

WACHUSETT REGIONAL SCHOOL DISTRICT

HOLDEN ♦ PAXTON ♦ PRINCETON ♦ RUTLAND ♦ STERLING

Minutes

Regular Meeting #1328

Thursday, May 23, 2019
7:00 PM

Media Center
Wachusett Regional High School
1401 Main Street, Holden

Wachusett Regional School District Committee

Kenneth Mills, Chair	Robert Imber
Christina Smith, Vice-chair	Laura Kirshenbaum
Melissa Ayala	Linda Long-Bellil
Scott Brown	Amy Michalowski
Stephen Godbout	Karl Ottmar
Maleah Gustafson	Linda Woodland
Sherrie Haber	Adam Young

Committee Members Absent:

Michael Dennis	Benjamin Mitchel
Anthony DiFonso	Asima Silva
Sarah LaMountain	Megan Weeks

Committee Members Participating Remotely:

Matthew Lavoie

Administration Present:

Darryll McCall, Superintendent of Schools
Robert Berlo, Deputy Superintendent
Daniel Deedy, Director of Business and Finance
Jeff Carlson, Director of Human Resources
Rebecca Petersen, Executive Secretary to the Superintendent

Student Representatives Present:

Rianna Massoni-Nesman

Others present, who desired to be recorded as present (see attached Attendance Sheet – attachment 1).

Chair Mills called the meeting to order at 7:13 PM. He announced the meeting was not being boardcast live or streaming, but will be available on HCTV in the future. Chair Mills read aloud the Guidelines for Public Hearing.

7:15 PM Vice-chair Smith left the table.

I. Public Hearing

Lauren Salmon-Garrett, Holden resident, read a prepared statement (attachment 2).

7:18 PM Vice-chair Smith returned to the table.

Heidi Lahey, Holden resident, WRSD teacher, and WREA President, read a prepared statement (attachment 3).

Betsy Wood, Holden resident and WRSD teacher, addressed the School Committee.

II. Chair's Opening Remarks

Chair Mills welcomed six Science Seminar students and recent science fair participants, along with WRHS teachers Beth Litterio-Foster, Nicholas Guerin, and Daniel Whitmore, to the meeting. Ms. Litterio-Foster thanked the School Committee for inviting them to the meeting, seconded by Mr. Guerin and Mr. Whitmore. After brief comments about Science Seminar, the students were invited to the podium to speak about their projects.

7:29 PM Vice-chair Smith left the table.

- Sophomore Gwyneth MacDonough - *The Effect of Almonds and Extra-Virgin Olive Oil on The Memory of Drosophila*
- Sophomore Alexa Volfson - *The Effect of Propolis on E. coli*
- Sophomore Eileen Xu - *Testing the Inhibitory Effects of Straw on Algae*
- Sophomore Elise Mizerak- *The Effect of Lithium on Learning and Memory in Drosophila*
- Junior Rianna Massoni-Newman - *The Effects of Cell Phone Electromagnetic Radiation on the Longterm Memory of C. elegans*
- Sophomore Katherine Schmalz - *The Effect of Pre-adult Malnutrition on Offspring Learning and Memory*

At the conclusion of the students' addresses, they were given a hearty round of applause. Members Young and Michalowski spoke about Science Seminar, and Superintendent McCall congratulated the students on their recent successes.

7:55 PM the students and three teachers left the meeting.

Chair Mills welcomed the new members to the table, and asked all members to introduce themselves. Chair Mills asked members to submit their preference sheets indicating their interest in serving on subcommittees and he also requested members willing to represent the School Committee on school councils to indicate that interest.

III. Student Representatives' Reports

In Student Representative Ferdinand's absence, Student Representative Massoni-Nesman reported D. J. will be attending Howard University in the fall. She also reported the WRHS graduation will take place June 6, 2019 at the DCU Center, that A.P. exams and MCAS testing have concluded, spring concerts were recently performed, and she thanked the Committee for the opportunity to serve as a Student Representative. Rianna was given a hearty round of applause.

