

Hamilton-Wenham Regional School District Committee

April 3, 2014

Minutes

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

Roger Kuebel opened the meeting at 7:02 p.m. in the Buker Multipurpose Room. The Committee and others present rose for the Pledge of Allegiance.

PRESENT:

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

ALSO PRESENT:

Dr. Michael Harvey, Superintendent; Dr. Celeste Bowler, Assistant Superintendent for Learning

ABSENT:

Bill Dery, Sheila MacDonald

CITIZENS' CONCERNS:

Richard Boroff (Moynihan Rd., Hamilton) urged the Committee not to vote on any major change at the meeting at which it is first discussed.

Sean McDonough (Rust St., Hamilton) expressed concern about the upcoming "1 to 1" iPad program, said letting technology drive the approach to learning is a flawed philosophy, asked for a statement of the challenges the program might present as well as its opportunities, and recommended parents, teachers and administrators work together to determine how best to integrate technology into instruction.

Charlie Pepler (Meyer Rd., Hamilton) said in his work in the technology field he has observed that major technology programs created without future users' input often fail; he recommended consulting teachers about major program changes they would need to implement. He expressed concern that if all students in a class have an iPad it would create distractions, and suggested a smaller number of shared devices would be effective.

Dr. Harvey recognized Sean Condon, who was attending his last meeting as a member of the Committee, and gave him a gift.

R. Kuebel corrected a statement he made at an event the night before this meeting that the Committee unanimously supports reducing the size of the Committee; in fact, J. Bertrand voted against recommending this to Town Meeting voters.

R. Kuebel then moved to his Chair's Report (below), but Kristin Pepler (Meyer Rd., Hamilton) spoke from the floor during his report and said the end of the public comment period had been unclear to her and she wished to comment on the 1 to 1 iPad program. She said the

fact that some other communities have programs like this is not an adequate basis for this district to adopt it, and asked for more public information about the program planning process, the pilot program in place this year, and pros and cons. She expressed concern that at a recent public meeting a high school administrator spoke of "pushing the program through."

CHAIR'S REPORT:

Response from AG re Open Meeting
Law Complaint

R. Kuebel said an open meeting complaint was filed regarding a Committee discussion of strategy in bargaining with cafeteria workers. He reported it is the Committee's legal counsel's opinion that the Committee did not violate the law by discussing strategy in executive session. He said the Massachusetts Attorney General has reviewed the complaint and concluded that violations were not intentional; the matter is closed.

CONSENT AGENDA:

Minutes of March 20, 2014
Executive Minutes of September 5, 2013

L. Swartz asked that the minutes of March 20, 2014 be 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. DEB EVANS SECONDED THE MOTION. THE MOTION PASSED 6-0-1-2. (L. Swartz abstained.)

L. Swartz requested amendment of the draft minutes of March 20, 2014 minutes to correct an error in a list of members who voted against a motion at that meeting. By general consent the Committee agreed to amend the March 20 minutes.

BILL WILSON MADE A MOTION THAT THE HW REGIONAL SCHOOL COMMITTEE VOTE TO APPROVE THE AMENDED MINUTES OF MARCH 20, 2014. BARBARA LAWRENCE SECONDED THE MOTION. THE MOTION PASSED 7-0-0-2.

In brief discussion following these votes, Committee members said members of the public who want to comment further about the 1 to 1 iPad program can email School Committee members, whose district email addresses are posted on the district website. They asked Dr. Harvey to gather further information and report to the Committee at a future meeting.

COMMITTEE REPORTS:

Audit

None

Facilities

This working group met with J. Sands on March 27 and discussed the Collins Center report about the proposal to create a shared department

of public works for the district and the towns. S. Condon said J. Sands has a long list of priorities.

Negotiations This working group met with teachers the week before this meeting, is scheduled to do so again on April 8, and met as a subcommittee the day before this meeting.

Policy Policy proposals were discussed later in the meeting.

Warrant None.

Student Representative Student government officers made presentations later in the meeting.

Other The Master Plan Steering Committee was scheduled to meet the morning after this meeting; Dr. Harvey said the committee is planning a forum on the 2 reports just released.

