

WILLINGTON BOARD OF EDUCATION
Tuesday, January 9th 2024
Virtual Meeting: Hybrid (in-person and online)
7:00 p.m.
Minutes
Zoom Recorded

Members Present (all in person)

Briana Ross - Chair
Jennifer Goodale - Vice Chair
Ann Grosjean
Tracey Anderson
Arthur Christensen
Jon Mitchell

Members Absent

Samantha Sperry, Secretary

Also Present

Superintendent Phil Stevens

1. Call to order

Chair Ross called the meeting to order at 7:01 p.m.

2. Pledge of Allegiance

Chair Ross led the Pledge of Allegiance.

3. Present to Speak

Michelle Cunningham, Liska Road: Ms. Cunningham asked if they could give health updates and add it to the agenda of how many students have been out with COVID or have been out of school sick.

Carrie Rainville, Potter School Road, gave PTA updates.

4. Chair Report

B. Ross asked how the Board felt about sending a letter to the Somers Superintendent sending condolences to the loss of some of their students. Members agreed it was a good idea.

5. Communications

There was no new communications at this time.

6. Superintendent Report

a. Staffing

Superintendent Stevens stated that there were currently no changes in staffing at this time. He said that they are going to be posting for substitute custodians.

b. Facilities Study

Superintendent Stevens said that QA+M is in the process of developing a first draft of the facilities study. They are expecting to have more to report to the Board at the February meeting.

c. Kindergarten age for attendance

Superintendent Stevens said that the state has new legislation, Public Act 23-208, Section 1(a), requiring children entering kindergarten to turn 5 years old on or before September 1, 2024, to be eligible for kindergarten in the 2024-2025 school year. This is a change from the current kindergarten cutoff date of January 1, 2025. Based on the new Connecticut legislation, if a child's birthday falls on September 2, 2024 through August 31, 2025, the child will enter kindergarten in the 2025-2026 school year. We have 22 students that we know of as of today who are eligible for kindergarten, and 4 students who are no longer eligible and will need to wait another year to enter kindergarten. Families who have students who were eligible, but are no longer are, can request an assessment be completed by school staff to determine if it would be developmentally appropriate for their child to enter in the fall of 2024.

d. CES plumbing request

Superintendent Stevens said that the CIP plumbing request went through the Board of Finance and Board of Selectmen successfully. The request has been moved to Town Meeting which will occur on Tuesday, January 23rd at 7:00 pm in the Old Town Hall.

e. Budget workshops

Superintendent Stevens reminded members there are budget workshops starting next week, each Wednesday for the next 3 weeks. The dates are January 17, 24, and 31. All meetings start at 6:00 pm and are in-person. We have one additional meeting planned if needed on February 13 at 6:00 pm before the regular meeting. He said that there is present to speak during those meetings so the community is encouraged to provide feedback.

f. School Roof projects

Superintendent Stevens said he was able to meet with Representative Tammy Nuccio and members of the Department of Administrative Services, including their attorneys, to discuss reimbursement rates and the roof projects the state canceled. He stated that they heard our concerns about the process and rates and basically said they simply apply the rates, but don't set the rates. Representative Nuccio did say she would work on getting more information on the establishment of the rates and how to get a higher rate for Willington. DAS suggested we apply for the HVAC grant in coordination with the roof project grants, and told us to reapply for the roof grants.

g. After school program grant

Superintendent Stevens said that he applied for an afterschool program grant through the state and learned we received the grant. We are receiving approximately \$90,000, though \$185,000 was requested. He says that there will be a workshop with the state on Thursday to edit the application to work within the \$90,000 budget. He said this will allow us to operate a daily district after-school program without utilizing town funds. The decrease in grant funding will

impact the number of students accepted into the program. The program will operate on a sliding fee structure so students eligible for free meals will be free, and students eligible for reduced meals will have a reduced rate.

h. Upcoming events

Superintendent Stevens said that the PTA meeting is this Thursday at Center School at 6:00 pm. He said both basketball teams at HMS are playing and the schedule can be found on the HMS website.

i. Other

Nothing reported

7. Financial Report

a. January 2024 financial report

Attachment #1

Superintendent Stevens said that there is currently a spending freeze on the budget. He said that they are purchasing necessary curricular supplies through the ARP ESSER grant. He says he is holding this freeze into February. The only items being approved are critical maintenance repairs.

