

WILLINGTON BOARD OF EDUCATION
SPECIAL MEETING BUDGET WORKSHOP
AGENDA

January 23, 2019, 6:00 p.m.

Town Office Building, Upper Level Meeting Room

Audio Recording: yes

Notes Taken: yes

Members Present:

Herb Arico

Tracey Anderson

Chiara Bambara

Michelle Doucette Cunningham

Ann Grosjean

Stephanie Summers

Elena Testa

Members Absent

Also present: Superintendent of Schools Phil Stevens

1. Call to order M. Doucette Cunningham called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m. She noted if anyone wanted to speak to please sign in. The board has received quite a bit of letters and if you would like to speak about them please do. She also notes that we will not be voting on the budget tonight, but at our BOE meeting in February.

2. Present to Speak Speakers will be recognized by the Chairman and identify himself/herself by name and address and proceed with his/her comments. All persons will be limited to five (5) minutes. The total time allotted for Present to Speak shall not exceed twenty (20) minutes and is at the discretion of the Board and may not address specific personnel issues. Board of Education Policy 9325

Sarah Parcell 75 Timber Ln- Would like to thank all teachers and staff at public schools. Thanks for all the opportunities given. Cutting funding in areas that directly impact our students is not what we should be cutting. Our youth is our future and they should be allowed opportunities to thrive and grow. Thank you to all educators for keeping our children safe and providing great learning opportunities for them.

Julie Threat 19 Birch Meadow Ln- I sent an email about cutting positions that work directly with students. Schools with libraries show higher test scores than schools without them. Last year we brought 300 names on a position to keep the library media specialist. I am now a parent of a

highschooler, and although he was a straight A student at Hall without much difficulty, his first exams in high school were Ds and Cs. He is using same skill set and study techniques and got a very minimal result. When you take away people who make a difference in our children's life, ones that teach them about critical thinking, it scares me. My son had a message that the 7 and 8 grade students do not get enough homework. I don't want our services cut, I know how hard your job is, and I have the utmost respect for you. I don't think cutting positions is the answer. Fixed costs are going to go up every year and something needs to be done about that. We are unsustainable in the direction we're going. Thank you for what you do.

Matthew Clark 42 Burt Latham Rd- I was shocked that we don't teach social studies and science all year long. My niece went from Willington to EO Smith and had a difficult time. My suggestion is to cut librarian and makerspace teacher. These are not classroom teachers. Possibly add a teacher to be able to teach social studies and science. We can't build a brand new school and maintain budget flexibility. That would lock us into a financial situation that we cannot afford to do. Spend capital expenditure every year to maintain the buildings we do have. I don't think a new school is necessary, but invest the money into our students.

3. Follow up to Willington Public Schools' Superintendent's 2019-2020 Spending Plan (Budget)

P. Stevens started with some updates. Questions were brought up about the grand list and we do not know yet if it's going up or down but we should know by the end of the month.

Review of Program 1 (Center Elementary School)

Last year you applied \$50,000 in the grant offset of Program 1 though I applied all \$75,963. It's more than what we expected, but that's what we can apply for next year.

Review of Program 2 (Hall Memorial School)

We need to plan for what we fiscally expect. The position we are potentially eliminating has the ability to bump another person so the savings isn't the entire amount. This affects benefits as well. You will see an \$18,000 increase based on seniority and certification.

Review of Program 3 Special Education and Related Services

A letter of retirement has been received by a special education teacher retiring at the end of the year. Budget was adjusted basing a new hire coming in with a masters degree at step 1. Cost could be more or less depending on the pool of candidates for the job, but this is standard practice.

Review of Program 6 Curriculum and Staff Development

Title 2 grant offset allows \$1,600 more which brought the support for curriculum leadership to \$9,100.

With all adjustments \$453 decrease brings the budget to 2.93%

Program 8: Operations/Maintenance

This is our facilities and maintaining our facilities. We do not have a secretary that is assigned to maintenance but we have people like Nicole at Hall that does all the POs and collecting information from the custodians for both schools. In the 2018/19 year we had two custodians, but we also had a substitute and it was really impacting Hall School. Our maintenance staff decreased from 3 to 2, one at each school. There is one night custodian at Center and 2 at Hall since it is twice the square footage. The custodian line went up because we hired two new people, but the maintenance line went down. Summer work was a 3% increase and purchase services is a number that is told to us. EMCOR was moved out and that \$9,000 was shuffled between programs one and two. There is no contingency plans built into this budget. If there is money at the end to pre pay a contract that would be good, but that's not guaranteed. The custodial supplies line is down 4% and this total account is down \$7,000.

