

**Westwood School Committee
Meeting Minutes
January 21, 2016**

Present:

Brian Kelly, Chairperson
Josepha Jowdy, Vice Chairperson
John O'Brien, Clerk
Carol Lewis, Committee member
Charles Donahue, Committee member

John Antonucci, Superintendent
Emily Parks, Assistant Superintendent
Abby Hanscom, Director of Student Services
Heath Petracca, Director of Finance and Business
Meredith Brodsky, Student Liaison

Meeting was recorded by WestCAT

Meeting called to order 7:05

Pledge of Allegiance

Superintendent's report (7:05-7:11)

Q2 Financial Report

Dr. Antonucci said he and Mr. Petracca reviewed the numbers, and things are looking good, we're on track. There were no Questions from the committee.

Proposed Meeting Dates for Space and Capital Needs community forum

Dr. Antonucci proposed that the forum be held on Monday February 8th, 2016 at 7pm. It is the only night the architect is available. He also said he will make sure it will be advertised heavily to ensure the public is aware of it.

Dr. Antonucci also mentioned he just received a new architect report with more options to consider.

The Committee is in favor of the meeting; all will double check that there is no issue with the proposed date.

April 8th is final deadline for the SOI (Statement of Interest). Dr. Antonucci just wants to get in a queue for a construction/renovation project. No options will need to be on the table at that time.

Dr. Antonucci took a moment to recognize Kelly Cavanaugh, who is doing a great job acting as interim Assistant Principal at the High School.

Public participation – (7:11)

None

Discussion Items (7:11-8:45)

Presentation of FY17 School Department operating budget (7:11-8:12)

Dr. Antonucci went through the budget executive summary

(Note: Executive summary will be emailed to parents 1/22 and the entire budget document will be available on the district website by 1/25)

Overall the proposed budget increased 5.97%. Dr. Antonucci understands that it is larger than preferred, but he feels it addresses critical needs that have been ignored since the 2008 recession, and the constituency pressure to decrease class sizes and improve programming.

Westwood residents demand a high level of service, and Dr. Antonucci warns not to plan for the future at the sacrifice of the present.

The budget increases include 404K increase in Special Education, one additional school bus at University Station, addition of 9 FTE's, a school bus contract increase, and Furniture/Fixture expense increases.

1.29% of the budget increase are unavoidable costs, there no choice but to fund them.

- Special Education: 404K
- University Station transportation: 64.8K
- Kindergarten Revolving Offset: 20K
- Contractual obligation to increase school transportation costs: 28K

Dr. Antonucci feels these unavoidable school costs should be taken off the top to allow for fairer comparison of all departmental budget requests. The budget increase without these unavoidable costs is 4.68%

Ms. Parks went through the personnel requests:

- 9.6 FTE increase district wide

- High School: 3.8 FTEs
 - 2.2 FTEs directly related to high school class sizes (SIPP, English, and social studies)
 - 2.2 FTE Social Worker (student specific and interagency collaboration needs [case management]). This person would also help with SOS program at HS and middle school (Signs of Suicide)
 - .6 FTE music teacher (program expansion)- would help allow new elective courses and reduction in class sizes
- Middle School :1.25 FTEs (Due to class size projections, which indicates a decrease over 3 years, they want to focus on program development)
 - 1 FTE computer science and engineering
 - .25 FTE for English
- Elementary School: 2.5 FTEs
 - 1.0 FTE Instructional assistant (general)
 - 1.0 Elementary science coordinator/science content specialist- will help coordinate the curriculum to the new science frameworks
 - .5 Elementary science content specialist

Ms. Hanscom reviewed the Special Education personnel requests:

- 2.1 FTE personnel district wide, based on IEP requirements for service district wide
 - 1.0 FTE at the High School level
 - .5 FTE for a High School speech therapist
 - .5 FTE at Deerfield Elementary – increase the resource person to full time
 - .1 FTE at Hanlon Elementary, would be a swing person with Deerfield – increases the resource role to .6 FTE

Out of district tuition and transportation in the proposed budget is 200K (35K is for transportation).

Ms. Hanscom said that they were also making the Lesley Intern Program part of the formal district budget. This program is for hiring and developing future special education teachers.

