

WILLINGTON BOARD OF EDUCATION
BUDGET WORKSHOP
Special Meeting Minutes
Thursday, January 23, 2020
Town Office Building, Upper Level Meeting Room
6:00 p.m.

Audio Recording: Yes

Notes Taken: Yes

Members Present

Michelle Doucette Cunningham

Herb Arico

Elena Testa

Ann Grosjean

Tracey Anderson

Donna Cook

Liz Perry

Members Absent

Also Present

Superintendent of Schools Phil Stevens

Center Elementary School Principal Rich Napoli

Hall Memorial School Principal Ken Craig

Members of the Public

Meeting was called to order at 6:01pm.

H. Arico stated that the goals of the board are student growth and success, an investment in school culture, and sustainable strategic development of school facilities, and that the budget should generate that. He spoke about the process for the Education budget to be developed and said that Superintendent Stevens has developed a budget that he feels will fit the needs and requirements of the students in town. H. Arico continued that anything the board does in regards to the budget should consider how it will benefit students and to keep in mind the ability of the town to support the needs that the board feels everyone should have. He continued that the board will look at the budget line-for-line and the bottom line. H. Arico told members of the board that numerous items are included in each line item to reach the line item total; typically the board

deals with the bottom line rather than individual items. He concluded that this meeting is for discussion; no action will be taken.

Present to Speak

Elaine Newcomb inquired whether a student census document was attached to the budget, as it would add context as to how many children there are.

Introduction of the Willington Public Schools' Superintendent's 2020-2021 Proposed Spending Plan (Budget)

Superintendent Stevens stated that the budget document being reviewed tonight is available online on the town website. He continued that the budget process is long and intense and requires lots of coordination and a significant amount of time and collaboration between staff, administrators, Business Manager Donna Latinesics, and his assistant Brenda Weber, and he would like to extend his thanks. Superintendent Stevens stated that the numbers presented are as current as possible, but that this is a moving document; new information could impact a program in which case it would be updated.

Superintendent Stevens introduced members of the board to the layout of the budget document including appendices. He noted that the goals referenced by H. Arico are listed on page 2 of the document because they are the driving force in developing a budget and that every dollar value can be tied to a part of the goals. On page 27 - Appendix D, Superintendent Stevens explained that the grants received offset the budget totals and went over each grant. He noted that all grants have been approved for 2020-2021 and can be relied upon in the budget, unless the state calculation formula were to change.

On page 28 - Appendix E, Superintendent Stevens explained that the number of staff positions will remain the same; no cuts and no new positions. He noted that some staff are not full-time positions (e.g. Physical Therapist: 0.27), but that approximately 5 staff members work in both buildings so are listed under both schools with decimals representing the amount of time they spend in each building (e.g. Social Worker: 0.75 Center School + 0.25 Hall School = 1.0). A portion of each salary is placed into each school's budget.

Superintendent Stevens noted for the board on page 5 that the 2019-2020 voter-approved budget of \$8,689,095 was a 4.67% increase. The proposed budget for 2020-2021 is a 3.25% or \$282,735 increase for a total budget of \$8,971,830. He assured the board that it is a very tight budget and that a tremendous amount of the budget is contractual and non-negotiable. Superintendent Stevens elaborated on the following points:

- Developmental Budget Assumptions:

- Medical/dental flat due to favorable budgeting in 19-20: Last year, the planned percentage increase of 14% was significantly higher than the 2% increase that was negotiated. Next year's increase will be no higher than 7%, so there will be no impact to the cost of insurance because that line already contains enough to cover any increase. He noted that the current year's excess went toward the unexpected increase in Special Education costs.
- Placeholder for insurance: The Board holds one insurance policy in case someone who previously waived insurance needs to change mid-year to district coverage.
- Shared Services with Town of Willington: there is a difference between regionalization, which is joining another district, and regionalism, which is sharing services when possible. Many services are shared with the Town of Willington in order to save money.
- Unfunded/Partially Funded Education Mandates: includes laws put into place with good intentions but creates extra strain on time or resources to complete those mandates, which costs money.

