

Hamilton-Wenham Regional School District Committee

Meeting of January 17, 2013

Minutes

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

Roger Kuebel called the meeting to order at 7:04 p.m. in the Buker Multipurpose Room. The Committee and audience rose for the Pledge of Allegiance.

PRESENT:

Sean Condon, Bill Dery, Kym Donnellan (until 9:05), 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

ABSENT:

No one.

CITIZENS' CONCERNS:

None.

SUPERINTENDENT'S REPORT:

Dr. Harvey recapped information released the previous week. The finalists for the position of high school principal are Eric Tracy and Kristen Vogel; they are to interview in the district on Jan. 28 and Jan. 29, respectively; public sessions to meet them are scheduled for 5:30 p.m. on those dates in the high school music room. K. Donnellan asked whether a Committee meeting should be posted for those times, in case a quorum of the Committee attends; R. Kuebel said he would check, and arrange posting if necessary.

Dr. Harvey updated the Committee about the public rollout of the Olweus anti-bullying program the week of this meeting.

He previewed the agenda for the Committee's 1/24 meeting, which includes his report on his entry plan, and presentations by Kathy Harris about the FY14 special education budget, Catherine Donovan about food services, and state Rep. Brad Hill about state funding.

Action items:

- K. Donnellan requested a 1/24 update on improvements to the district website.
- R. Kuebel requested a 1/24 status report on a shared Towns/District public works department, which Dr. Harvey noted is now being called a department of public facilities and infrastructure; K. Donnellan requested that the report consider potential impact on the FY14 budget.

- B. Wilson requested a financial update as of the midpoint of the current fiscal year; this was placed on the agenda for the meeting of Feb. 7.
- K. Donnellan requested an update regarding audit benchmark activities generated at a Committee retreat (see minutes of Nov. 29, 2012, appended to these minutes). R. Kuebel asked Dr. Harvey to review these with the Committee on 1/24.

CHAIR'S REPORT:

R. Kuebel said Hamilton Finance & Advisory Committee chair John McWane recently contacted him re the proposed FY14 district budget but made no new requests.

CONSENT AGENDA:

Minutes of November 29, 2012

R. Kuebel noted that the minutes of Nov. 29, 2012, are a record of the Committee's third goal-setting retreat.

LARRY SWARTZ MADE A MOTION THAT THE HW REGIONAL SCHOOL COMMITTEE APPROVE ALL OF THE REMAINING ITEMS ON THE CONSENT AGENDA. THERE CAN BE NO FURTHER DISCUSSION OR AMENDMENT OF THIS MOTION. KYM DONELLAN SECONDED THE MOTION. THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY (9-0-0-0).

COMMITTEE REPORTS:

Facilities

B. Dery distributed an updated chart extending a timeline he had presented at a previous meeting, for consulting work regarding a facilities master plan for the district. (The updated timeline is appended to these minutes.) R. Kuebel noted it calls for a report by Oct. 2013 while the Committee previously set a goal of March 2014; B. Dery explained why he drafted a more aggressive schedule.

OLD BUSINESS:

Second Reading of Financial Policy

Extended discussion of the process of proposal and Committee review of proposed new district policies preceded discussion of the specific policies proposed to date. Members discussed issues including the number of policies to be discussed per meeting; the recently adjusted timeline for completing review and approvals by June; how long before a meeting policy documents should reach members; whether passages from relevant statutes should be printed on the policy documents (or be appended); at what stage in the process the Committee's counsel should review policies; whether counsel should only evaluate the legality of a proposed policy or also offer input about its substance; the degree of urgency involved in review and approval of proposed policies; and how administrative procedures relate to policies. B. Wilson said recent audits cited the paucity of district financial policies as a material weakness in district financial statements, and urged prompt review and approval. K. Donnellan said the pace at which they are being presented is unrealistic. B. Dery suggested a list of definitions would be helpful.