IV. Superintendent's Report

A. Discussion of Report

Superintendent McCall thanked the Member Towns for supporting the FY20 budget, which was approved at the five Annual Town Meetings. He also thanked teachers and staff for their support and for attendance at the ATMs. Superintendent McCall spoke briefly about the budget.

Superintendent McCall reported on the search for the next Administrator of Special Education. He reported he recently met with a candidate brought forward by the Search Committee and he anticipates bringing his final recommendation for appointment of the next Administrator of Special Education before the full School Committee at the June meeting.

Superintendent McCall spoke of parity across the District when it comes to staffing. He explained that District and school administration keep class size and enrollment numbers at the forefront when planning staffing. He reported he and Central Office administrators are working on a staffing plan.

8:14 PM Vice-chair Smith returned to the table.

Chair Mills opened the floor to discussion. Director Deedy approached the podium.

Superintendent McCall, with Director Deedy at the podium, spoke about Medicaid reimbursement and discrepancies brought to the attention of District administration.

8:17 PM Member Lavoie's remote connection was discontinued.

At Superintendent McCall's invitation, Director Deedy gave a brief explanation about Medicaid reimbursement, Mass Health, and "moment in time" study submissions. He reported there is a discrepancy with FY18 Medicaid reimbursement to the District, and the District is awaiting confirmation on the exact impact and how this discrepancy will be addressed.

Chair Mills read a statement from Business/Finance Subcommittee Chair Dennis, who was not in attendance at the meeting.

Superintendent McCall explained that part of the cost of implementation of tuition-free, full-day kindergarten, approximately \$400,000, will be covered by the "breakage" between salaries of teachers who will be retiring (on the upper end) and the salaries of new hires (on the lower

end). Discussion and explanations continued, with questions being asked and concerns being expressed.

8:28 PM Vice-chair Smith left the meeting.

At Member Michalowski's inquiry, Superintendent McCall spoke about staffing at Chocksett Middle School and Central Tree Middle School, in light of recent reports that teaching positions were being cut at these schools. Director Carlson approached the podium, and spoke about the kindergarten position at Mayo Elementary School and that the position will be re-posted.

8:45 PM Member Godbout left the meeting.

Discussion about Medicaid reimbursements, the role UMass plays in submitting information on behalf of the District for Medicaid reimbursement, and how the discrepancy will be addressed continued. Superintendent McCall reported on several recent "moment in time" training sessions provided to WRSD staff by UMass staff and that additional training sessions will be scheduled.

8:52 PM Member Young left the table.

Much discussion took place, with many members of the Committee and Superintendent McCall participating in the discussion.

8:55 PM Member Young returned to the table.

9:10 Member Imber left the table.

Member Michalowski asked if a staff position could be added, a position specifically dedicated to overseeing Medicaid reimbursement submissions, documentation, and paperwork.

9:13 Member Imber returned to the table.

Discussion around the table continued, with many members and the Superintendent participating.

B. Recommendations Requiring Action by the School Committee

1. Motion: To accept the *Annual Financial Statements and Governance Letter* prepared by District Auditors Melanson Heath for fiscal year ended June 30, 2018.
(R. Imber)
(L. Long-Bellil)

At the podium, Director Deedy spoke about the FY18 annual audit conducted by District Auditors Melanson Heath, and reported on audit findings and the District's plan to address these findings.

Vote:

In favor:

Kenneth Mills
Melissa Ayala
Scott Brown
Maleah Gustafson
Sherrie Haber
Robert Imber
Laura Kirshenbaum
Linda Long-Bellil
Amy Michalowski
Karl Ottmar
Linda Woodland
Adam Young

Opposed:

None

The motion was unanimously approved.

