

GATEWAY REGIONAL DISTRICT SCHOOL COMMITTEE

The Gateway Regional School District will provide and exemplary education that challenges all students in an instructional setting appropriate to their needs.

All visitors attending the school committee meeting should sign in at the security booth.

BUDGET HEARING

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 4, 2020

**Performing Arts Center
7:00 P.M.**

I. OPENING OF MEETING

BLANDFORD
Michele Crane
Terri Garfield

CHESTER
Jason Forgue
Shirley Winer

HUNTINGTON
Melissa Nazzaro

MIDDLEFIELD
Sarah Foley

MONTGOMERY

RUSSELL
Tara Balboni
Sarah Page
Lyndsey Papillon

SECRETARY
Stacy Stewart

CENTRAL ADMINISTRATION
Dr. David B. Hopson, Superintendent
Stephanie Fisk, Business & Finance

ADMINISTRATIVE COUNCIL
Martha Clark, High/Middle Assistant Principal
Megan Coburn, Chs,Lit Principal
Jason Finnie, Middle/High Principal
Kurt Garivaltis, Pupil Services Director
Deanna LeBlanc, High/Middle Assistant Principal
Jeanne LeClair, Communications

STUDENT REPRESENTATIVES
Brian Forgue

OTHERS: Andy Myers, John Baldasaro, Linda Coffey, Nick Balboni, Ruth Kennedy, Mike LaFleur, Peter Spotts, Amy Porter, Cara Letendre, Josh Garcia, Joe Kearns, Mary Ann Pease, Chris Tamburrino, Adare, Marin, Chrissy DeAngelis

7:05 p.m. II. BUDGET HEARING FY '21

- Dr. Hopson opened the meeting at 7:00 p.m.
- He gave a PowerPoint presentation which will be on the website either tonight or first thing tomorrow morning.
- He discussed the differences between the statutory and alternative methods.
- Mr. Balboni asked what method makes it on each town warrant. It is what the school committee sends?
- Dr. Hopson said state law dictates that the school committee is the group that decides if we put the statutory or alternative method on the town warrants. It takes four of our six towns to approve the statutory method and all six towns to pass the alternative method.
- Mr. Forgue believes what Mr. Balboni was asking was how do we make sure what the school committee sends is what gets on the warrant.
- Dr. Hopson said the regional agreement and the state say that what the school committee sends forward is what goes on town warrant. This also should be the case with the regional agreement. It can be changed on the floor. There are no teeth in the state to penalize a town who doesn't put it on the warrant. When the

assessment and the method go on the warrant the selectman could say they don't agree with it. From a town moderator standpoint, the town only has to put one budget article on the warrant.

- Mr. Baldasaro said his research is found exactly what Dr. Hopson said. The cooperation between the towns and the school committee has been good over the past few years, it is a shame that we cannot use the alternative method and get the regional agreement. He is extremely frustrated. It is not fair for other select boards to change our process. He is sick of being held hostage by two towns. It is time townspeople
- Mrs. Kennedy goes to the meetings, she was at a select board meeting when the attorney was there. She happens to know a letter was sent.
- Dr. Hopson agrees with Mrs. Kennedy that she and Mr. Mason did what they were asked. The problem is the process is by law the school committee appoints a committee to make changes to the regional agreement. That group takes input from all 6 towns and then comes back to school committee with recommendations. That part worked. When school committee approved it, it didn't go on the warrant for Russell and Montgomery. Now Russell and Montgomery have changes, and any major changes need to be voted again by the other 4 towns. The select board should have taken Ruth and Derrick's input.
- Mr. Baldasaro would recommend the school committee send it to the towns for a vote.
- Dr. Hopson said by law the school committee is a separate municipal committee. You don't have to vote for it but you do have to put it on the warrant. When Russell and Montgomery didn't put it on the warrant it was against the law. In the end it is the school committee's choice to move it forward for ratification.
- Dr. Hopson said the real question tonight is which assessment method to use. Mr. Baldasaro has said he doesn't think the alternative method will pass.
- Mr. LaFleur said it seems to be that up to now, they feel they will be subsidizing growth for other towns and not see growth. Five year rolling assessment was done and it wasn't huge savings.
- Dr. Hopson said we cannot use the 5-year rolling average until the regional agreement is passed.
- Mr. LaFleur said when the new selectmen came on they had their own plan. They would prefer the statutory method.
- Mrs. Kennedy doesn't know what the Russell selectmen want. They haven't seen this yet.
- Dr. Hopson gave kudos to the administration for keeping this down.
- Mr. Baldasaro would like to see this pass, but he has been doing this for so long that he doesn't see a chance.
- Dr. Hopson said if school committee sends out the alternative method, Blandford could vote the statutory amount. Which means if all six towns vote the alternative method, towns could vote the larger number.
- Mr. Baldasaro said it works out for Chester this year, but that was not the basis for this.
- Dr. Hopson thinks we should at least try the alternative method and vote the larger number.
- Mr. Fogue occupies finance and school committee for the town of Chester. The alternative method is going to be is recommendation from both positions. His concern is they voted statutory because it saved them money, but now they are voting against it so there is clearly another agenda.
- Brian Fogue asked if there is a way to do one method for multiple years.
- Dr. Hopson said no because the state says all towns have to vote the alternative method every year if they are not using the statutory method.
- Mr. Fogue said two years ago, Mr. Myers said it was going to pass and he said it would never happen and he proved him wrong. He hopes he proves him wrong again.
- Mrs. Nazzaro said what the idea of wanting to encourage growth. Under the statutory method, towns are penalized for families moving in. With the alternative method we are inviting families in. When one town succeeds we all succeed. We cannot be pitting against each other. Any house that sells in the district should be a good thing.
- Dr. Hopson said it would be nice to increase the town populations.
- Ms. Fisk said people should lobby the house for the alternative assessment to pass with a 2/3rds vote instead of all six towns.
- Brian Fogue said the capital stabilization account was not set up again.
- Dr. Hopson said if the towns could be on board for the alternative method it would be easier to set money aside. If we had put \$50,000 away for 20 years we would have the money almost to cover the roof. Instead when we do that the towns will have to bond for it.
- Andy Myers supports the alternative method, we need to welcome families. The towns are all getting older. He compliments Gateway for coming in with a 1.9% budget. It is reasonable and he would encourage all towns to pass it. He asked for a regional agreement compromise. It is critical to come into compliance. Once we are compliant then it is not difficult to update. We have hammered out what brings us into compliance. It has been approved by DESE, four towns and administration. He requests Russell and Montgomery put it on the town warrant get it into compliance.

III. ADJOURNMENT at 8:00 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,
Stacy L Stewart
School Committee Secretary