Superintendent Stevens noted that the budget shows some savings due to ongoing work such as implementing group bus stops, buying a copier outright instead of leasing, and negotiating a lower rate for fuel. He stated that the goal has been to find savings without impacting education and programs for students.

On page 7, Superintendent Stevens noted that the NESDEC predictions have historically been low, as with the Prowda projection. Kindergarten numbers are hard to determine until students are registered, but are estimated by reading birth announcements from 4-5 years ago and knowing already-enrolled older siblings. Kindergarten projections are made even more difficult in Willington due to the changing number of apartments or houses rented by UConn graduate students and their families.

On page 8, Superintendent Stevens noted that enrollment is no longer declining but has stabilized between 430-440 for the last 6 years. He noted that in 13/14, Center School enrollment jumps because 4th grade was moved from Hall School. E. Testa pointed out that enrollment seems to stabilize for 5 to 6 years then drop, so the board doesn't really know what's coming up.

H. Arico inquired about the number of graduating 8th graders, which will be consistent, so tuition paid to E. O. Smith High School shouldn't change much. Superintendent Stevens noted for the board that students can choose to go to E.O. Smith or another high school and their tuition is billed back to Willington. A mistake was recently discovered that in the past the Town of Willington has been billed by Region 19 for students attending magnet schools but not for students attending a technical high school. There are approximately 30-40 Willington students

across 4 grades at alternative high schools, and the bill for Region 19 is usually around \$4,000,000.

Program 1: Center Elementary School Review and B.O.E. Discussion

Superintendent Stevens presented pages 9 and 10, Program 1: Center School Elementary Education K-4 and the board discussed the following points:

Positions:

- Number of teachers (19.74) does not include Special Education, as that is a different program.
- Title 1 grant for 0.41 position is noted separately.
- Secretaries appear as 1.65. There are 2 full time staff, but 0.35 is billed out to other programs due to the tasks that they do. A portion of one secretary's job deals with transportation and a portion of the other is accounted for in Special Education.
- Paraprofessional line accounted for the person who has since been hired into the Library Media Specialist teacher position, eliminating the library paraprofessional at Center School. This hire provided a benefit to the budget because the prior employee was at the top step of the pay scale and was replaced by someone in their first year of certified service. Both principals reported the change has gone very smoothly with no services to students being disrupted.
- The 0.43 is a duty clerical aid directly linked to lunch duty. In the past, paraprofessionals, teachers, and the principal covered lunch duties, but due to the needs of students and number of paraprofessionals, staff weren't available to do lunch duty. The 0.43 person works 3 hours per day to supervise all lunch waves.

Salaries:

- Increase to Center School budget is related to contractual salaries.
- A paraprofessional is not required for the library at Center School anymore, which accounts for the decrease in paraprofessional salary line.

Purchased Services:

Appears as a slight increase of \$1,000, but should be decreasing in the near future due to internet savings. Internet service is currently shared between the Superintendent's Office and Center School for \$1200 per month via a fiber optic cable from Hall School. The Capital Improvement Program (CIP) approved running fiber optic cable from the fire house's large server to the Superintendent's Office and Center School. The project is currently stalled due to the utility company not approving utility pole space. However, the tech company has identified a way to connect wirelessly and the \$1,200 monthly bill will be removed if the project goes through. A decision will hopefully be known by the end of the budget season. The firehouse connection has

security and the Town of Willington has its own layer, so security is not a concern and will incur no additional costs.

Educational Supplies:

- 3% increase, which is fair to expect when buying office products.
- The dollar amount from the 2019-2020 budget was not quite enough, partially due to a necessary \$2,000 laminator purchase as the 25-year-old laminator broke. There are no longer stockpiles of supplies in the school; when teachers need something, they put in a request and typically receive it the next day.