R. Kuebel suggested revisions to some of the financial policies that had been introduced in a first reading at a prior Committee meeting, some of which the Policy Working Group already had revised, renumbered and recirculated. (The drafts used at the Jan. 17 meeting are appended to these minutes.) In some cases the Committee decided to substitute one or more sentences from state statutes or regulations in place of draft policy text they considered less clear. Committee members agreed to submit suggestions and sample text to Dr. Harvey for him to forward to the Policy Subcommittee, for consideration during preparation of final drafts of the policies for future review and approval. Policies and points that were discussed in detail included these:

- D-4003, Budget Transfer Authority: whether to specify what dollar value or percentage of expense category would trigger notification of the Committee about administrators' transfer of funds between line items within an expense category, or retain existing language that requires such notification if an adjustment is "significant." R. Kuebel proposed the trigger level be \$50,000.
- D-4006, Authorized Signatures: members agreed to amend this to specify a primary and secondary signatory. L. Swartz read aloud a relevant portion of M.G.L. 71:16A.
- D-4012 and 4013, Purchasing Requirements: members discussed whether to require that every contract above \$5,000 must be put out to bid, or allow no-bid contracts within the parameters established by state law, and if the latter, whether prior authorization should be required. B. Dery favored a ban except as authorized in an emergency. P. Gray explained situations in which sole source contracts typically take place.
- D-4016, Reserve Funds: whether to specify 3%, 5% or some other percentage of operating budget as the annual target for the Excess & Deficiency account, and whether the Committee should be required to return to the Towns all funds in excess of the specified percentage or should have discretion to retain them if "any of the excess is required for future needs." Extensive discussion was inconclusive; the Committee agreed to settle this at a future meeting.
- D-4018, Student Activity Policy: R. Kuebel said having multiple checking accounts under principals' control for student activity funds seems over-complicated; Dr. Harvey said state law dictates this procedure.
- Use of Grant Funds: Supplement, Not Supplant: Dr. Bowler explained what a district can and cannot legally use grant funds for, and said she would propose changes so the draft policy would comply with regulations.

NEW BUSINESS:

First Reading of Administrative

The draft administrative policies are appended to these minutes.

Policy Sections

R. Kuebel commented on them and discussion touched on policies and points including these:

- Evaluation of the Superintendent: R. Kuebel objected to language he said inappropriately implies the Committee can tell the superintendent what to do, and said it should just address how the Committee is to evaluate the superintendent. Members agreed to amend the relevant section of the draft policy to state the Committee "will work with the superintendent to develop annual goals consistent with the strategic plan."
- Rules Pertaining to Staff and Student Conduct: member discussed the roles of this Committee and of school councils in review and approval of the individual schools' handbooks. Dr. Harvey said the Committee could review them and advise school councils to encourage consistency throughout the district.
- Administrative Responsibility in Absence of Committee Policy: R. Kuebel disagreed with the draft's statement that such decisions by the superintendent would be "subject to review by the Committee at its next regular meeting," which he said would allow the Committee to second guess the superintendent. Members agreed to amend it to "shall be brought to the attention of the School Committee."
- Annual Report: members and Dr. Harvey discussed what form the report should take going forward and agreed A. Minois and Dr. Harvey would share their ideas about the critical elements.
- School Ceremonies and Religious Holiday Observances: discussion of this lengthy policy was deferred to a future meeting. Dr. Harvey said some of the language reflects court decisions.

ADJOURNMENT:

LARRY SWARTZ MADE A MOTION THAT THE HAMILTON-WENHAM REGIONAL SCHOOL COMMITTEE VOTE TO ADJOURN. SEAN CONDON SECONDED THE MOTION. THE MOTION PASSED 7-0-1-1. (B. Dery abstained.)

The meeting adjourned at 9:46 p.m.

DOCUMENTS AND EXHIBITS USED AT THIS MEETING:

- Updated charts re RFP preparation timeline, master plan consultant (2 pages)
- Undated list of HWRSD existing administrative policies, and recommended administrative policies (1 page)
- Draft HWRSD financial policies D-4000 through D-4020 (packet dated Jan. 17, 2013; individual policies undated; some updated and renumbered) plus draft policy on Use of Grant Funds: Supplement, Not Supplant (23 pages)
- Draft HWRSD administrative policies (undated) on Administration

Goals; Regional School Superintendent; Superintendent's Contract;
Evaluation of the Superintendent; Lines of Responsibility/
Organizational Chart; Administrative Councils and Committees;
Principals; Policy Implementation; Development of Procedures;
Rules Pertaining to Staff and Student Conduct; Procedures
Dissemination; Administrative Responsibility in Absence
of Committee Policy; School District Annual Report;
School Ceremonies and Religious Holiday Observances (15 pages)

Respectfully submitted,
Ann Sierks Smith, School Committee recording secretary