8. New Business

a. Regular Meeting Minutes of December 12, 2023

Attachment #2

J. Goodale moved to approve the December Meeting minutes.

J. Mitchell seconded the motion.

Motion passes unanimously.

b. Special meeting minutes (retreat), January 3, 2024

Attachment #3

A. Groshean moved to approve the special meeting minutes from January 3rd 2024.

J. Goodale seconded the motion.

Motion passes unanimously.

c. Policy committee meeting minutes, January 3, 2024

Attachment #4

J. Goodale moved to approve the committee meeting minutes of January 3rd 2024.

J. Mitchell seconded the motion.

Motion passes unanimously.

d. Policy 9160: Board of Education Student Representatives

Attachment #5

Superintendent Stevens said that the policy committee met and have a draft of a policy for student representatives. He stated that this is a first reading and that he has feedback from the principals and they are good with the way it is written. He stated that the policy is brand new and would result in student representatives from Center and Hall Schools attending Board meetings on a rotating basis to provide student reports. He stated members would receive a report from each school every month from September through June. The policy is going to be reviewed by the Board attorney as well.

A. Christensen said that he liked the policy and it covers all of the bases they were looking for. He said he was glad the principals were on the same page as they were with the policy.

J. Goodale asked if there was criteria the principals were going to use to pick the students.

Superintendent Stevens said they left that area gray because they did not want to make it too narrow. He said that the idea is to have a broad group of students able to participate.

J. Goodale asked if they would be doing an orientation session with the selected students every month.

Superintendent Stevens responded saying that once the students are chosen then he would go into either Hall or Center School to talk to them, and then they would arrive at the meeting they were speaking at 15 minutes early to talk to the Chair before the meeting. Superintendent Stevens said that he would show them how the meetings work so they can prepare what they want to present.

A. Grosjean asked if students who were not selected to speak would still have an opportunity to share opinions throughout the year.

Superintendent Stevens said that they could be involved in Present to Speak. He also noted that it wouldn't mean it limited other student presentations that they wanted to hear.

It was decided to add the policy to the budget meeting agenda on the 17th.

9. Old Business

a. 2024-2025 Willington Public Schools Calendar Draft Attachment #6

Superintendent Stevens said that the 24-25 calendar was updated. He said that the last day of school was adjusted accordingly. He said they also made the correction to Labor Day and June 2025. After talking with administration he said that they also moved the October 3rd ½ day of professional development to the 11th so it was tied to a long weekend. He asked if they would like him to poll staff and parents about the November schedule regarding Thanksgiving and conferences.

A. Christensen said he would like him to poll staff and parents to figure out the reason why they would like conferences moved from Thanksgiving week.

P. Stevens said that the reason he has heard was because it is a busy week. P. Stevens said that if they move it to December the issue would be the broken week two weeks in a row. P. Stevens said that they do have time to do a poll.

B. Ross noted that if the conferences were moved to December there would only be two full weeks of school that entire month and that it is also a busy time of year.

A. Grosjean said that they could have conferences after report cards were issued.

P. Stevens said that they have conferences before report cards so parents could be notified of

what was coming up. He said that they could consider doing one full day of conferences, however that can be hard for teachers and parents.

J. Mitchell said he would like to poll families to see what they think.

The Board agreed to poll families.

b. Capital Improvement Project requests

Superintendent Stevens said that he provided Board Members with the CIP projects last meeting and he suggested requesting the CIP committee for a minimum of \$1,500,000 for 24-25. He stated that the funding could be added to the current \$1,000,000 that was allotted, and between the two amounts could be used to cover both roof projects, the CES chimney, the HVAC study and owner's project manager, plumbing work for each school, CES upper wing windows, and solar panels. He said that the total of these projects without solar is \$1,660,000. Superintendent Stevens said that if you consider the cost of the panels for E.O. Smith, then he believed it would cost Willington at least \$500,000 after grant reimbursement bringing the total over \$2,000,000. He also noted that the funding does not include any HVAC improvements and they may need to have funds set aside for the HVAC grant to be able to apply. Superintendent Stevens recommended that Board members request CIP for \$1.5 million minimum for 24-25. He said he will work with the business manager to determine the impact on taxpayers and the need for bonding.

