

**Hamilton-Wenham Regional School District Committee**

**Jan. 16, 2014**

**Minutes**

**CALL TO ORDER AND  
PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE:**

Roger Kuebel opened the meeting at 7:07 p.m. in the Buker Multipurpose Room. The Committee and others present rose for the Pledge of Allegiance.

**PRESENT:**

Bill Dery, Deb Evans, Roger Kuebel (chair) (until 9:37), Barbara Lawrence, Sheila MacDonald, Larry Swartz, Bill Wilson (vice chair)

**ALSO PRESENT:**

Dr. Michael Harvey, Superintendent; Dr. Celeste Bowler, Assistant Superintendent for Instruction; Jeff Sands, Assistant Superintendent for Administration and Finance; Vincent Leone, Accountant

**ABSENT:**

Jeanise Bertrand, Sean Condon

**CITIZENS' CONCERNS:**

None

**CHAIR'S REPORT:**

R. Kuebel reported on a Jan. 8 meeting with the Wenham town administrator, Hamilton town manager and chairs of both Towns' finance committees and boards of selectmen about how the Committee deals with excess funds, and whether to create a policy to guide future school committees' decisions in this area. B. Wilson said he would again seek the input of the district's auditors.

**CONSENT AGENDA:**

Minutes of January 9, 2014

**BILL WILSON MADE A MOTION THAT THE H-W REGIONAL SCHOOL COMMITTEE APPROVE ALL OF THE REMAINING ITEMS ON THE CONSENT AGENDA. THERE CAN BE NO FURTHER DISCUSSION OR AMENDMENT OF THIS MOTION. SHEILA MACDONALD SECONDED THE MOTION. THE MOTION PASSED 7-0-0-2.**

**SUPERINTENDENT'S REPORT:**

Dr. Harvey noted changes from the earlier tentative agendas and dates for some topical discussions and public hearings. The public hearing on the school choice program is scheduled for 6:30 p.m. on Jan. 23. The budget hearing is to take place during the meeting that begins at 7 p.m. on that date. The Committee is to vote at the Jan. 23 meeting, following the public hearing, on whether to participate in the choice program for the 2014-15 school year by admitting new students through the choice program; until that vote, applications cannot be accepted. The vote will have no impact on students already enrolled in HWRSD through this program.

**COMMITTEE REPORTS:**

Audit	None
Facilities	None
Negotiations	This subcommittee was scheduled to meet the morning following this meeting.
Policy	This subcommittee addressed policy issues later in this meeting.
Warrant	None
Master plan	Dr. Harvey said this group had a productive meeting the day prior to this meeting.
Student Rep	None
Building	None
Other	Dr. Harvey said the district and the two Towns continue to cooperate in planning for a potential shared Department of Public Works and are currently exploring standardizing accounting systems and work order systems.
<b>NEW BUSINESS:</b> First Reading of Policies	B. Lawrence detailed proposed revisions of a group of existing district policies, and proposed new policies. The Committee discussed some of the proposals briefly; others were introduced with no further comment. The Committee is to vote on the policy revisions and proposals after a second reading at a future meeting.
<i>Education of Pregnant and/or Parenting Students</i>	A proposed additional sentence would stipulate that after giving birth, students are permitted to return to the same academic and extracurricular programs in which they participated before they took the leave.
<i>Developing Educational Specifications</i>	R. Kuebel commented that the draft policy omits mention of many other things to take into consideration when developing educational specs.
<i>Facilities Planning</i>	Members reached informal agreement that this policy describing the role of the Facilities Working Group (FWG) need not mention the Open Meeting Law. They discussed the superintendent's and FWG's roles in decisions about hiring consultants and considered whether to rephrase #4 within the draft text.
<i>Consultants</i>	R. Kuebel suggested this policy should address CORI checks.
<i>Naming Facilities</i>	Discussion touched on whether the draft text would obligate the district to following the wishes of the community in naming facilities. At L.

Swartz's suggestion they rephrased the last sentence of the draft to read "Such procedures will include the solicitation of community input."

*Building & Grounds Management*

R. Kuebel and B. Dery said this policy is unnecessary because it would simply state the district would comply with the law on certain points.

*Safety Program*

Dr. Harvey said the draft text is consistent with the law.

