

Hamilton-Wenham Regional School District Committee

Jan. 23, 2014

Minutes of Public Hearing: School Choice 2014-2015

Regular Meeting

Public Hearing: FY15 Budget

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

Roger Kuebel opened the meeting at 6:35 p.m. in the Buker Multipurpose Room. The Committee and others present rose for the Pledge of Allegiance.

PRESENT:

Jeanise Bertrand, Sean Condon, Bill Dery, Deb Evans, Roger Kuebel (chair), Barbara Lawrence, Sheila MacDonald, Larry Swartz, Bill Wilson

ALSO PRESENT:

Dr. Michael Harvey, Superintendent; Dr. Celeste Bowler, Assistant Superintendent for Learning; Jeff Sands, Assistant Superintendent for Finance & Administration; Eric Tracy, Principal, HWRHS

ABSENT:

No one

**PUBLIC HEARING,
SCHOOL CHOICE 2014-2015:**

The public hearing began at 6:40 p.m. B. Lawrence read aloud the executive summary of the report of the Committee on School Choice submitted in November 2013 (which is appended to these minutes), and recapped the study process. The district's master plan consultant spoke about data generated during that process and how it relates to issues around the school choice program; he touched on topics including anticipated enrollment declines, optimal enrollment, space needs now and with projected future enrollment, how shifting teaching methods and classroom design might impact the optimal student population figures, and how the state regards choice students when calculating several types of funding to local districts.

R. Kuebel opened the floor to public comment.

Richard Boroff of Moynihan Rd. in Hamilton offered background information about how the high school's capacity was arrived at years ago; suggested surveying students about whether they think existing spaces hinder their ability to learn; and urged the Committee to participate in the choice program in 2014-2015 but continue to study the issue.

Jeff Stinson of Hamilton, who served on the Committee on School Choice, said the often-cited optimal student population target of 720 is no longer valid for the high school, and said if the school population decreased, existing science labs might not need renovation.

Dacia Rubel of Puritan Rd. in Wenham urged the Committee to stay in the choice program but pursue further cost-benefit analysis. She said the Towns should explore why young families are settling here in lower numbers of late.

Michelle Bailey of Remington Rd. in Wenham asked what Dr. Harvey recommends re choice. Dr. Harvey said he supports the report's recommendation to stay with the program, but assess and "right size" the number of choice students the district accepts. M. Bailey expressed concern with details of the fixed and variable cost reports and spoke about a state funding agency's changing views of appropriate classroom space.

Elizabeth Berthoud of Rowley, a 1989 graduate of HWRHS whose three children now attend the school as choice students, thanked the Committee for that opportunity and spoke of her children's positive experience.

High school teacher Nora Burnett said students should have a choice about where they attend school so they can choose a learning environment that is a good fit for them.

Glenn Campbell of Maple Rd. in Hamilton, a retired HWRHS teacher, said a student body below 600, and especially below 500, would endanger the curriculum.

Alisa Zimmerman of Peabody spoke of her daughter's positive experience as a current choice student at the high school and her hope that her middle school age daughter will be able to attend HWRHS too.

Jean Caulfield of Juniper St. in Wenham echoed D. Rubel's call for further evaluation, and asked for E. Tracy's point of view.

E. Tracy supported continuing the choice program and predicted that withdrawal would result in significant losses in the curriculum.

High school teacher Ben Hellman spoke about a choice student in one of his classes and her leadership and impact on other students. He also said that given the shifting approach to education and the condition of the high school it is unlikely the school would still occupy its existing building 10 years from now.

High school teacher Brianne Sette said because choice students have made the choice to attend HWRHS they are especially hard working. She spoke about reasons students might choose to attend school outside their hometown, and said the concept of choice is important.

Helen Allard of Hamilton asked whether there are other ways to keep the student population high that would be less expensive to the district.

She suggested further work to develop a qualitative picture of the ideal number of students, and to plan how to achieve it.

Lauren Prior of Gardner St. in Hamilton asked whether Manchester-Essex considered issues about the choice program when deciding whether to build a larger high school; no one present could answer. She echoed others' call to remain in the program but continue to study its costs and benefits.

Hamilton Selectman Jeff Hubbard expressed support for the choice program and thanked the Committee for considering the issue seriously.

Ernie Bertagna of Gloucester spoke positively about his oldest child's experience as a choice student at HWRHS, and spoke of its sense of community.

Rob Vosseler of Monument St., Wenham, suggested the district charge higher fees to choice students than it now does. R. Kuebel informed him the state sets the standard fee for all districts and has not changed it since the choice program began in 1991.

