

Hamilton-Wenham Regional School District Committee
Joint Meeting with
Hamilton Board of Selectmen and Wenham Board of Selectmen
October 27, 2011
Minutes

CALL TO ORDER

A. McCloughan called the meeting of the School Committee to order at 7:02 p.m. in the Multi-purpose Room of Buker School. M. Martins called the meeting of the Wenham Board of Selectmen to order. J. Scuteri called the meeting of the Hamilton Board of Selectmen to order. The Committee, Boards of Selectmen, and audience rose for the Pledge of Allegiance.

PRESENT:

School Committee: Sean Condon, Bill Dery, Kym Donnellan, Roger Kuebel, Alexa McCloughan, Ann Minois, Jack O'Keefe, Dacia Rubel, and Larry Swartz

Hamilton Board of Selectmen: Dave Carey, Jeff Hubbard, Marc Johnson, Jennifer Scuteri, Jeff Stinson

Wenham Board of Selectmen: John Clemenzi, Molly Martins

ALSO PRESENT:

Peter Gray, Superintendent; Dr. Celeste Bowler, Assistant Superintendent for Learning; Kathy Harris, Director of Student Services; John Hughes, HWRHS Interim Principal

ABSENT:

Patrick Wilson, Wenham Board of Selectmen

**UPDATE ON OPERATIONAL
AUDIT RESPONSE:**

P. Gray updated the Committee and boards on the status of the district's response to each of the recommendations made by consultant Evergreen Solutions in the report on its 2010-11 operational audit of the district. His 50 minute presentation organized the recommendations in four groups: those already completed (see green pages of the audit update document appended to these minutes); those that are "ongoing," or currently being addressed (see yellow pages); those that will be addressed later, as ongoing projects are resolved and staff time becomes available (see blue pages); and those that district leaders do not plan to pursue (see pink pages). He said the district cannot act promptly, or alone, on two Evergreen's recommendations (see gray page). He expanded on the brief written status statements about some recommendations, noting that some involve teacher contract negotiations; some others call for new policies that the Finance Working Group of the Committee is developing and will present to the full Committee at a future meeting for its consideration; and some administrative hiring and restructuring will be deferred until a permanent superintendent and a permanent technology coordinator are hired. He said the district expects to realize \$283,000 in savings from recommendations it has acted on so far.

J. Stinson and J. Scuteri requested clarification about revolving accounts (see 4-2 in yellow section). P. Gray said \$125,000 was mistakenly left in the kindergarten revolving account that should have been returned to the general fund, and that Evergreen overstated the sum because at the time its staff examined that account, the district was collecting payments for the current year. He said the pending report on this fall's routine financial audit of the district will identify all revolving accounts, state their balances, and specify which revolving fund balances are to carry over for use in future years, and which are to be transferred to the general fund at the close of each fiscal year.

J. Scuteri recommended the district adjust the financial figures in the update report to specify the savings realized in the current fiscal year, versus those expected in FY2013.

R. Kuebel asked when administrators will act on those recommendations not yet addressed. P. Gray said there is no specific timeline; as staff complete and "retire" particular tasks and projects linked to the operational audit, they will move on to others.

J. Clemenzi asked for details about administration-teacher communication (see 2-1 in yellow section). P. Gray said he now meets monthly with union representatives, and a teacher advisory council is in place that gives teachers more of a voice in district issues.

L. Swartz asked why the district does not plan to expand contract steps (see 3-13 in pink section) and asked whether this could be instituted for new hires. P. Gray said were the steps changed per Evergreen's recommendation, some current teachers' salaries would decline, while the district's overall personnel costs might increase.

M. Martin invited the audience to ask questions. None were forthcoming at that time.

P. Gray briefed the Committee and boards on planned changes to the budget process and format, noting that building administrators will have more input than in the past. He made a PowerPoint presentation (appended to these minutes) of the timeline for development of the FY2013 budget. He said also that the Hamilton Wenham Educational Fund has offered to sponsor a forum with outside speakers addressing educational issues.

C. Bowler, K. Harris and J. Hughes spoke briefly. C. Bowler said administrators would be asked to do some things differently, and gradual changes would increase efficiency and transparency; she said she expects parents to question some changes. K. Harris spoke highly of the education the district provides to the majority of students and said education of some students can be improved in a fiscally responsible way. She spoke of best practices said urged careful expression of concerns to avoid the perception that special education and regular

education are competing interests. J. Hughes spoke of increasing teachers' and students' technological versatility and said the principals will fight to maintain excellence.

In response to a question asked by Michelle Bailey of Wenham, P. Gray said the planned Jan. 30 budget forum would supplement the official public hearing on the budget, which would take place at another time. He told her also that the group he referred to as a "school improvement team" is known in this district as a school council. Margot Killoran of Hamilton requested that SPED topics be included in the educational forum to be sponsored by the EdFund.

J. Hubbard thanked P. Gray for his presentation and tone.

In response to a question asked by J. Scuteri, P. Gray said further updates on the operational audit would occur during budget presentations, and at specific Committee meetings. He said the operational audit moved the district toward the new format being used for the FY13 budget.

ADJOURNMENT:

COMMITTEE MADE A MOTION TO VOTE TO ADJOURN. THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.

The meeting adjourned at 8:35 p.m.

DOCUMENTS & EXHIBITS USED AT THIS MEETING

Update to the Hamilton Board of Selectmen, Wenham Board of Selectmen, and Citizens of Hamilton & Wenham on the Operational Audit of the Hamilton-Wenham Regional School District.

Proposed FY13 Budget Timeline

Respectfully submitted,

Ann Smith, School Committee recording secretary