2. Motion: To authorize the transfer of \$100,000 from the Salaries and Stipends Appropriation to the Benefits and Insurance Appropriation

(A. Young)

(S. Brown)

Vote:

In favor:

Kenneth Mills
Melissa Ayala
Scott Brown
Maleah Gustafson
Sherrie Haber
Robert Imber
Laura Kirshenbaum
Linda Long-Bellil
Amy Michalowski
Karl Ottmar
Linda Woodland
Adam Young

Opposed:

None

The motion was unanimously approved.

3. Motion: To authorize transfer of \$20,000 from the Transportation Appropriation to the Instructional Support Appropriation

(A. Young)

(S. Brown)

Vote:

In favor:

Kenneth Mills
Melissa Ayala
Scott Brown
Maleah Gustafson
Sherrie Haber
Robert Imber
Laura Kirshenbaum
Linda Long-Bellil
Amy Michalowski
Karl Ottmar
Linda Woodland
Adam Young

Opposed:

None

The motion was unanimously approved.

4. Motion: To approve the 2019-2020 School Committee Meeting Schedule
(R. Imber)
(A. Young)

Before voting on the motion, the schedule for the July meeting was discussed. Due to action necessary to close-out the fiscal year on or before July 15th of each year, it is recommended the July regular School Committee meeting be scheduled in advance of July 15th, and conducting the meeting on Tuesday, July 9, 2019, was considered the better option. The meeting schedule to be voted on will reflect the Committee's recommendation the July meeting be scheduled for July 9, 2019.

Vote:

In favor:

Kenneth Mills
Melissa Ayala
Scott Brown
Maleah Gustafson
Sherrie Haber
Robert Imber
Laura Kirshenbaum
Linda Long-Bellil
Amy Michalowski
Karl Ottmar
Linda Woodland
Adam Young

Opposed:
None

The motion was unanimously approved.

5. Motion: To approve the 2018 Annual Report

(A. Young)
(S. Brown)

Vote:

In favor:

Kenneth Mills
Melissa Ayala
Scott Brown
Maleah Gustafson
Sherrie Haber
Robert Imber
Laura Kirshenbaum
Linda Long-Bellil
Amy Michalowski
Karl Ottmar
Linda Woodland
Adam Young

Opposed:
None

The motion was unanimously approved.

V. Unfinished Business

There was no unfinished business brought before the Committee.

VI. Secretary's Report

A. Approval of #1327 Regular Meeting Minutes of the Wachusett Regional School District Committee held on April 29, 2019

Motion: To approve minutes of the regular meeting of the WRSDC held on April 29, 2019.

(S. Brown)
(A. Young)

Vote:

In favor:

Kenneth Mills
Melissa Ayala
Scott Brown
Maleah Gustafson

Linda Long-Bellil
Amy Michalowski
Linda Woodland
Adam Young

Opposed:
None

Abstained:
Sherrie Haber
Robert Imber
Laura Kirshenbaum
Karl Ottmar

The minutes were approved 8-0-4.

B. Approval of the Executive Session Minutes of the Wachusett Regional School District Committee held on April 29, 2019

Motion: To approve minutes of the executive session of the WRSDC held on April 29, 2019, to be released.

(S. Brown)
(A. Young)

Roll call vote:
In favor:

Kenneth Mills
Scott Brown
Maleah Gustafson
Linda Long-Bellil
Amy Michalowski
Adam Young

Opposed:
None

Abstained:
Melissa Ayala
Sherrie Haber
Robert Imber
Laura Kirshenbaum
Karl Ottmar
Linda Woodland

The minutes were approved 6-0-6.

VII. Treasurer's Report/Financial Statements

Chair Mills reminded the Committee that if there were questions regarding the Director of Business and Finance's report that Members should contact the Superintendent; if there were questions regarding the Treasurer's Report, Members should contact the Business/Finance Subcommittee Chair.

VIII. Committee Reports

Chair Mills took the opportunity to speak about subcommittee assignments for the coming year, and asked members to provide their preferences for serving on subcommittees and on School Councils.

A. Management Subcommittee

Chair Mills reported this subcommittee has not met since the last School Committee meeting.

B. Education Subcommittee

This subcommittee has not met since the last School Committee meeting.

