

A Special Meeting of the Regional School District 14 Board of Education was held on Thursday, May 17, 2012 at Nonnewaug High School, 5 Minortown Road, Woodbury, Connecticut.

Present: Superintendent Jody Ian Goeler; Board Chairman Charles Cosgriff and members John Chapman, Gary Suslavich, John Swendsen, Maryanne Van Aken, and Pamela Zmek; Director of Finance and Operations James Reese; Administrators Kim Culkin, Alice Jones, Melinda McKenna, William Nemec, Andrew O'Brien, and MaryLou Torre; and Board Clerk Debra Carlton

Absent: Board members Sophiezane Bartlett and George Bauer

Audience included: Region 14 faculty Sharon Gomes, Donna Marcinek and Steve Bunovsky; two members of the press and about sixteen members of the community

I. Call to Order

Mr. Cosgriff called the meeting to order at 7:50 p.m.

II. Discussion of 2012-13 Budget/Reductions

Mr. Goeler reported that the leadership team had met and significant cuts were made to the budget. With initiatives the district is facing around teaching and learning, it would be irresponsible for him to tell the board that a director of curriculum is not needed. The district is obliged to help 100% of students achieve and, therefore, that position remains in the budget. The leadership team agreed it would withdraw a 1.0 FTE social worker in order to accommodate this. With the curriculum position in, the additional \$50,000 for PD was taken out.

Mr. Reese reviewed the reduction list and calculated the new percentage increase at 1.89% adding that, if the science teacher was funded through increases in State revenue for agriscience students, the percentage would be closer to 1.77%. He also clarified reductions in secretarial/clerical staff, and with regards to the science position, the requirement to supplement and not supplant. The new budget amount was given as \$30,817,765.

Mr. Suslavich spoke of educational goals determined by the leadership team, versus the board's responsibility to respond to the community. He felt the board would be micromanaging if it suggested one position is more important than another and that, perhaps instead, it should indicate what level of funding it believes the community will support and then allow the superintendent to use the budget as he sees fit.

Mr. Chapman supports the administration's strong support for the curriculum position and the willingness to sacrifice a social worker. Regardless of personal opinion of what positions are more important, no one would argue the importance of a curriculum coordinator, he said. He is not aware of a district without a curriculum coordinator on staff. He has heard thoughtful input from the community and believes the board needs to sift through input from the community and administration to make the best decisions for children. They must not be swayed by any particular faction, and must make rational conclusions. This budget represents a reasonable approach and he believes it can be communicated to the public that the curriculum coordinator is important. He supports what has been presented.

Ms. Van Aken also expressed support for what had been presented to the board. Her thoughts about social workers are well known but she defers to, and applauds, the efforts of the leadership team. She very much supports this budget and stressed that the board listens to the public but the students have to come first.

Mr. Swendsen felt the budget reflects reasonable and responsible reductions. The leadership team has been given the responsibility of running the schools and these are fair reductions, he said.

Ms. Zmek made the clarification that the curriculum director position is being restored and not added. The first budget was voted down approximately 2-1 and it is her hope that by cutting the previous increase about in half that this will be a good compromise. It is about as low as it can go.

Mr. Suslavich sees the reductions as a good start but feels many areas could still be adjusted. Good discussions have been had over the past three months on how to move the district forward but he feels that 1.89% in light of fewer students and a poor economic climate is still too large. We can meet the needs of students with less. He cited fees for sports officials and athletic transportation as examples, as well as board public relations, and snow plowing, as line items that are too high.

Mr. Nemec, and Mr. Reese, explained athletic line items not previously in the budget and those that were previously listed under extra curriculars. Mr. Nemec talked about fixed rates for buses, per mile and hourly rates, and said he believes the estimates he gave to be accurate.

Mr. Cosgriff supports the administration and feels strongly about the curriculum position. He supports the budget and does not wish to micromanage, nor does he want to go back to the old ways of doing things.

Mr. Chapman feels the level of scrutiny is good; we are building an expense budget. There are times to budget aggressively, and conservatively, and this is a best estimate. If we do better, we can cut next year and bring lower budgets moving forward; at this stage, he said, we need to run with the facts as we have them and see them and then answer questions as they arise.

Mr. Suslavich remarked on the past year's budget and differences between what was approved and what came to be, feeling that the differences were largely due to unforeseen changes in special education.

III. Privilege of the Floor

Anne-Marie Mastroianni, Bethlehem Registrar, requested that the board not hold the next referendum on June 5th, as the registrar group of Litchfield County has an annual meeting on that date. She and her staff could more easily accommodate a June 6th or June 7th referendum date.

Duncan McDougal, Woodbury, recalled that, back in the 60's, we had good control over the schools. He understands a few unexpected expenses, but a couple hundred thousand in legal fees and funds for special education, along with out of school pupils, and now a new vo-ag science teacher is too much. Free money from the State sounds good but asked why more teachers when there are less students. He suggested changing the names of jobs, such as department heads.

Tom Arras, Woodbury, again raised the question of preschool costs and whether they would be less if the program was not in house. He raised questions about debt service which Mr. Reese addressed.

Sean Murphy, Woodbury, is still opposed to this second round of budgeting. He works in the private sector and there are many things he wants to do but knows he must do more with less. This reality is coming to Region 14, too, and there should be a goal of no increase.

Eileen Budrewicz, Woodbury, felt it would be helpful to show the yearly increases to taxpayers on a per month basis to illustrate that they are not that significant.

Jeanne Hawley, Woodbury, has had children in the district for 20 years; for the majority of those years, there was curriculum director in place to ensure that curriculum was implemented properly. She also made a case for one full time social worker per building.

IV. Revisions to the 2012-13 Budget

Mr. Cosgriff requested a motion to revise the 2012-13 budget.

Ms. Van Aken entered a *motion to adopt the \$30,817,765 budget, representing a 1.89% increase for the 2012-13 school year.* Seconded by Mr. Chapman, the **motion carried 5-1** with Mr. Suslavich voting no.

V. **Set Date for District Meeting and Budget Referendum**

Mr. Suslavich entered a *motion to hold a District Meeting on the budget referendum on June 5, 2012 at 7:00 pm, and to adjourn to a referendum vote to be held on June 6, 2012 in the towns of Bethlehem and Woodbury, between the hours of 6:00 am and 8:00 pm.*

Seconded by Mr. Chapman, the **motion carried 6-0.**

VI. **Adjournment**

Mr. Cosgriff requested a *motion to adjourn*, entered by Ms. Van Aken, seconded by Mr. Chapman.

Motion carried 6-0.

The Special Board of Education meeting adjourned at 9:00 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

John E. Chapman, Secretary
Regional School District 14 Board of Education

Recorded and filed subject to Board of Education approval by: Debra W. Carlton, Board Clerk, 5/18/12