Board members inquired whether teachers have what they need to teach or are spending their own money on supplies, as it seems a failing on the part of the Board of Education to budget for what is needed if the school is only able to supply the bare bones. Superintendent Stevens and the school principals confirmed that unless teachers want something truly above and beyond what is needed, their supplies are paid for. They also noted that letters no longer go home to parents detailing specific items that students need to buy; if a teacher believes a student needs one specific item, then it is the board's responsibility to provide it. Board members noted that people have paid toward these supplies in their taxes.

Textbooks:

There are no textbooks anymore; this item deals with books for classrooms and the library, periodicals, magazines, etc. The number is staying flat and staff are being asked to work within that number, but it is a reasonable amount for both buildings and purchases are made strategically. The reader's and writer's workshop goal is to get good books in the hands of students at their level. D. Cook inquired about the life expectancy of books being purchased. Principal Rich Napoli spoke about the "book shopping" library model, arranged by reading level, for students to choose from and speculated that as the paperback books are used frequently by young children, they may last approximately 3-5 years.

Equipment:

\$5,000 is for approximately 16 chromebook replacements or repairs if necessary to maintain the 1:1 ratio of students to chromebooks in 2nd through 4th grade. It costs \$300 per chromebook. This is offset completely by the REAP grant.

Building maintenance:

Includes cleaning supplies, but also items that go with the aforementioned unfunded mandates such as required inspections and the preventative maintenance program provided by EMCOR. M. Cunningham inquired whether the water quality is tested, as the pipes are aging and that she believes that should be included in the budget, even if every 5 years. Superintendent Stevens stated that he believes the water is tested farther down the line at the Senior Center and those

results are provided to the town, but that he will check. D. Cook inquired whether the amounts are contracted, to which Superintendent Stevens replied that staff do shop around for best prices and that there aren't a lot of options sometimes.

Other:

- Conference/travel is contractual.
- Principal Ken Craig spoke to the Principal Supplies fund as the purchase of something special or above and beyond if a teacher wants to try something new and innovative that has a cost attached to it. He provided examples such as bringing in a special assembly; purchasing a Swivel, the video recording device that follows teachers so they can improve by watching themselves; professional book clubs for teachers for professional learning.
- Dues/fees/memberships are contractual.

M. Cunningham asked to know what was asked for that Superintendent Stevens said no to, in order to make sure the board is aware of the tradeoffs being made, and said that she'd like to know that for each program. Superintendent Stevens replied that the submitted budgets were extremely reasonable. There are larger items at Hall School which are necessary, but Principal Craig comes up with creative ideas to spend money on and he finds a way to fund them. The budget encompasses what students need, but doesn't go above and beyond. A. Grosjean noted that in past years when the board had to make cuts and they couldn't come from contractual items, the books and supply budgets were trimmed, so they're fairly minimal.

Program 2: Hall Memorial School Review and B.O.E. Discussion

Superintendent Stevens presented pages 11 and 12, Program 2: Hall Memorial Middle School Education 5-8 and the board discussed the following points:

Positions:

- Teachers: the number is lower due to shared staff.
- The Title 1 teacher was all at Center School previously, but now works at Hall School as well.
- Secretaries, substitute caller: The substitute caller is 0.125 of a position which wasn't noted in the budget last year even though the dollars were.
- Paraprofessionals: number increased from 1 to 2, as there was no Library Media paraprofessional at Hall School before. The library position was a certified Media Specialist teacher who supervised the paraprofessional in the Center School library. Now the teacher position is at Center School and supervises the Library Media paraprofessional at Hall School. The other paraprofessional is a math interventionist.

Salaries:

Superintendent Stevens noted that the large decrease in teacher salaries is not due to hiring the lowest people. Part of the drop is due to the adjustment of the Library Media Specialist position who was at the top step of the pay scale and shifting the certified staff library position to Center School. In addition, he noted that Hall School has been extremely lucky to hire top candidates who have happened to cost less than teachers who retired or moved on.