NEW BUSINESS:

Student Government
Digital Citizenship Initiative
Digital Citizenship PSA
Teacher of the Month Program
Junior class talent show
Sophomore class trivia night
Freshman class fundraiser ideas

HWRHS student body president Chase Schaub introduced other student government officers, who gave brief reports. Secretary Elizabeth Rose spoke about initiatives regarding "digital citizenship." Treasurer Riley Frackleton briefed the Committee on the Teacher of the Month program. Vice president Morgan Sperry reported the junior class will host a talent show in May; a recent sophomore class trivia night raised roughly \$600 for the prom and other uses; and the freshman class had a restaurant fundraiser in late March and has arranged one for every Tuesday in April at another local restaurant.

Update on Superintendent's Goals Dr. Harvey reported on progress to date on the goals he officially presented to the Committee early in the school year. Committee members received a written update (which is appended to these minutes) that states the 3 goals, key actions and benchmarks, and reports on progress to date. He spoke about training administrators in the use of data to improve student learning; work toward creation of instructional core goals; and his participation in the state's New Superintendent Induction Program.

Update on School Committee Goals B. Wilson presented his synthesis of individual Committee members' assessment of progress toward 11 goals the Committee set earlier in the school year. The written report (which is appended to these minutes) states the goals, timelines, benchmarks, who was to coordinate work toward each goal, and a summary statement of members' comments. The focus of goals included updating the policy manual, analysis of the impact of the school choice program, final response to the operational audit, a master planning project, budget development, and the annual evaluation of the superintendent.

Update on District Improvement Plan Dr. Harvey said the plan was extensive and ambitious and because some elements more time than anticipated, some others were not

completed. He highlighted several elements and referred the Committee to his written report for further details. (It is appended to these minutes).

Curriculum Leadership Reorganization Model

Dr. Harvey proposed restructuring the district's administrative leadership as of summer 2014 by eliminating the existing middle-high school department chair positions and replacing them with 5 curriculum leaders, in literacy, mathematics, humanities, STEM, and the arts, who would report to the assistant superintendent for learning. He displayed a flow chart representing curriculum goals and the role of data analysis, and charts of the existing organizational structure and the proposed structure (which are appended to these minutes). His presentation touched on topics including consistency of instruction district-wide; the increased time administrators spend evaluating staff under the new state-mandated evaluation system; measurement of the effectiveness of curriculum; administrators' responsibilities, and the fact that in the current system the assistant superintendent for instruction has no direct reports; and how staff evaluation tasks would be distributed among administrators under the proposed reorganization. Prior to the meeting, the Committee received project overview documents and job descriptions for the proposed new leadership positions (which are appended to these minutes). The proposed positions would be 20% teaching (1 class) and 80% administrative.

Committee discussion that followed touched on topics including the process that led to this proposal; what would be given up by making this change; further details on perceived advantages; and whether the Committee would have to vote to eliminate some positions and add others (as the Committee's legal counsel advises) or could instead simply offer its opinion to the superintendent (as the chair has concluded). Positive comments by Committee members touched on topics including reducing principals' staff evaluation workload, and clarification of lines of responsibility, authority and reporting. Concerned expressed touched on topics including how increasing consistency across classrooms and schools relates to individual learning styles and teaching styles, how eliminating subject-specific department chairs might impact students' experience, and whether a specialist in one subject area could provide expert guidance about how to implement standards in other subject areas.

The Committee invited comments from the audience. R. Kuebel asked speakers not to repeat arguments already made, but to instead briefly express agreement with a prior speaker; most of the speakers whose comments are summarized below expressed agreement with all previously expressed points, as well as contributing the comments noted below.

Tate Shippen (HWRHS English teacher) said the department chairs first learned of this proposal the week prior to this meeting and the

faculty was informed the day before the meeting. He spoke highly of aspects of the existing department chair system and expressed skepticism that a curriculum director without content knowledge in a subject could guide teachers through curriculum planning in that subject or provide useful feedback about how to teach it.

Deborah Clapp (HWRHS science teacher) asked whether other districts with similar demographics and student achievement levels have used the proposed model successfully.