In conclusion, Dr. Antonucci feels that schools should be top priority in Westwood. This is also an opinion of a vast majority of the Westwood residents, many of whom moved to this town because of the schools.

Two themes emerged when he was speaking with residents at school meetings last year:

- Residents don't feel informed about the workings of our local government (including schools)
- Residents view Westwood as an elite community that services are commensurate with status

Dr. Antonucci built the budget with these themes in mind.

The budget hearing will be during the February 11th School Committee meeting.

Any questions, email the Superintendent or the school committee, via the contact info on the district website.

Discussion

Ms. Lewis asked who has been doing the work of the Social Worker need up until now? Do we see a need that expands this need past high school?

Ms. Hanscom replied that many people doing the work collaboratively all day-special education teachers, guidance counselor, school psychologist, general ed teachers. An Elementary social worker would be something to consider for the future. Data shows the biggest need is at the High School.

Ms. Jowdy asked if there is any other agency we can ask for help?

Ms. Hanscom replied that the primary agency would be DMH (Department of Mental Health). This new role would help activate DMH and get programs to our students. Youth and Family Services have also been very helpful during this time. Having a consistent person to liaise with these agencies would be very helpful. Also a Social Worker has a specific skill set needed to work with these agencies.

Mr. O'Brien asked if the State mandates the services but not the person?

Mr. Bevan responded that this person would be a hub for communicating with all the school partners to ensure the students transition better in school, and helping with programming before kids get to a moment of crisis.

Mr. O'Brien asked does the district not need a Social Worker?

Dr. Antonucci said that we've already had 15 students hospitalized and we're only mid-year. This is larger than it's been in the past. The numbers are staggering around the country.

Mr. Donahue thanked Dr. Antonucci for the presentation, and thought it was a good effort. He asked if we have figures on what we spent per kid in Westwood? How much of total budget is for special needs students?

Ms. Hanscom replied they will get exact dollar amount. Special Education is 25% of overall budget, for 17% of the student population.

Mr. Donahue stated it would be valuable to know what the kids are getting out of the Chromebook program. He also thought it would be nice to get names of the people in the community that volunteer to help the SIPP program so they can be recognized.

Mr. Donahue mentioned there is a Mandarin school at the HS every Sunday, and wondered if there was a way we can hook into that, or have a relationship with that resource?

Mr. O'Brien asked for clarity on the University Station school bus numbers?

Dr. Antonucci replied there are between 8-12 permanent residents there. We need a bus for Middle School and High school. Elementary kids can be handled on current bus routes.

Ms. Lewis stated she is very excited about the science coordinator addition. For the Semester courses, where does the staffing come in?

Ms. Parks said that overall the social studies numbers are going to grow, speculating the need. Ms. Lewis followed up and asked how will we decide what semester courses will be? Ms. Parks said that Social Studies department came up with the elective courses themselves. Mr. Bevan also mentioned he polled the junior class to see what would attract the most interest, and Social Studies won.

Mr. O'Brien asked about the affordability of the budget? Dr. Antonucci said it appears there is opportunity to fund the budget.

Ms. Jowdy asked about the athletic increase, as some teams are losing kids (football). Dr. Antonucci said that overall participation is still up. The number is about half of what was proposed.

Ms. Jowdy understands we need to be competitive, even though she is not happy to see a 6% increase.

Mr. Kelly thinks putting the budget in historical perspective might be very helpful (to add to executive summary). This will help people see where we made concessions. Dr. Antonucci said that the average annual increase was 3.11% and he will put that back into the summary.

Mr. Kelly said that any additional follow up questions could be discussed at next meeting.

Draft 2016-17 School Year Calendar (8:12-8:22)

At last meeting Dr. Antonucci proposed to start school pre-Labor Day again, which was not well received by the entire committee. He would prefer not to trade those days in the summertime.

There are 3 options on the table:

1. Keep the schedule before Labor Day
 - a. Dr. Antonucci would mandate no homework over that weekend
2. Start post-labor day
3. Or start even one day earlier, on 8/31, have a 4 day weekend

Mr. Kelly mentioned that in the option 2 draft the last day might be off (would actually mean we get out later).