J. Mitchell asked if the solar panels would include a solar study to find out how much they would get in return.

Superintendent Stevens said that it would all be done and all of that information would be determined. He said he has been looking at the town question and information sheet from Region 19 and that it was very well done. He brought up solar panels because it could be beneficial to add them and they couldn't do it after new roofs were put on the schools without voiding the roof warranty.

A. Grosjean asked if reimbursements would include money for the roofs.

Superintendent Stevens said that it would. He said that is why it is encouraged to do solar panels while doing the roof.

J. Goodale said it was important to her to hear from someone who did a facility study on the buildings to see if solar panels would make sense because the buildings are so old and that she does not see students being in those buildings for another 20 years.

Superintendent Stevens said it was a valid concern and if the facility study comes back saying that the buildings are beyond repair and something shifts in a different direction, you would still need money in the CIP fund for a different project or needed renovation.

J. Goodale said she appreciated the fact that they are looking forward and making a plan. She said that she believed what Superintendent Stevens said was accurate.

Superintendent Stevens said that if only \$1 million was put in the fund, then they would probably have to take solar panels off the list because there were other priorities that need to be repaired.

J. Goodale moved that they request from the CIP a minimum of \$1.5 million which is money to cover the list of projects as submitted by the superintendent of schools.

T. Anderson seconded the motion.

A. Christensen asked if he was sure they wanted to put an amount in the motion because it would likely hold them to that amount. He recommended amending the motion to take out the dollar amount.

J. Goodale asked if they would approve the entire list of projects.

Superintendent Stevens said that CIP puts these in a five year plan and move them around. He said that what happened last year was they were just given \$1 million for projects that would have to go through a process. He noted that not saying a dollar amount would be fine.

J. Goodale said she was concerned about moving around the projects, because there are funding deadlines that moving projects around would be affected by. She also asked how they would be aware of how much the projects would cost if they did not put a dollar amount in.

Superintendent Stevens said he would bring it to CIP and let them know the dollar amount needed and how much projects would cost. He said that if there was not enough money for certain projects, then they would not qualify for certain grants. He said he would also be saying that \$1.5 million was the minimum requested.

A. Grosjean asked if prior work on the HVAC would qualify for the grant.

Superintendent Stevens said that prior work was unlikely to be reimbursed.

A. Grosjean asked if they would get about a half million dollars back if they get reimbursed for the solar and roof projects.

Superintendent Stevens said that that amount had already been factored in.

B. Ross stated that the motion had been amended to state that the Board of Education requests the CIP Committee to approve funding to support school projects as submitted by the Superintendent.

J. Goodale accepted the friendly amendment to the motion.

T. Anderson also accepted the friendly amendment to the motion.

Motion passed unanimously.

10. Present to Speak

There was no present to speak.

11. Board Comments

A. Christensen said that he would like to put out there that after the first of the year that it is probably time to think about baseball and softball. He said registration is now open for Mansfield, Ashford, Willington Little League to those who participate. He said that he coaches and knows that a lot of Willington parents that volunteer and that it is a great opportunity for kids. He also recognized the cafeteria workers at the schools for all the hard work that they do.

J. Goodale stated that she keeps thinking of how they started the meeting out and how they started thinking about the Somers situation and supporting the town as a Board and is happy to do a letter to reach out to them.

J. Mitchell sent prayers to those affected by the tragedy in Somers. He also said he was happy with progress on repairs at the schools being made.

T. Anderson said she agreed with what was said so far and is excited to move forward with the student representatives.

B. Ross said that town meeting is January 23rd at 7:00 pm. and hopes people would come to that meeting and vote.

12. Adjournment

A. Christensen motioned to adjourn the meeting.

J. Goodale seconded

The motion passed unanimously, meeting adjourned at 8:12 p.m.

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