Bennett Ahearn (HWRHS science teacher) expressed concern that the proposed restructuring might increase class size and erode teachers' ability to differentiate instruction and connect with and meet the needs of all students.

Chan Gauthier? (whom has taught at both MRMS and HWRHS) asked the Committee not to vote on the proposal at this meeting. She suggested the restructuring would not be cost-neutral (as Dr. Harvey stated it would be) if existing senior-level department chairs return to fulltime teaching and newer teachers who earn less are laid off as a result. She urged the Committee to ask administrators for data that indicate a need for the proposed change.

Kevin Dunn (HWRHS student) spoke highly of the recently retired history department chair's work with teachers and students and its impact on him.

Charlie Pepler (Meyer Rd., Hamilton) said each student is unique, reported that some states are opting out of the common core, and asked whether this district could do so.

Jenny Beauregard (Hamilton Ave., Hamilton) said that if more data analysis is needed, analysts could be hired to accomplish that without eliminating department chair positions.

Kirsten Losee (chair of Fine Arts for MRMS and HWRHS) said under the current system, department size is manageable and promotes good relationships between chairs and teachers.

Victoria Thornburg (Friend Ct., Wenham, a HWRHS senior) expressed dismay that students and faculty were not consulted during the planning process or informed if it until shortly before this meeting. She said administrators should collaborate with those who would be affected.

Brianne Sette (HWRHS English teacher) said many faculty members began looking for other jobs upon hearing of this proposal and many would leave the district if were enacted. She spoke in detail about subject-specific guidance her department chair provides and said

someone who lacks subject knowledge would be poorly positioned to advise or evaluate teachers of that subject.

Amy Jacobs (HWRHS history teacher) spoke highly of faculty mentoring at the high school, and urged the Committee not to vote until it learns how the proposed restructuring would impact student learning. She asked whether the driving force behind the proposal was curriculum concerns, or issues around staff evaluation.

Cheryl Elkin (Rust St., Hamilton) asked why the administration did not invite teachers' input, and whether restructuring would result in a decrease in teaching positions or a change in class sizes. She urged the Committee to seek community input before voting.

Barbara Mahoney (HWRHS English teacher) said close day-to-day operations within departments, and chairs with intimate knowledge of a subject, are key to the district's excellence, and that having some teachers report directly to central office staff would reduce principals' contact with master teachers. She asked whether the proposed restructuring would make it harder for principals to gather with curriculum leaders as they have to this point.

Elaine Appel (Linden St., Hamilton) said the new required teacher evaluation system is overshadowing learning, and district officials should not change the entire organization because of such demands. She suggested school representatives join parents and administrators elsewhere in resisting such mandates.

Kaitlin Cooke (Gloucester, HWRHS senior) spoke highly of the high school's teachers and said she does not want to see any changes that would adversely impact education in the district.

Eric Baumeister (HWRHS senior) asked the Committee to delay its decision and expressed concern about hiring administrators unfamiliar with the district. He asked whether the existing department chairs have been consulted about whether they want the proposed new jobs.

Dacia Rubel (Puritan Rd., Wenham) said that in recent years many in town, including some individuals now on the Committee, pressured previous Committees to reduce the administrative staff and focus school spending on teachers and direct services to students. She said the proposal has significant budgetary implications and called it irresponsible to propose it days before Town Meetings are to vote on the 2014-15 district budget, which does not consider the proposed restructuring. She asked for more information about how it would impact education, and about where in the budget the administration proposes to find efficiencies to offset expenses of the proposal.

Nora Burnett (HWRHS English teacher) said teachers already observe one another's teaching extensively and share ideas and strategies, and a statement earlier in the meeting that it is necessary to create new administrative positions to make that happen is a misconception. Christopher Oo (HWRHS senior) urged the Committee to postpone a decision, collect data, and consult students, teachers and administrators.

Nate Shephard (HWRHS junior) said it would be irresponsible to move forward without reviewing data about how the proposed change would affect other employees, and class sizes. He expressed concern about the lack of detail presented about financial implications.