*Staff Accident Reports*

A typo in line 6 of the draft was corrected, to change "aid" to "said."  
Dr. Harvey said the district already has a staff accident report form as stipulated in this draft policy.

*FY15 Budget Discussion*

*Peer analysis*

R. Kuebel provided and discussed statistical graphics that he prepared to provide contextual data about how much various districts spend per student. They were displayed onscreen (and are appended to these minutes). His presentation and discussion that followed touched on topics including how some peer districts' per student spending compares to HWRSD's; how HWRSD's compares to certain percentile ranges of Massachusetts districts; trends in recent years; where this district should be situated in this regard; foreign language instruction; activity fees; budgeting proactively for anticipated maintenance needs and routine replacement; variables that can affect a district's per student expense; class sizes; a proposed new curriculum position; special education costs, and partial reimbursement by the state. Members commented on topics including past reductions in staff and programs, and their opinions about restoring some; using volunteers; and outside fundraising.

*Historical trends*

*Review of per pupil expenditures*

*Targets for FY15 budget*

Dr. Harvey displayed and discussed budget scenarios that project how various hypothetical FY15 budgets would ripple into future fiscal years in total dollars, percent change, and changes in the Towns' assessments. (The budget scenarios he presented are appended to these minutes.) He discussed details including contractual increases in staff compensation; recurring expenses; and various options for the Excess and Deficiency (E&D) account. The scenarios he presented project that the FY16 operating budget could fall a bit compared to a hypothetical FY15 budget, or could rise as much as 10.4% as a consequence of other hypothetical FY15 budgets. Discussion followed about topics including: pending decisions about what services to include in the FY15 budget (upon which the Committee still must agree, and then vote in February to recommend to the Towns); staffing; anticipated levels of state aid and resultant expense offsets; whether to cut back staffing or some existing programs in order to add some positions and/or programs from a list of proposals discussed at recent Committee meetings; and whether returning funds from E&D to the towns (by reducing upcoming assessment bills) has any practical value if this would require increasing the assessments in the year(s) beyond. Dr. Harvey said if the Committee approves a budget that would cut some

positions, he wants to inform the individuals in those positions by mid-April. Discussion also touched on topics including transparency; whether, if budget increases appear inevitable, to try to distribute them smoothly over multiple years; and the need to communicate clearly with the community about whether program delivery would be affected by staffing changes or program budget restructuring. Discussion also touched on perceived shifts in the rapport between this Committee and Town leaders, and possible strategies for maintaining a collaborative working relationship; members discussed establishing an official liaison to each select board.

R. Kuebel departed at 9:37 p.m.; B. Wilson chaired the remainder of the meeting.

Discussion also touched on topics including the existing policy of returning E&D funds in excess of 3% of budget to the Towns; how that would occur, in practical terms; and state regulations regarding E&D.

In the final minutes of the discussion, L. Swartz twice moved to adjourn the meeting. The first motion was not seconded; the second motion was seconded by S. MacDonald but did not proceed to a vote.

FY14 Budget Surplus and FY15  
Budget Discussion with town officials

Future Budget Communications  
with Towns

Dr. Harvey noted he, R. Kuebel, and J. Sands are scheduled to meet Jan. 29 with the Towns' finance committees, and those committees are to attend the School Committee meeting of Feb. 3. Dr. Harvey also is to meet with the Hamilton town manager and Wenham town administrator to discuss specific budget figures. D. Evans suggested that B. Wilson (who as vice-chair, per Committee practice, is on track to chair the Committee in 2014-15) participate.

**ADJOURNMENT:**

**BILL WILSON MADE A MOTION THAT THE HW REGIONAL SCHOOL COMMITTEE VOTE TO ADJOURN. SHEILA MACDONALD SECONDED THE MOTION. THE MOTION PASSED 6-0-0-3.**

The meeting adjourned at 9:55 p.m.

**DOCUMENTS AND EXHIBITS  
USED AT THIS MEETING:**

Draft policies (Education of Pregnant and/or Parenting Students; Developing Educational Specifications; Facilities Planning; Consultants; Naming Facilities; Buildings and Grounds Maintenance; Safety Program; Staff Accident Reports) (8 pages)  
Expenditures data for all MA districts and for group of peer districts (3 pages)  
FY15 Budget scenarios 1.16.14 (6 pages)

Respectfully submitted,  
Ann Sierks Smith, School Committee recording secretary