Committee members spoke briefly to clarify a point about which some speakers appeared to be unclear. Choice students already enrolled at HWRSD can complete their education there regardless of the Committee's decision about whether to admit additional students in 2014-15.

R. Kuebel closed the public hearing at 7:34 p.m. After a brief break while some members of the audience departed, the Committee returned to the regular meeting agenda.

CITIZENS' CONCERNS:

M. Bailey asked the Committee to hold the public hearing in the FY15 budget early in the regular meeting. R. Kuebel reordered the published agenda to accomplish this.

CHAIR'S REPORT:

R. Kuebel said after the budget is resolved he would raise again the issue of whether to propose that voters reduce the size of the Committee. Brief discussion focused on the timeline for submitting a warrant article for the Towns' 2014 Annual Town Meetings.

CONSENT AGENDA:

Minutes of January 16, 2014
Accepting donation from EdFund for
Chromebooks & Mobile Cart

At B. Dery's request, acceptance of the EdFund donation was removed from the consent agenda.

BILL WILSON MADE A MOTION THAT THE HW REGIONAL SCHOOL COMMITTEE VOTE TO 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 UNANIMOUSLY (9-0-0-0).

B. Dery asked whether there would be peripheral costs to the district if the EdFund donation were accepted; E. Tracy replied that the operating system, software and apps are free, the district has a Google domain in place, and funds are already put aside for licensing.

BILL WILSON MADE A MOTION THAT THE HW REGIONAL SCHOOL COMMITTEE VOTE TO ACCEPT THE EDFUND DONATION OF CHROMEBOOKS. SHEILA MACDONALD SECONDED THE MOTION. THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY (9-0-0-0).

**PUBLIC HEARING,
FY15 BUDGET:**

R. Kuebel opened the public hearing on the FY15 budget at 7:43 p.m. He said the public would have another opportunity to comment on the budget during the meeting of Feb. 6.

Dr. Harvey gave a PowerPoint presentation (slides are appended to these minutes) on the updated tentative FY15 budget, which the Committee referred to as a "placeholder" budget approved at a recent meeting only to satisfy a state budget approval timeline requirement. Discussion followed between committee members, Dr. Harvey and J. Sands about several projections ("scenarios") how the Towns' assessments might vary in FY15 and FY16 depending on how the Committee allocates excess funds this year and in future years, and Dr. Harvey's proposal to retain current programs and staffing levels in FY15, plus budget an additional \$616,000 for maintenance projects, technology updates, and to move to an all-day kindergarten program for all students at no cost to parents. Other topics included other programs and projects he proposes funding by freeing up funds from some existing programs; how administrators decided which new expenses to propose as top priorities for FY15; and school security issues.

R. Kuebel opened the floor for public comment at 8:31 p.m.

M. Bailey urged the Committee to restore the team teaching model at the middle school; to negotiate with teachers to institute parent-teacher conferences at the middle school level; and to be attentive to specifics before voting to authorize any restructuring of school services. She recommended the district look into federal funding of security upgrades.

J. Hubbard strongly supported technology initiatives.

Martha Hill Farrell spoke favorably of full-day kindergarten and suggested one reason fewer young families are settling in these Towns may be their reluctance to pay tuition for HWRSD's full-day program when nearby towns provide it at no cost to families.

D. Rubel supported technology initiatives and teaching more than one foreign language.

Patty McCullough of Rust St. in Hamilton said children who attend half-day kindergarten miss out on a lot and, when they enter first grade, bear the burden of catching up with students who attended kindergarten full-time.

Tess Leary of Bay Rd. in Hamilton asked why the district proposes programs with both Chromebooks and iPads; asked to see the full list of proposed projects from which the highest priority items have tentatively been selected; and asked why full-day kindergarten made the cut. Dr. Harvey said every member of the leadership team independently ranked full-day kindergarten as the highest priority. The list of prioritized proposals is on the district website among documents appended to minutes of recent meetings. A new "1:1" iPad program would be for grades 9 and 10, and students would lease their own iPads; the Chromebooks would expand the number of these devices being used in grades 11 and 12.

Hamilton Finance Committee member John McWane asked the Committee to list the Excess and Deficiency fund in the budget as an offset, not a revenue, and said excess funds are the taxpayers' money and should be returned to them promptly if a given year's expenses are lower than budgeted. He also asked the Committee to use this year's projected actual spending as the basis for calculations of the rate of change in the proposed FY 15 budget, rather than comparing the FY14 budget to FY15. .

D. Evans noted that many district staff were present in the audience and said she would like their future input about the district's priorities. High school teacher Joe Marr suggested instituting periodic meetings with several committee members to provide a forum for this.

The public hearing ended at 8:59 p.m.