Ariana McDonough (Rust St., Hamilton) said if the restructuring would have an impact on teachers' work, and their input was not invited, the process should be changed.

Michael Allara (Echo Cove Rd., Hamilton, HWRHS junior) spoke highly of the district's teachers and said department heads are accessible to students and a bridge between teachers and the administration.

Hendrick (HWRHS senior) said existing department heads work effectively with the teachers and if the administration brings in outside influences it would not be the same.

Joe Maher (Linden St., Hamilton, HWRHS math teacher) said the Towns do not have the financial resources to allocate increasing sums for administrators, especially at a time when enrollment is declining. He said teachers as well as administrators have an increased workload due to government-mandated initiatives, and detailed additional tasks these require of teachers. He said having more teachers is more important than having more administrators.

The Committee discussed overarching issues of the proposal, and how to proceed. Discussion touched on topics including the Committee's perception that there are structural problems that should be addressed; interest in more financial detail and community input; and whether evaluation is the main driver of the proposal.

Motion to eliminate Curriculum Leader position and create proposed positions

No motion was made.

Policy: First Readings

B. Lawrence briefed the Committee about proposed facilities policies and operational support policies, and asked them to email comments to Dr. Harvey.

Emergency Closings

This draft would express as a policy the district's existing practice regarding emergency closings, and make explicit that parents always

have the choice of whether to send a child to school, but if they do so on a day when school is open, the student will be marked absent.

Student Transportation Services

This states service goals. In response to D. Evans' questions about CORI checking and safety standards, Dr. Harvey said the contractor is responsible for security measures, and safety standards are the same as for individuals who have contact with students within school buildings.

School Bus Safety Program

This draft policy addresses inspections, education of children about safety issues, and emergency evacuation drills. It recommends the latter take place in the afternoons so students who ride the bus only at that time would be present.

Bus Driver Examination and Training

Not put forth at this meeting.

Student Conduct on school buses

This draft policy states principals will enforce student conduct requirements and notes that parents would be notified if children face the loss of transportation privileges due to behavior on buses that endangers other riders. In brief discussion Dr. Harvey said principals use a multi-step process to determine whether to suspend a student's privileges.

Student transportation in private vehicles

B. Lawrence said a detail of this draft policy may be out of date and suggested the administration explore what is workable. Members and Dr. Harvey discussed whether the high school's current practice is consistent regarding whether students who are licensed drivers can transport other students to such events as athletic practices and meets, off-campus extracurricular activities, activities at the school after hours. They deferred discussion of the draft policy's proposal (suggested by a member who was not present at this meeting) that drivers who transport students to school activities during or after the school day must be 21 or older.

Passing a school bus on school property while it is loading or discharging students

Not put forth at this meeting.

OLD BUSINESS:

None.

L. Swartz thanked R. Kuebel for his service as chair of the Committee; this was his final meeting in that role.

VOTE TO ADJOURN:

BARBARA LAWRENCE MADE A MOTION THAT THE HW REGIONAL SCHOOL COMMITTEE VOTE TO ADJOURN. BILL WILSON SECONDED THE MOTION. THE MOTION PASSED 7-0-0-2.

The meeting adjourned at 10:08 p.m.

DOCUMENTS AND EXHIBITS

Superintendent's Goals Progress Update, dated April 3, 2013 (3 pages)

USED AT THIS MEETING:

School Committee Goals 2013-2014 (updated, undated) (5 pages)
District Improvement Plan 2013-2014 (updated 4/3/2014) (18 pages)
PowerPoint flow chart re curriculum, assessment, instruction, and data
(1 slide)
Current HWRSD Organizational Chart 2013-2014 (1 PowerPoint slide;
2 printed pages)
HWRSD Proposed Leadership Reorganization Chart (1 PowerPoint
slide; 2 printed pages)
FY2014-FY2015 Project Planning Template (re proposed
reorganization) (8 pages)
Job descriptions for 5 proposed curriculum director positions (19
pages)
Draft policies: Emergency Closings, Student Transportation Services,
School Bus Safety Program, Student Conduct on School Buses,
Student Transportation in Private Vehicles (5 pages)

Respectfully submitted,
Ann Sierks Smith