Purchased Services:

- Physical Education Climbing Wall Inspection: the new belay system needs to be inspected.
- Music: if school-owned instruments break, the town has a contract to pay for the repair.

Educational supplies:

Principal Ken Craig elaborated on the increase. He stated that last year the school adapted its grades 6-8 math program, including working with CREC for professional development, and is now fully Common Core aligned using Illustrative Mathematics. Due to the popularity of the curriculum, the company has expanded to include algebra. Approximately \$5,000 of the increase is for additional supplies and student workbooks so Hall School can use the curriculum with algebra as well. After calculating the cost of supplies and staff time to make photocopies for student use versus purchasing student workbooks outright at around \$22 per book, it makes more sense to purchase the workbooks, which are currently in daily use and working well for students, parents, and teachers. Principal Craig stated that there has been a direct effect on student achievement in math on the SBAC and that the program is brilliantly put together so teachers can follow it directly without having to pull from different resources or jump around in a book to teach what is necessary.

E. Testa inquired whether there is a similar program available for language arts. Principal Craig responded that it is not recommended for language arts; readers and writers workshops are the research-based best practice right now. He added that the school is not only doing what they should be doing, but what was recommended on the CREC curriculum audit three years ago. Fifth grade is using a homegrown curriculum by Erica Buchior that fits with what grades K-4 are doing. H. Arico inquired whether the math curriculum is aligned with E. O. Smith High School and will benefit students when they reach high school. Principal Craig confirmed that he believes it is, as it is fully aligned with all national standards. He concluded that he doesn't have an influence on the approach that E. O. Smith uses, but that Willington is sending students to high school with a full foundation in the standards.

Beyond the math workbooks, the additional increase in the Education Supplies line is due to Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Mathematics (STEAM) classes, which did not

previously have a budget and were being funded out of Principal Supplies. With the new Enrichment Specialist taking over the makerspace and oversight of all STEAM classes, it would make the most sense for her to oversee that budget, not because they're buying more things, but because that's where the money is coming from. A few examples of STEAM classes, which are numerous, include coding, chess, drama, robotics, multicultural, and baking.

D. Cook asked the overarching question of what students need to get out of their education in the long term, not just for success in high school, but in order to have life skills and be able to function well in society and whether the curriculum allows for those things. Principal Craig stated that the household management class is wildly popular and includes items such as changing oil, managing a household budget, and making household repairs and that the teacher works hard to make sure they cover any big items that students may encounter. Principal Craig also stated that there is a big push for nature education and that the nature club is currently rehabbing the nature trail behind Hall School to make it wheelchair accessible and in the process learning about nature, construction, and engineering.

Media Center Books and Periodicals:

Same types of items as at Center School. It's a small decrease, but is just the number that they report needing.

Equipment:

Again, similar to the Center School budget for replacement or repair of student Chromebooks and fully offset by a REAP grant.

Building Maintenance:

More expensive at Hall School than Center School due to the increased size of the building.

Sports and Extra Activities:

- Stipends for Coaches is a contractual rate. The amount budgeted is flat because sometimes positions go unfilled but they are still budgeted for.
- Stipends for Extra Activity Clubs which are offered in the fall and spring and are run by teachers who receive the stipend to run a club for 10 weeks.
- Schoolwide enrichment line was formerly used for special programs, assemblies, etc., but those types of things are currently being funded by the Parent-Teacher Association (PTA).
- Sports Membership relates to the membership fee to be part of the CIAC (Connecticut Interscholastic Athletic Conference)

Other:

- Conference/Travel is contractual. When an administrator goes to a conference, the town is required to pay for their mileage at the standard IRS rate.
- Principal Supplies is the same as Center School; used for new or innovative initiatives.
- Media Center Supplies decreased to \$0 because that money was added to the general supply line.

