

**Hamilton-Wenham Regional School District Committee**

**Meeting of January 10, 2013**

**Minutes**

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

Roger Kuebel called the meeting to order at 7:08 p.m. in the Buker Multipurpose Room. The Committee and audience rose for the Pledge of Allegiance.

**PRESENT:**

Sean Condon, Bill Dery, Kym Donnellan, Roger Kuebel (chair), Barbara Lawrence, Sheila MacDonald, Ann Minois, Larry Swartz, Bill Wilson

**ALSO PRESENT:**

Dr. Michael Harvey, Superintendent; Dr. Celeste Bowler, Assistant Superintendent for Learning; Peter Gray, Assistant Superintendent for Finance and Administration; John Hughes, High School Principal; Brian Menegoni, Associate High School Principal; Alan Taupier, Director of Information Technology

**ABSENT:**

No one

**CITIZENS' CONCERNS:**

Helen Allard of So. Hamilton asked about inclusion of special education (SPED) students in regular education classes; support for students who are not diagnosed as learning disabled, but struggle in school; and when Dr. Harvey's entry plan will be made public. (Her written questions are appended to these minutes.)

Dacia Rubel of Puritan Rd., Wenham asked Dr. Harvey's to share his thoughts about the pending facilities strategic plan, and how it would dovetail with an overall strategic plan; she also asked how the Towns and district would share the costs of hiring consultants to assist with the facilities plan. She echoed H. Allard's call for the superintendent's entry plan.

Deb Evans of Porter St., Wenham said that when the Committee votes on a preliminary budget some citizens may interpret that vote as an endorsement of the budget figures in that preliminary version; she advised the Committee to make it clear the preliminary approval is a formality and the budget may change before the Committee votes on an official budget proposal in mid-February. She asked about opportunities for input and feedback from community members.

R. Kuebel said the Committee and leadership team would try to respond to these questions at the next Committee meeting.

**SUPERINTENDENT'S REPORT:**

Dr. Harvey reported that the first round of interviews of candidates for

High School Principal Search Update

the position of high school principal took place during the week of this meeting and the search committee has forwarded to him the names of two finalists, which he said he would soon release. He said both are interested in moving forward, and they are to visit the district for interviews on Jan. 28 and Jan. 29.

Entry Plan

He said he would present his entry plan at the meeting of Jan. 24, and schedule focus groups for February and March to gather feedback.

**CHAIR'S REPORT:**

Report on Debt Refinancing Query

R. Kuebel said the district treasurer researched whether it would be possible to refinance some existing debt at a lower interest rate, but learned that because the debt in question already was refinanced once, regulations prohibit a second refinancing.

Meetings with Town Officials

He reported on a meeting earlier in the week of this meeting with chairs of the Towns' select and finance boards, and administrators. Hamilton officials request that the FY14 district budget be set at a level that would decrease Hamilton's assessment by \$300,000 from the level in the current draft of the budget, because Town officials wish to keep Hamilton's tax rate below \$18. R. Kuebel said \$450,000 would have to be eliminated from the current draft version of the budget to reduce Hamilton's assessment by that sum.

**CONSENT AGENDA:**

Minutes Jan. 3, 2013

**LARRY SWARTZ MADE A MOTION THAT THE HW REGIONAL SCHOOL COMMITTEE VOTE TO APPROVE ALL OF THE REMAINING ITEMS ON THE CONSENT AGENDA. KYM DONNELLAN SECONDED THE MOTION. THE MOTION PASSED 8-0-1.**

**COMMITTEE REPORTS:**

None.

**NEW BUSINESS:**

High School Class Size Report

J. Hughes reported on class section sizes at the high school for the spring 2013 term. (His written report is appended to these minutes.) Extensive questions and discussion by the Committee followed, after which members of the audience were invited to ask questions. Data presented in writing included lists of each teacher's number of spring 2013 class sections ("courseload"), the number of students registered for each section, the total number of students that individual teaches ("student load"), and that teacher's average class size. (The report does not identify teachers by name; numbers are substituted, and the teachers are grouped by academic department.) Verbally, J. Hughes also provided summary data that included the average section size by department, and average class size by academic level (AP, Honors, A1 and Skills). He said schoolwide, the average class size is 19.8; 235 sections are scheduled for spring term 2013; and the current plan is to reduce that to 220 for fall 2013.

Discussion touched on a wide range of issues including these:

- the reasons for markedly low enrollment in some sections, particularly in the fine arts
- the assignment of both a subject specialist and a special education teacher to some sections to facilitate diversified learning
- J. Hughes' assessment of the senior portfolio project, and how it might be altered in the future
- regulations that prohibit tracking SPED students in separate classes, and the de facto occurrence of this in some Skills sections
- reductions to date in the number of Skills level sections, and possible future elimination of this academic level
- teacher:student ratios and teacher certifications required by statute for district SPED courses (Margo Killoran of Sagamore Farm Rd., Hamilton spoke from the audience to this point)
- how offering fewer sections of multi-section required courses would impact class size
- whether ideal class size differs by subject area
- the maximum number of students it is appropriate to assign to one teacher
- how existing facilities (such as science lab and TV studio work stations) limit class size in some subjects
- the district's current class size policy, and issues to consider when contemplating revisions
- how class sizes influence some aspects of foreign language instruction
- enrollment in each of the HWRHS AP classes
- inclusion of AP courses within some teachers' regular courseload, and payment of others by stipend to teach an AP course in addition to a normal courseload
- the number of classes HWRHS faculty teach each term and some other districts' higher loads
- what class size is ideal at the high school level; J. Hughes suggested 18 to 22
- what total student load per teacher is acceptable; J. Hughes suggested 110-120
- the gap between that figure and some HWRHS teachers' current current student loads in the 90s
- the nature of professional development to train faculty for differentiated instruction
- how 15 sections could be cut without affecting the quality of education
- the option of making fractional reductions to a number of teaching positions, rather than laying off three individuals, and

whether teachers would want to continue to teach in the district if their positions were reduced

