administrator pay freeze. She thinks technology costs are too high, and Mr. Hubelbank explained that the region's current technology contracts expire in 2011. She suggested low renewals to which Mr. Hubelbank agreed. She questioned 62% increase in athletic transportation; and Mr. Hubelbank explained the increase on transportation was flat, with the increase on athletic.

Mr. Suslavich asked about possible salary freezes with other groups, such as First Student. Mr. Hubelbank agreed to look into that possibility. Dr. Cronin noted that the teachers' union had been approached and he awaits their reply. Mr. Suslavich asked why legal fees remain high. It was noted that the case is still in court with no end in sight, and custodians and nurses will negotiate this year. He asked about a 17% increase in coaching salaries. It was noted that a football coach was added; in addition, the athletic director's stipend is now reflected in the athletic, not teachers, budget. He also asked about differing numbers for student decreases and was told that pg. 5 includes enrollment for Bethlehem and Woodbury.

Mr. Arras asked which 2 of the 7 portables at MES were not slated for removal and was told the 2 nearest Main Street. He asked if the price includes asbestos removal and was told it does. Mr. Arras complained that the teachers' negotiations process was not in keeping with state statute. He was told statute requires the invitation for an initial meeting, which was made and which both towns declined; however, both towns were represented at all negotiations sessions.

Mr. McNally again thanked the Board for the hearing, and for agreeing to meet with the WRTC tomorrow evening. He warned against accepting stimulus money to add staff as he feels there are strings attached to that money and that the money is not "real." He feels commitments made to full time employees will be hard to undo.

Mr. McDougal complained that the boards of finance were not informed of budget preparation meetings and was told they were both informed of and in attendance at such meetings.

Mr. Suslavich asked about excess cost reimbursement. He was told that the state can determine, mid year, not to reimburse 100% of excess costs. Therefore, the region is budgeting 75% of what it should get to be cautious. He asked about travel/conference and was told by Dr. Cronin that generally certified personnel participate in conferences related to district initiatives and return and pass the information on to others. There are also required conferences related to OSHA and other information sources. Asked about dues, it was explained that the region participates in CABE and Education Connection, among other educational groups. Mr. Suslavich recommended keeping the portables and not allowing them to deteriorate; in case the reconfiguration ruling makes them necessary again.

VIII. ADJOURNMENT

Feeling that the few audience members had had ample time for all questions, and recognizing that a Board meeting was to follow, Ms. Ecsedy closed public comment.

Ms. Bulvanoski thanked her for her moderation of the hearing, and requested a motion to adjourn.

Mr. Paluskas made *a motion to adjourn*, seconded by Mr. Baider, and the **motion carried 8-0**.

The budget hearing adjourned at 9:10 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Debra W. Carlton
Meeting Clerk