Program 9: System-Wide Support

.85 is Brenda and her other .15 is in transportation. Purchase service line here are set. Magnet school tuition is a state formula and they are all over the board. We are required to pay whatever the negotiated rate is. Around 5 kids, budgeting for what we know currently. We don't pay for transportation unless there is something set up through special education. Not per pupil cost, just a bill. Teacher evaluation is every third year. \$11,000 back in for next year that we have to do. School messenger is what we use for when we have delayed openings, and our website built in. PowerSchool and Star Testing went up. Also within the \$104,000 is our portion of custom computers, this is a shared service with the town. 47% payed by board, 53% by town. We all benefit from service. Homebound has not been used so I took it out. It is a program if a student needs a home tutor because they can't leave the house, many other reasons you can get a tutor. All teachers have auditory phonic ears. Mandatory training for staff is de escalation training. We were told every staff member has to have this, and now it's just crisis team. We will pay our old pupil services director to come in and train our teachers on this which is much cheaper than sending teachers out. Only new thing in budget is security related. Went through different recommendations on keeping our buildings safe for our staff and students. Public safety officers, not police officers, for big events. They would walk the halls and deal with parking. We had a car fire during one of our shows, if someone passed out we would have no nurse. We would hire local emergency personnel at their per diem rate, any event where we would have lots of people they would come in. \$3,000 covers 37 hours with two people.

Follow up information requests from previous reviews, and discussion

P. Stevens brings us back to program 3 with a question about our special education program. Parents asked about the amount of money in our budget that is directed toward special education needs and if we could manage without replacing the special ed teacher retiring. No we cannot. We need to evaluate the program, just like we would any other program and see if there is a way we can save money without impacting student needs. Asked Marcia about our

rates for identifying students. We're at 17% for special education services. Rates have gone up because in the last several years there's been a push for certain interventions. If you go through steps and they don't make progress you have to look into special education. You can do an outside audit to come in and look at IEP hours in the future from a third party but it cost money.

M. Doucette Cunningham explains that In our process we will make a motion, then make amendments as needed. In order for that process to happen is there any other additional info you need to move this budget or any other amendments that may come up.

C Bambara- Has concerns of cutting positions. What are things you can do to make sure there are minimal impact on students? P. Stevens said the idea is to take a para from intervention room into that position. You would have makerspace and library managed by para. Para would go to team meetings to hear classroom teachers and plan together for what they want to see.

C Bambara questions how students use makerspace. P. Stevens said it is used during STEAM block, but also collaborative space. Group of students read a story then recreated the ending in their own way with marionettes and film it. They had built the sears tower out of cubes to scale based on the topics they were discussing in math. Makerspace is about hands on activities. Kids are excited to come in and do hands on learning with student inquiry based activities.

H. Arico- Our driving force is increased salaries and insurance. This happens to us every year. We cut into instructional areas that directly affect the children in our district. We should want to provide our students with everything we possibly can. I don't know if there are other areas to decrease or not but if we put those back in that would drive us up another \$100,000 or so probably around 5%. What would happen next year? We would have to up class sizes. I favor keeping the positions.

There was a request to see what the budget looks like without cutting those positions. Looking at ways to save money to break this because it happens year after year. It's going backwards. No matter what our staff will rise to the occasion but they will get burnt out and leave and I don't want to see that.

C. Bambara- Expresses that last year she contacted the head counselor at EO Smith that our kids who participate in higher level classes is comparable to other schools. We do provide a good education and there are no deficiencies with our kids.

E. Testa- The level of education that our schools supplied, when people look into moving to Willington they first look at taxes. So many people planning on moving out that will cause kids moving out from our school system. It's too expensive to live here and we need to look at other revenues.

M. Doucette Cunningham wants to make sure we stay on task with budget about the education system. No matter what we vote in February we have to present to the BOF and they look at the broader picture. Our job is the discuss what the education system requires not what we think the town can or cannot pay.