- the timing of student course registration, scheduling, and announcements of reductions in staff for 2013-14

R. Kuebel invited the audience to ask questions.

Catherine Harrison of Pleasant St., Wenham, noting she was speaking on her own behalf and not representing the Wenham Finance Committee (which she chairs), urged more attention to the needs of students whose academic performance falls in the mid-range.

Margo Killoran of Sagamore Farm Rd., Hamilton, said the district is legally entitled to maintain substantially different SPED programs if they meet certain criteria, and cautioned against abandoning existing SPED programs in favor of inclusion within classes that employ diversified instruction. She recommended consultation with the Federation for Children or an independent legal consultant regarding appropriate options.

Tracy Mayor of Fox Run Rd., Hamilton, said large AP classes pose problems, and some teachers need additional support if they are to teach more students per section in the future. She asked whether the district class size policy applies to electives, or just core classes and language courses.

#### Pending Approval of Preliminary Budget

The Committee discussed official steps in the budget approval procedure. L. Swartz informed the Committee that during the week since the Committee's previous meeting, district officials learned of a statutory requirement that the Committee vote to accept a preliminary budget. (In past years the Committee received and discussed the superintendent's proposed budget but did not vote to accept the preliminary version.) To comply with this requirement and stay on the budget approval timeline that requires certain actions within a prescribed number of days before Town Meetings, the Committee scheduled a meeting for Mon. Jan. 14 at 8:30 p.m. to vote on a preliminary budget. They noted this would be a formality to approve a "placeholder" version, and that the preliminary budget might be amended before the Committee's scheduled Feb. 14 vote to approve an official FY14 budget. R. Kuebel noted that after the Committee approves the FY14 budget, the Committee could later make changes to it that would reduce the total budget, but could not make changes that would increase the total budget.

#### Ed Fund Donation Acceptance

Because district policy requires the Committee to officially accept a grant or donation of \$2,000 or more, Dr. Harvey asked the Committee to vote to accept the Hamilton-Wenham EdFund's donation of \$27,147 for a 2013-2014 pilot program that would equip a group of about 20 to 25 ninth-graders, and their teachers, with iPads, and train the teachers

to plan and teach in innovative ways this technology makes possible. Extensive discussion followed. B. Menegoni (who wrote the EdFund grant proposal) and A. Taupier answered Committee members' questions about topics including details of the proposed program; ongoing visits to other districts that already employ such methods, and outcomes in those districts; projected costs beyond the pilot timeframe; how participants would be selected; and how the pilot program would be evaluated.

**LARRY SWARTZ MADE A MOTION THAT THE HW REGIONAL SCHOOL COMMITTEE VOTE TO APPROVE THE PRIVATE FUNDING FROM THE EDFUND IN THE AMOUNT OF \$27,147.00 (TWENTY SEVEN THOUSAND ONE HUNDRED FORTY-SEVEN DOLLARS AND 00/100) FOR THE IPAD PILOT PROGRAM. KYM DONNELLAN SECONDED THE MOTION. THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY (9-0-0).**

First Reading of  
Administration Policy Sections

The Committee deferred the first reading of these policies and scheduled a meeting for Thurs. Jan. 17 at 7 p.m. to consider these and other matters.

**OLD BUSINESS:**  
Second Reading of Financial Policy

Deferred.

Revised Timelines for  
Facilities Master Plan

Deferred.

**ADJOURNMENT:**

**BILL DERY MADE A MOTION THAT THE HW REGIONAL SCHOOL COMMITTEE VOTE TO ADJOURN. KYM DONNELLAN SECONDED THE MOTION. THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY (9-0-0).**

The meeting adjourned at 9:52 p.m.

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

Hamilton-Wenham Regional High School Class Size 2nd Semester 2012-2013 (4 pages)  
Hamilton-Wenham EdFund Project Grant application dated 0/23/2012, for 1:1 Pilot Program (3 pages)  
Draft HW policy #D4002 (3 pages)  
Draft unnumbered HW policies on Administration Goals; Regional School Superintendent; Superintendent's Contract; Evaluation of the Superintendent; Lines of Responsibility/Organizational Chart; Administrative Councils, Cabinets, and Committees; Principals; Policy Implementation; Development of Regulations; School Committee Review of Regulations; Regulations Dissemination; Administrative Responsibility in Absence of Committee Policy;

School District Annual Report; and School Ceremonies and  
Religious Holiday Observances (16 pages)  
Questions 1-3 dated 1/10/2013, submitted in writing by Helen Allard,  
SEPAC School Committee Liaison (1 page)

Respectfully submitted,  
Ann Sierks Smith, School Committee recording secretary