COMMITTEE REPORTS:

Audit	None
Facilities	None
Negotiations	The first meeting between this subcommittee and representatives of the teachers' union took place the evening before this meeting.
Policy	None
Student Representative	Exams are underway at the high school.

Master Plan

Dr. Harvey said this group would meet the week after this meeting, to discuss results of visioning sessions. He and B. Lawrence agreed this subcommittee would report to the Committee after budget season.

NEW BUSINESS:

School Choice

*Master Plan Progress Report
(School Choice)*

[A presentation relating master planning to the school choice program took place earlier, at the beginning of the Public Hearing on School Choice 2014-2015.]

*School Choice Participation
Motion*

R. Kuebel said HWRSD has never accepted choice students in grades K-8.

BILL WILSON MADE A MOTION THAT THE HW REGIONAL SCHOOL COMMITTEE VOTE NOT TO PARTICIPATE IN THE SCHOOL CHOICE PROGRAM FOR GRADES K-5 AND GRADES 6-7-8 FOR THE 2014-2015 SCHOOL YEAR. SHEILA MACDONALD SECONDED THE MOTION. THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY (9-0-0-0).

BILL WILSON MADE A MOTION THAT THE HW REGIONAL SCHOOL COMMITTEE VOTE TO PARTICIPATE IN THE SCHOOL CHOICE PROGRAM FOR GRADES 9-12 FOR THE 2014-2015 SCHOOL YEAR. SHEILA MACDONALD SECONDED THE MOTION.

Extensive discussion that followed was grouped topically; R. Kuebel first invited Committee members to speak about issues of curriculum impact, then about diversity and the positive influence of choice students on the rest of the student body, and finally about cost issues. Comments and discussion touched on topics including how a decline in enrollment might affect the number of high school course offerings, and other districts' experience with this; potential impact on extracurriculars; whether the existing report provides adequate evidence and analysis; whether choice students from other North Shore towns increase diversity in the student body, and other contributors to diversity in HWRSD schools; how the long-cited high school capacity of 720 was determined, and whether it is valid; and what guidance, if any, to give the superintendent about how many students to accept through the choice program if the Committee voted to accept more choice students in 2014-2015. Committee members reiterated that if the Committee were to vote not to participate in the school choice program for 2014-2015, no new choice students would be accepted, but those already enrolled could complete high school at HWRHS.

THE MOTION PASSED 8-1-0-0. (B. Dery voted no.)

BARBARA LAWRENCE MADE A MOTION THAT THE HW REGIONAL SCHOOL COMMITTEE PROVIDE DIRECTION TO THE SUPERINTENDENT TO DEVELOP A PLAN TO

ACCEPT ONLY AS MANY NONRESIDENT STUDENTS AS CAN BE ACCOMMODATED WITHOUT REQUIRING ADDITIONAL COURSE SECTIONS. SHEILA MACDONALD SECONDED THE MOTION. THE MOTION PASSED 6-3-0-0. (J. Bertrand, D. Evans and L. Swartz voted no.)

D. Rubel said information at this meeting left her unclear about some details, and recommended clearer expression of the salient points to the community and to families applying for the choice program. Tracy Hutchinson asked the Committee to consider admitting special education students on a tuition basis.

OLD BUSINESS:

2nd Reading and Approval of Policy
Education of Pregnant and or Parenting Students

B. Lawrence recapped the proposed change to this existing policy: a draft new sentence specifies that after giving birth, students can return to the same academic and extracurricular programs in which they participated prior to taking a leave.

BILL WILSON MADE A MOTION THAT THE HW REGIONAL SCHOOL COMMITTEE VOTE TO APPROVE THE POLICY PRESENTED FOR A SECOND READING. THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY (9-0-0-0).

VOTE TO ADJOURN:

BILL DERY MADE A MOTION THAT THE HW REGIONAL SCHOOL COMMITTEE VOTE TO ADJOURN. DEB EVANS SECONDED THE MOTION. THE MOTION PASSED 9-0-0-0.

The meeting adjourned at 10:15 p.m.

The meeting agenda indicated that the Committee would meet in executive session after the public session. No executive session meeting took place.

DOCUMENTS AND EXHIBITS USED AT THIS MEETING:

Documentation of EdFund grant for purchase of Chromebooks and mobile cart ("Exhibit B") (6 pages)
Report by the Committee on School Choice, dated Nov. 14, 2013 (42 pages)
Revised FY15 Superintendent's Budget Recommendation dated Jan. 23, 2013 (sic) (12 PowerPoint slides)
Education of Pregnant and/or Parenting Students Policy (1 page)

Respectfully submitted,
Ann Sierks Smith, School Committee recording secretary