C. Business/Finance Subcommittee

Subcommittee Chair Dennis had provided Chair Mills with a report on the last meeting of this subcommittee, and Business/Finance Subcommittee Member Young also spoke about the May 21, 2019 meeting.

D. Legal Affairs Subcommittee

This subcommittee has not met since the last School Committee meeting.

E. Superintendent Goals and Evaluation Subcommittee

This subcommittee has not met since the last School Committee meeting.

F. Facilities and Security Subcommittee

This subcommittee has not met since the last School Committee meeting.

G. Audit Advisory Board (B. Mitchel, Chair)

Director Deedy reported this Board has not met since the last School Committee meeting. He also reported the AAB will start looking at other audits and reviews, such as the Coordinated Program Review.

H. Ad Hoc Subcommittees

I. Building Committees

1. Mountview Building Committee

Superintendent McCall reported the final close out of this building project is being prepared for submission to MSBA (Massachusetts School Building Authority). He also reported that warranties on the fields at Mountview Middle School were for one year.

J. School Council Reports:

Central Tree Middle School, Chocksett Middle School, Davis Hill Elementary School, Dawson Elementary School, Glenwood Elementary School, Houghton Elementary School, Mayo Elementary School, Mountview Middle School, Naquag Elementary School, Paxton Center School, Thomas Prince School, Wachusett Regional High School, Special Education Parent Advisory Council, Early Childhood Center

Member Gustafson – SEPAC

IX. Public Hearing

Heidi Lahey of Holden addressed the School Committee.

X. New Business

There was no new business brought before the School Committee.

XI. Adjournment

Motion: To adjourn.

(R. Imber)
(S. Brown)

Vote:

In favor:

Kenneth Mills
Melissa Ayala
Scott Brown
Maleah Gustafson
Sherrie Haber
Robert Imber
Laura Kirshenbaum
Linda Long-Bellil
Amy Michalowski
Karl Ottmar
Linda Woodland
Adam Young

Opposed:

None

The motion was unanimously approved.

The meeting adjourned at 9:49 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Darryll McCall, Ed.D.
Superintendent of Schools

DM:rlp

Attachments:

- Attachment 1 – Sign-in sheets
- Attachment 2 – Lauren Salmon-Garrett statement
- Attachment 3 – Heidi Lahey statement

Lauren Salmon-Garrett 49 Cook St Holden MA. For those that don't know, I do local advocacy with I Am Wachusett and state-wide advocacy with Support MA Regional Schools.

On Monday night, I was elated to sit at Holden's Town Meeting and witness another year of 5 out of 5 towns voting YES for the school budget. Free full-day kindergarten is a HUGE accomplishment and I couldn't be happier that this administration and the school committee worked hard to make it happen.

Unfortunately, my bubble was quickly burst on Tuesday when I received a message from someone in Rutland saying that pink slips were being handed to teachers and that 2 positions at the middle schools in both Rutland and Sterling were being cut. The teachers from Sterling were being moved and the teachers from Rutland were being given pink slips. I was, needless to say, SHOCKED and was hoping to get some answers, so I contacted a couple of my Holden school committee members. Neither had heard anything about this, but promised to inquire about it.

I received an answer after Tuesday's Business and Finance meeting and it seemed to explain that there was a misunderstanding and that no teachers were getting pink slips. PHEW - that would have been terrible when we were all told that positions were being added! It was further explained that the state had screwed up a Medicaid reimbursement, that the district's revenue would not be as high as expected and that we might not get AS MANY new positions as were proposed in the FY20 budget because of this shortfall, but wouldn't lose any at all.

I reached out to a few of my advocacy friends in other regionals and asked about the Medicaid mistake. They'd heard nothing about it and even asked their district business offices. They were saying that actually, reimbursement had gone up!

Now, I'm still a little burned from last year's snafu with transportation funding. I worked hard to help get that line item up in the state budget and we weren't seeing any benefit, because we were paying the state back for mistakes. I hope that this too, is not a mistake and has a reasonable explanation.

