

The Regular Meeting of the Regional School District 14 Board of Education was held on Monday, March 5, 2012 in the Nonnewaug High School Library, 5 Minortown Road, Woodbury, Connecticut.

Present: Superintendent Jody Ian Goeler; Board members Sophiezane Bartlett, George Bauer, John Chapman, Charles Cosgriff, Gary Suslavich, Maryanne Van Aken, and Pamela Zmek; Director of Finance/Operations James Reese; Administrators and Directors Eric Bergeron, Kimberly Culkin, Alice Jones, Melinda McKenna, Mike Molzon, Andrew O'Brien, MaryLou Torre, and Jeff Turner; and Board Clerk Debra Carlton

Absent: Board member John Swendsen

Audience members included: NHS teacher Katie Yocis and staff member Jean McDevitt; about five members of the community and four members of the press

I. Call to Order

Mr. Cosgriff called the meeting to order at 7:32 p.m. and led the Pledge of Allegiance.

II. Presentation – Region 14’s Finest – Bethlehem Elementary School

Mr. Goeler explained the Board's initiative of recognizing excellence in Region 14 with Region 14's Finest Awards. He called on Ms. McKenna to present for her school.

Ms. McKenna asked second grade student Andrew Stone to join her at the podium. She told the Board and audience that Andrew participates in his own recycling program at Bethlehem Elementary School, thereby helping his school and the earth. He also brings a smile to everyone's face each day, she said, and she was proud to be honoring him as one of Region 14's Finest. Bruce Beeman, head custodian at her school, was also chosen due to his dedication to the school and tireless efforts to ensure that the school is a pristine place for all. In addition, she said, Mr. Beeman connects with students, provides them with projects, incentives and praise, and offers support and friendship to the entire school community. Joined by Board member Charles Cosgriff, she presented certificates to Andrew and Mr. Beeman.

III. Review of the Minutes

Mr. Suslavich entered a *motion to accept the minutes of the regular meeting of February 6, 2012 as written.*

Seconded by Mr. Bauer, the **motion carried 6-0-1** with Ms. Zmek abstaining.

Ms. Van Aken entered a *motion to accept the minutes of the regular meeting of February 21, 2012 as written.*

Mr. Bauer seconded that motion. Mr. Suslavich pointed out that, in the absence of a quorum, the 2/21/12 meeting would be considered a non-meeting. The motion previously entered was withdrawn.

Ms. Van Aken entered a *motion to accept the minutes of the special meeting of February 28, 2012 as written.*

Seconded by Mr. Bauer, the **motion carried 6-0-1** with Mr. Suslavich abstaining.

IV. Correspondence

None.

V. Report from the Chairman

The Join Us Back to School program was discussed. Citizens 65 and older may apply on line for a membership card that allows them access to all Region 14 activities at no cost.

**VI. Report from the Superintendent**

Mr. Goeler began with this statement: "As you may be aware, the Board initiated an investigation of the school district's procedures for special education expenditures. Based on the initial investigation, we have decided to refer this matter to the State Department of Education for further investigation. In light of the fact that the State Department of Education has an ongoing investigation, we do not believe it is appropriate to comment further at this time."

Mr. Goeler then began the budget presentation with remarks about goals for the district, budget objectives and guidelines.

Mr. Reese summarized a number of slides in his powerpoint presentation regarding budget challenges and assumptions, enrollment history and projections, projected elementary class sizes, and special education numbers. He presented the proposed budget amount of \$31,329,022, representing an increase over last year's budget of 3.58% and pointed out that, in light of flat or nearly flat budgets for several years in a row, it would be difficult to make progress if some increase is not seen this year. He graphed budget components, showed an expenditure summary and displayed reductions made from the initial budget draft. He explained revenue by source, budget distribution by town, effect on mill rate, and gave a variety of budget statistics. He concluded with upcoming budget dates and then took questions and comments from the board.

Mr. Chapman pointed to a discrepancy in the number of kindergarteners projected at BES; and Mr. Reese realized that current enrollment numbers had been used in his slide and that updated ones would need to be added.

Mr. Chapman also expressed concern over elementary teachers being eliminated but no middle or high school teachers.

Mr. Bauer asked if Peter Prowda's predictions were being used and Mr. Reese noted that those numbers tended on the high side in recent years, but had been considered.

Ms. Van Aken acknowledged that the board has class size guidelines; but, she asked what variance it is willing to accept between the two elementary schools.

