

An Ad hoc Agriscience Committee meeting of the Regional School District 14 Board of Education was held on Tuesday, July 24, 2012 at Nonnewaug High School, 5 Minortown Road, Woodbury, Connecticut.

Present: Superintendent Jody Ian Goeler; Director of Finance/Operations James Reese; Board members George Bauer, Charles Cosgriff and Maryanne Van Aken, NHS Principal Andrew O'Brien, Agriscience Director Bill Davenport; Woodbury Selectmen Barbara Perkinson and George Hale; Bethlehem Board of Finance Chair Len Assard and member Mike Devine; Woodbury Board of Finance members Bill Butterly; and Board Clerk Debra Carlton

The meeting began at 5:08 pm when Mr. Goeler requested each participant introduce him/herself and thanked the group for attending. The minutes were reviewed, and Mr. Butterly expressed concern that specific comments were not attributed to committee members in the minutes. Mr. Bauer explained that ad hoc minutes are meant to give a general recounting of topics discussed. Mr. Goeler asked for additions/corrections. Mr. Hale requested that, in the second-to-last paragraph, in a section describing comments made by him, that the following be added: "Could the BoE look into outside funding for the program, perhaps from the Dept. of Agriculture and/or private sector possibilities, such as large agriculture corporations?"

Mr. Reese provided a slide summary of net cost per pupil for 2010-11, as this year is closed out and actual numbers are available. There was considerable discussion and questions about these numbers as compared to ones Mr. Butterly was using from a State report. Mr. Reese stressed that Mr. Butterly's numbers were from an expense report, while Mr. Reese's are showing impact to the towns. The two are not comparable. Mr. Devine felt that, with pure numbers, this slide is right on the money; however, "overhead" is also a cost and needs to be attributable, too. Mr. O'Brien noted that the 2003-4 report broke down all these expenses, and also addressed economy of scale.

Mr. O'Brien had been charged with showing the impact if the program was not here. He explained that there would be fewer course offerings/sections, which would adversely impact highest and lowest performing students the most resulting in a decrease of elective offerings. The impact associated to the region, if we were to become a sending town, would result from having to pay tuition costs for students choosing to attend another district's agriscience program. In addition, the region would be required to pay a prorated reimbursement to the State for the building and equipment. Intangible losses would include the loss of the flagship program, diversity in our student population, loss of scholarships and work experiences for students, and adult education programs for adults in the community.

Mr. Butterly commented that no member of the community, not one, has ever expressed to him the desire to see the program removed.

Mr. Devine felt all possible expenses are needed to assess the "costs" and "value" of the agriscience program. The committee should put a value to all aspects of the expense side as well as the benefit side. Net/net will show whether the program is a win or loss, and would help to make an argument to the State if more funding is needed. He asked if it can be quantified at what point the program maxes out before the next incremental jump is needed, both for regular ed and agriscience. Mr. Davenport believed the 210 out-of-district students have been calculated by the business office as the max out number. Mr. Cosgriff wondered whether, as regular ed enrollment declines, more agriscience students could be added.

Mr. Devine felt that all other intangible costs should be identified, as well as the level of quality desired and how much money is needed to get there. Expense and value added will show the value of the program. The committee should show the public that it has allocated all worst case scenarios as well as the great things about it to show the value of the program. Various formulas for different audiences, and due diligence to the process, is needed.

The committee will reconvene on August 14th at 6 pm, to allow for further discussion on matters related to determining the costs that should be assessed against out-of-district students and the value related to enrolling these students.

Respectfully Submitted,

Debra Carlton, Board Clerk
Regional School District 14 Board of Education