H. Arico inquired whether the budget included anything regarding security. Superintendent Stevens replied that there isn't money for security initiatives in the school programs themselves, but that money is accounted for in a different program. The funding for additional security measures, including double vestibules, would be applied for through CIP (Capital Improvement Program) if the town decides not to build a new school or renovate.

D. Cook asked for more information about how the internet bill is structured and if it is due to the proximity to the fire station that Center School could receive internet but Hall School couldn't. Superintendent Stevens explained that the bill is approximately \$12,000 split between Center School, Hall School, and the Town Office Building. The bill would decrease for Hall School as well if Center School and the Town Office Building are approved to route internet from the fire station.

H. Arico noted that the maintenance amount is about the same as last year and wondered, with such an old building, if that is enough if something big happens. Superintendent Stevens replied that the hope is always that nothing happens, but that the budget relies on approving large projects through CIP or going to the Board of Finance to ask for additional funds. He noted that the Board of Finance followed through and funded the replacement completely when the boiler at Hall School failed this year. Superintendent Stevens recommends that as long as town support continues for additional funding when things break, the Board of Education keeps the budget the way it is. He noted that the district maintenance secretary puts together a spreadsheet of all necessary maintenance and services. The spreadsheet includes when projects are due, how often they occur, the cost, the program it's under, etc., so the district has a handle on those projects. EMCOR doesn't tell the town when to pump the septic or replace a fire extinguisher, their role is more to alert to any mechanical issues in the buildings and provide solutions.

Program 4: Transportation Review and B.O.E. Discussion

Superintendent Stevens presented page 15, Program 4: Transportation and the board discussed the following points:

Salaries:

Secretarial Support is not an additional person, but a portion of three different secretary's positions. The 0.35 position notes the portion of their salary that comes from the district for the work that they do.

Contracted Services:

- Bus contract is a 5-year contract, of which this is year 3.
- A portion of transportation for musical and sporting events is budgeted because it's not a field trip, rather those students are representing the town.
- The aforementioned after school activities and clubs which run once per week require transportation. Superintendent Stevens is hoping for a grant to cover this.

Supplies:

The decrease is due to the negotiated lower rate of \$2.15 for diesel in the upcoming year, as opposed to \$2.29 this year.

Superintendent Stevens stated that implementing group stops does not directly result in a savings in busing because busses cost a flat fee for the day, no matter how many runs you use it for.

However, you pay for all of the diesel used, and that is where the savings came in.

Superintendent Stevens stated that his office tracked fuel use from September to November and compared last year to this year and attributes implementing group bus stops with saving 1000 gallons of diesel in 3 months. He gave an example of a group stop implemented and stated that if a location wasn't safe, was on a curve, or he receives a complaint, they change it or wouldn't do it. He reminded the Board that their policy states that elementary students may walk up to ¼ mile and middle school students may walk up to ½ mile, and that no student is even close to those distances. Superintendent Stevens stated that he anticipates these fuel savings to continue, but that this first year is a test and the budget is based on using the same number of gallons of fuel just in case. He noted that next year's group stops may be more or less efficient.

E. Testa stated that she thought the primary purpose of combining bus stops was to shorten student time on the bus and she had heard that it didn't. Superintendent Stevens replied that it depends on the bus route, as some shortened and some didn't. He reminded the board that their policy says that we will do our best to keep bus ride times under or around 1 hour and that is being adhered to. E. Testa expressed concern that some group stops are unsafe. Superintendent Stevens stated that he discussed the matter with every parent whose child is picked up at a group stop.

