

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

Present: Superintendent Jody Ian Goeler; Director of Finance/Operations James Reese; R14 Business Office financial assistant Helen Stewart; Board members Maryanne Van Aken and Pamela Zmek; NHS Principal Andrew O'Brien; Agriscience Director Bill Davenport; Region 7 Business Manager Roger Newbury; Woodbury Selectmen Barbara Perkinson and George Hale; Bethlehem Selectman Ed Roden; Bethlehem Board of Finance Chair Len Assard and member Mike Devine; Woodbury Board of Finance members Bill Butterly and Charles Bartlett; and Board Clerk Debra Carlton. Also, two members of the community, and one member of the press were in attendance.

The meeting began at 6:06 pm, and the minutes of the last meeting were reviewed. Mr. Butterly requested an addition: Where the minutes stated that it had never been suggested to him by any member of the community that the agriscience program should be eliminated, he asked for his additional statement, that "the community also wants a clear understanding of what it costs the taxpayers of Woodbury."

Mr. Reese provided additional financial summaries, explaining that previously referring to his data as showing "net cost per pupil" was probably a misnomer. He is showing "local assessment per pupil," which is the information the towns are seeking. He demonstrated that the local assessment per pupil minus the assessment per pupil used for special education costs yields an assessment per pupil of \$9,622. Further, when combining agriscience tuition with the agriscience education grant, a total of \$9,707 was given as the cost to educate an agriscience student.

Considerable discussion followed and questions were asked regarding some of the financial figures. Mr. Davenport explained that, as a large school program, \$300-400 is received per student in the large school grant, and this appears in the budget. However, since grant money is not received until the following year, estimates are used in the proposed budget until actuals are known.

Mr. Bartlett commented that, for people without a knowledge base, if the numbers don't match they conclude that we don't know what we're doing; therefore, more explanation is needed for the public.

Mr. Hale wondered, if the \$1715 number is accurate, and it can be agreed that the district is actually ahead by about \$85 per out of district student, is there an issue with that, or are we to break even at best? In lobbying the state for additional funding, Mr. Goeler believes such concerns relate to fairness and that agriscience programs should be treated as magnet schools, with the majority of funding coming from the State.

Mr. Hale asked if the town is not losing money on these students, if the large school grant tips us one way or the other, with what would we approach the State for additional funding?

Mr. Davenport illustrated that, for a votech school, the sending town pays nothing; yet, they must pay \$7992 to send an agriscience student. Unfortunately, this leads some districts to discourage students from pursuing agriscience education. Mr. Hale concluded that the discussion of whether we make or lose money to be relevant.

Mr. Butterly reminded the committee that the public has heard the rumor that the program costs \$1 million. He would like PPE for NHS. Ms. Stewart quoted a figure of \$10,461 as PPE for NHS; if \$9707 is received for agriscience students, the difference is \$754 each. Mr. Devine asked if her figures include Central Office costs, and was told it does, prorated, but these could be backed out.

Mr. Goeler asked if agreement on the figures as presented could be reached. For presentation to the public, Mr. Assard recommended audited numbers be used, and Ms. Perkinson felt an explanation sheet such as the one Mr. Reese had presented tonight be used at budget time as it was easy to understand.

Mr. Hale began the discussion of next steps, asking if the group would be willing to sign on tonight and begin to plan on marketing the findings – perhaps even take a full page ad in the Voices.

After more discussion, the group unanimously agreed to accept the figures of \$9662 and \$9707 as accurate and the formula from which these figures derive.

For the purposes of communicating its findings to the public, Mr. Goeler asked for a subcommittee to work on a marketing/communications strategy. Volunteering for this task were: Mr. Assard, Mr. Devine, Ms. Perkinson, Ms. Van Aken, Mr. Bartlett, Ms. Zmek and Mr. Davenport.

Ms. Perkinson suggested footnoting what each term means on Mr. Reese's handout, explaining why special ed and transportation are backed out, giving facts such as what the State does and does not pay, grant amounts, and using 4 years' worth of audited numbers. Ms. Van Aken suggested bringing this year's numbers out at budget time and going back at least two years to show that the numbers remain similar.

Next step will be a meeting of the subcommittee at a date to be determined.
The meeting adjourned at 7:41 pm

Respectfully Submitted,

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