Dr. Antonucci said we are delaying the vote on this; The Teachers Union needs to have a vote about starting before Labor Day.

Ms. Jowdy said that at a recent PTO meeting, most people said they wanted to start pre-Labor Day

Ms. Lewis thinks that's just the high school kids. She still believes the mental break (of starting after the holiday) is good for the younger kids.

Dr. Antonucci said that typical feedback on starting school later is that it might be a little more stressful for parents since most summer camps are over before school starts, and parents have to scramble to find child care.

Mr. Kelly asked if we can cut the Monday after Thanksgiving day off? Dr. Antonucci said that most families like that day off.

Ms. Lewis asked if we have always had major Election Day closures? Dr. Antonucci said the town prefers we don't have students on the school premises due to the amount of voter traffic. We could try to make it work, but we have to ensure the safety of the kids.

The Committee agrees that the residents need to know the school schedule soon. The vote will come at the next meeting.

Update on the practice of utilizing breathalyzers in regards to MIAA Chemical Health policy (8:22-8:45)

This update is regarding Page 5 of Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between Westwood Public Schools and the Westwood Police Department.

The Police Department reports to the school if a student participates in an activity that involves possession, use, or distribution of alcohol (on or off property). The only reason it's an issue for the school is because of an MIAA rulebook. Once the police hand over the list of students, the school is required to act.

Students are penalized by an event suspension.

This puts us in an awkward spot with having to deal with “guilt by association;” the list of kids the school received did not distinguish between actual offenders and those who did not participate.

Two years ago the Police Chief brought up doing a Breathalyzer test to prove kids were in the clear. But it’s hard to enforce, and was being administered inconsistently. Mr. Bevan said many factors get in the way with trying to get these kids tested. Breaking up the party is hard, and it is a very confusing environment.

Dr. Antonucci wanted to be clear that we have never penalized a kid that has not been proved they were in violation.

Dr. Antonucci said the bottom line is that the breathalyzer is not an option anymore. What is the next step? There is zero interest in over applying the MIAA policies. Everyone needs to use his or her professional judgment.

Dr. Antonucci is suggesting we change the MOU. We can eliminate the alcohol mention, and only report those kids that are a threat to others’ safety.

Mr. Donahue asked if DUI’s are reported to school? The answer is yes.

Ms. Lewis asked if there is any concern or obligation to the MIAA with our move forward proposal? Are we in violation? Dr. Antonucci said no.

Ms. Lewis said the key thing would be to make the students understand what the procedures are, process, consequences of this. As a community we need to know.

Ms. Brodsky agrees the kids need to know the rules and consequences.

Mr. Bevan said that initially the policy was communicated to captains, coaches and the students. The same will be done to tell them about the policy update: meet with captains, coaches, and students, and we need to communicate consistently and quickly.

Ms. Jowdy stated this has to be communicated now. Mr. Bevan agreed and will tell us how it went.

Action Items (8:45-8:46)

Approval of Minutes December 17, 2015

Motion to approve: Ms. Jowdy. Seconded by Mr. O’Brien.

Final vote: unanimous approval

New Business

No new business at this time.

Discussion

Public participation (8:46-8:55)

A resident said they are not happy that the breathalyzer option is going away. Can Dr. Antonucci mention to parents that they can take their kids to the police station to take the test? He replied that he told the police chief that this has to be an option.

Regarding the breathalyzers, a resident asked if the suspensions go on a student's transcript/permanent record? The answer was no, it does not.

A resident asked why don't we eliminate February and April vacations, and combine into one break in March? Having both breaks is very expensive for families. Dr. Antonucci has always been in favor of this, but said this would require a lot of work and manpower to sort out.

The question was also asked if they have surveyed parents? The answer is not recently. Dr. Antonucci said the surveys usually come at the principal level, and agrees we can try and do more of that.

A resident commended the committee for talking about a social worker.

A resident mention she has 4 children currently in the schools, and very much agrees about the need for the social worker. She feels Dr. Antonucci put forth a very good budget. Mental health is key, and she asked the school committee to fund that position.

Motion to adjourn: Mr. O'Brien. Seconded by Ms. Jowdy

Official vote: Unanimous approval

Meeting adjourned to executive session at 8:55