Superintendent Stevens stated that Region 19 shares busses with Mansfield's K-8 schools and only pays the flat bus fee once per day, but Willington hires their own separate busses for K-8 and has been paying the flat fee once to Region 19 for E.O. Smith students and again to the bus

company for K-8 students. He stated that he has been working with the bus company to try to take the transportation contracts and blend them. The bus company knows that this effectively means they'll lose a contract but have been willing to discuss it. Region 19 busses could drop students off at E.O. Smith at 7:05am, then drive to Willington to pick up K-8 students. However, if busses are shared with Region 19, it may impact school start times, because they wouldn't be dropping off middle school students until 8 or 8:15am, which would push the elementary start time to 9:30am or so, which is late. He proposed the possibility of doing one K-8 run together, which would create savings in diesel and the cost of busses to a potential of \$100,000 if parents and the board approve it.

D. Cook inquired whether going to one bus route would reduce the number of runs, as there are currently empty seats on busses. Superintendent Stevens replied that the state statute requires the district to hold a seat for a student, even if they aren't there and don't ride the bus. He stated that going to one bus route might require 1 or 2 more busses than the number required for E.O. Smith students, but it would still be a savings over what is being paid now. He gave a potential example that the drop off at Hall School could be first and then all the busses would travel to Center School to drop off.

D. Cook noted that it could be easier on parents to have their children all picked up and dropped off at the same time. Superintendent Stevens confirmed and noted that many PreK-8 districts do this. D. Cook inquired whether the town provides an option for parents to opt out of bussing if they know they'll be driving their student every day, and that she knows some seats need to be reserved, but maybe that could limit the amount of empty seats. Superintendent Stevens stated that they are looking at that possibility; Killingly provides an option to opt out at the beginning of the year before bus routes are designed. However, if a parent changes their mind mid-year, the town has to provide a seat, so the board would need to create a policy requiring 48 hours notice. He noted that providing an opt out only works if you can cut a bus because families opt out of morning and afternoon transportation, or you would have to look at creating two different routes. M. Cunningham noted that allowing parents to opt out may also save time, as busses would no longer be required to go into neighborhoods where students never ride the bus. Superintendent Stevens summarized that this is a raw idea right now and will need more time to be looked at, but that these are the types of things that can impact the budget without removing impacting programs or supply lines. He noted that the attorney has looked at this idea as well and the bus company is running the routes that it might require, and that the bus company would want a significant contractual commitment of probably 5 years.

D. Cook inquired whether a change to bus times would affect teacher contracts. Superintendent Stevens noted that it would provide teachers with the same number of hours worked but that the district dictates the start time. He noted that they would have to make sure parents are on board

with the start times changing and how that might impact their commute to work, and mentioned that research on sleep and students is huge right now. A. Grosjean mentioned that going to one bus pickup now could ease a possible future transition to a new Prek-8 school. The infeasibility and wasted instructional time of having both schools start at the same time and splitting up which busses dropped off at which building first was discussed. Superintendent Stevens concluded that it's a work in progress that hasn't been officially presented yet, but it's an item that could affect the budget.

Present to Speak

Mike Perry of 87 Balazs Rd. stated that teachers are the most important people and provide the foundation of our country and are what raises our children up and teaches them what they need to know in order to be successful in the community and the world. By his rough estimate looking at the budget, teachers are making \$70,000 per year while administrators are being paid \$114,000, which is approximately twice as much. He asked if the board thought that would be worth looking at.

Regarding transportation, he suggested charging parents a certain amount per year per student to ride the bus in order to eliminate stops and mileage and supplement the budget.

Mike Iacampo of 68 Latham Rd. stated that he knows what was brought up about bussing was not official, but that he was shocked at how early his middle schoolers had to get up to catch the bus. He stated that even if the money breaks even, he loves the idea of middle school students sleeping later. He brought up the concern of having such large age differences on busses together, but assumes that it's not an issue in the other towns who already do it and he trusts that it will be looked at. He suggested that changing the Hall School start time may even attract people to town.

H. Arico made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 8:10pm.

D. Cook seconded the motion.

Vote:	Yes	No	Abstain	Absent
H. Arico	X			
M. Cunningham	X			
D. Cook	X			
T. Anderson	X			
A. Grosjean	X			
E. Testa	X			
L. Perry	X			