Mr. Suslavich said that the numbers will never be the same, many factors are involved at all schools, and that academic parity, not numerical parity, is the goal. His concern was declining enrollment coupled with increased staff levels, including social workers, and wondered if the cost benefit is clear.

Mr. Goeler commented that we are trying to meet the needs of students with professionals who are familiar with them, rather than outsourcing on an as-needed basis.

Ms. Culkin added that the district does not provide family therapy, but rather serves the student population. The added position is listed at the middle school, but the person would work district wide.

Mr. Suslavich said that with a school psychologist at each building, he needs a better handle on caseloads. He seeks a strategic plan for one year, and 5 years, from now to see if it is in agreement with where we are headed with the budget.

Mr. Chapman suggested that the bar is being raised externally; enrollment is decreasing and 3 teachers are being cut but others supports still need to be in place.

Ms. Van Aken supports the increased social workers; the fact is, she said, these services are not available elsewhere in our community.

Mr. Suslavich sees 6% reduced staff and 15% reduced enrollment – a disconnect in added staff. Maybe a reallocation of staff is needed. He realizes there are increased initiatives but doesn't clearly see educational benefits. He needs quantifiable benchmarks to see if things are working.

Mr. Chapman sees a high burden on staff and doesn't think it fair to say lower enrollment equals less staff.

Mr. Goeler agreed that a strategic planning process is needed for the next budget year. This budget is based on what is needed now.

Ms. Van Aken added that certain pieces are not quantifiable, but kids need to feel safe in school and social workers address that.

Mr. Bauer noted that although special education numbers are flat, more services have been added. He needs clarity on what drives this. He understands the idea of bringing services back into district but cautioned against trying to do

too much at one time. The budget number is still too high. He is concerned about eliminating elementary teachers as he is in favor of one to one time with students. A strategic plan is needed to show him why he should support an assistant superintendent of curriculum. With new requirements on the way, he wants the district to be ready. He doesn't want to cut too much, but is mindful of what the community can afford.

Mr. Cosgriff concluded that more time is needed for understanding. He looks toward the 3/14 workshop and meetings on the 19<sup>th</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup> to provide that.

Ms. Zmek questioned Mr. Reese about the district wide maintenance position being requested and discussion followed regarding the use of the one person we currently employ and what types of work are contracted out. She also asked if the para requested was for the WMS LMC and was told it is.

Mr. Chapman concluded that raising the bar for teachers and administrators, which comprise 80% of the budget, getting the most out of them by developing them as professionals, is where our investment will pay off the most.

**VII. Privilege of the Floor**

Duncan McDougal, Woodbury, read a prepared letter to the board and provided copies of it to them. He noted that  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the budget is staff and benefits; feels teachers are the most important resource we have; questioned whether 22% of students require psychological testing; feels parents are 90% of the problem; asked what we will do this year that is different.

**VIII. Report from the Director of Finance/Operations**

None.

**IX. Committee Reports**

Reporting for the Bylaws/Policy/Ethics Committee, and having provided the Board with copies of the revised Safe School Climate Policy, entered a *motion to approve Policy 5131.911 Safe School Climate, to replace the existing bullying policy of the same number*. Ms. Zmek seconded the motion. Mr. Suslavich restated the need for a process for reporting adult to student bullying without fear of retribution. Mr. Goeler restated that the State code of conduct covers this and must be followed by all adults working with children. Mr. Bauer felt the administrative regulation would also cover this. Ms. Bartlett felt that parent/student handbooks could also clarify this. Ms. Van Aken felt that professional development to coincide with this policy revision would be valuable to staff. Mr. Suslavich requested that Mr. Goeler share the administrative regulation with the Board. Mr. Chapman indicated that the Board would receive the companion document. **The motion previously made and seconded carried 7-0.**

**X. Old Business**

None.

**XI. New Business**

None.

**XII. Board Announcements**

Several board members, as well as Mr. Goeler and Ms. Culkin, participated in Read across America on Friday.

**XIII. Privilege of the Floor**

None.

**XIV. Future Business**

Mr. Goeler noted that Team Beta would present at the next meeting.

XV. Adjournment

Mr. Suslavich entered a *motion to adjourn*, seconded by Ms. Van Aken. The **motion carried 7-0**.  
The meeting adjourned at 9:28 pm

Respectfully Submitted,

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John Chapman, Secretary  
Regional School District #14 Board of Education

Recorded and filed subject to Board of Education approval by: Debra W. Carlton, Board Clerk, 3/9/12