I have since heard that the teachers who thought they were being let go, are not and their positions remain.

Today I heard from someone who had applied for it, that the Full-time Kindergarten position at Mayo for next year's new classroom was cancelled on SchoolSpring and when I checked, it was also gone on the district website.

Attachment 3

Good evening. Heidi Lahey, 166 Bullard Street Holden
Special Education teacher Houghton School Sterling and President of Wachusett Regional
Education Association.

My remarks tonight are intended for the wider audience of the public as much as they are for those here in this room.

Tonight you will see the two faces of Wachusett. You will learn about the remarkable science achievements of our students, and applaud their success. These projects are a testimony to their hard work, the support of a community of adults; parents, teachers, mentors and advisors, along with the citizens whose taxes pay for the public schools. We celebrate the varied achievements of our students, from championship sports teams to scholarly awards. There is no question that many of our students do remarkable things during their time in Wachusett, and we are proud to support and recognize their success.

The other face is our ongoing tale of inadequate resources combined with misrepresentation of the facts.

On the evening of Wednesday May 15, I was contacted by two non-professional status teachers who were losing their jobs. It was clear from their emails to me that they were not told their positions MIGHT be cut, something you would expect if a decision from central office had been described as tentative or a possibility.

They were told their positions WERE eliminated- and given a date of May 28th to expect the letter of non-renewal.

That same evening, I was contacted by one of their colleagues who described these two teachers as "both fantastic, engaging teachers that have brought a lot to the table."

I advised the colleague that taking a collective action in support of these teachers was the only viable option to keep their jobs. The staff immediately started to organize themselves, creating a petition to present here tonight.

But you don't see all of them here- because once the news of their intended protest reached administration, there was a sudden change of tune. Yesterday staff was told that "it was a misunderstanding- that no final staffing decisions had been made" so they were asked to "Let the dust settle."

I consider this to be bordering on administrative interference in a protected union activity, and a blatant attempt to cover up one poor decision by making yet another.

I ask you tonight how credible do you all find the idea that a building principal would speak with two employees and tell them their positions were eliminated unless he/she felt it was decided?

It's not credible. It makes no sense. No responsible boss would do that to their employees.

What seems far more believable to me is that when word of tonight's collective action combined with growing community awareness and concern around these cuts filtered up to the highest level, there was a quick reversal of the decision to cut those jobs-exactly as I expected. I told those teachers to anticipate a reversal, and that they should be prepared to come tonight and publicly thank district administration for hearing their concerns and addressing them by restoring the positions.

But a genuine expression of thanks is hard to put forward when it is accompanied by the attempted suppression of teacher voices. I am outraged.

While the restoration of the positions was the intention of the collective action, WREA had hoped for some honesty about the situation. There seems to be much talk of transparency but very little actual honesty.

The staffing reallocations, reassignments and non-renewals currently occurring all across the district, in every school, are needed to address the current budget DEFICIT caused by Medicaid revenue shortfalls, recoupments and the projected shortfall of the recently approved FY20 budget to cover all costs going forward.

Yes folks, without a surplus to carry forward into FY20, there will be a deficit in the budget for next year too.

I repeatedly heard members of this committee ask for details of what the proposed FY20 budget did NOT contain. Yes, there will be full day K. Yes, the turf field will be replaced. But to achieve those goals, other things are not certainly not going to occur- such as reduced class sizes.

This latest financial fiasco is just one in a long history of planning for revenue that didn't materialize while being underfunded by the state. Despite the passage of the full budget by all five towns for the second year in a row, with a 0% health insurance cost increase for the second year in a row- Wachusett is facing a new fiscal year with potential for less-than-level services. Instead of decreasing class sizes, we could potentially have larger class sizes or a reduction in support positions that are desperately needed. We're still robbing Peter to pay Paul. Tonight, after you recognize and celebrate our student successes, I hope you will ask hard questions and demand answers. That is your job. Please do it.