H. Arico- Feels that with the elimination of this position the teachers would pick this up. Another area we should look at is the curriculum itself. In our budget the support for curriculum leadership has been cut in half. It's been going down year after year. We have reduced staff development as well. Last year we spent \$76,000 and this year about \$58,000 so were doing it with less money each year. We are not providing as much, or more in house. We have some PD days during the year, but as far as curriculum I dont think were impacting it the way we should.

A. Grosjean- Is concerned that we cut supplies so much, I know as a former teacher what it takes to run a classroom. We've reduced the money that it takes to buy those materials. We've been working on curriculum but it all costs money. I don't want to see teachers have to buy themselves. We need to provide teachers what the need to be able to enhance curriculum

C. Bambara- In previous years we sent letters out for parents to supply some items for students but that now we buy everything for the kids

P. Stevens- Explains that is part is his philosophy that we should be providing the materials needed for students. Some parents can't afford to buy these items as well. Also as far as different brands for things, kids notice that and I don't want any student to feel lesser about themselves because of school materials. If we supply them then they are the same across the board. It's the responsibility of the district to purchase notebooks and pencils. The savings to ask people to go out and do that is minimal. We want to make sure kids feel valued.

The board talks about the budget for books and periodicals since it has been cut significantly. We are not buying any new books this year and as that saves us some money this year it cannot be a savings every year. There are lots of online resources that are free but staying updated with books is needed as well.

M. Doucette Cunningham- Requests to look at comparable sized districts and look at last year's budget and what they spend on curriculum and staff development. Other is to look at supplies budgets in a similar light. I think that would be useful.

T. Anderson- Has concerns on reducing positions and supplies and relying on our teachers to add on to their roles. It affects the climate of our schools, which trickles down to the climate of our students. Morale gets low and it affects the kids. It changes the environment. I'm afraid to lose what we've been building.

S. Summers- Questions if we talked about an alternative budget cut opposed to the positions. What percentage would that increase be if we didn't cut those positions? I think we need another budget session because I don't know what we could propose before saying we want it all.

M. Doucette Cunningham feels if there is something someone would like to see changed, one scenario per person, to make a package of cuts, to get back to Phil and calculate what that would cost. We could take a motion and you can put forward your scenario and we'll vote. The board discussed the budget scenario process more to clarify for all board members.

T. Anderson- Feels that in prior budget meetings we went over all programs but we didn't have much time to go back and forth to discuss. We should have another meeting for communications to go back and forth to come up with more ideas.

We want to have an option to provide scenarios and have further discussion. The board will submit their scenarios to be researched by Monday morning.

4. Present to speak

Jack Bienvenue- I'm an 8th grader. What I think the students need at our school is a consolidation on curriculum. There is a lot of overlap in what were learning. Second comment is on our schedule. We have three study hall times a day. That's 80 minutes. If we distribute that time to more core classes or STEAM, one we would have more homework and two more learning could be done overall. I don't think the microphones are really necessary in the classroom. I'd rather have a water fountain or a working sink. Last comment is about makerspace as I think it's misunderstood. It is used during class time but I think it has potential to be used during other times like WIN [What I Need] time. Personally I like to take advantage of the makerspace and 3D printer.

Judy Threatt of 19 Birch Meadow Ln- I commend everyone's diligence with this as I know it's not easy. I'm a real estate agent. I have clients looking at homes in the area that won't consider Willington because of the school system. I have never had a client move anywhere because of taxes. I have great concerns for the future because of people moving out of town. I feel concerned for the teacher impact, and the many rolls they take on and hats they would wear. I feel like they're close to their limits. Cutting two teachers, makes others wonder if next year is it going to be me? I think it's time for you to fight for our students. Take that fight to the BOF. I think it's time because we can't keep cutting. Were lean, there is no fluff in this budget.

Matthew Clark of 42 Burt Latham Rd- I moved here because of the taxes, that was a major decision for me. It's a country town and old buildings are appealing to me. I don't want to live in a city or where everything is perfect. Phil, if you could look into EO smith and find out officially what's happening. If this is a problem then we have an education problem. No one wants students to suffer. Do you have any accreditation concerns? You don't have a director of facilities but the town needs to look at things that don't work. You have water fountains that don't

work. If we don't keep up with these things, then we're going to have to build a new school. As for security, I don't think we have any problems with kids and parents, are there problems? The board does need to weigh cost and benefit.

Sandra Hughes of 74 Willington Hill Rd- When we moved to town, our biggest concern is what the schools were like. We kept our kids in Tolland until they kicked us out. Thrilled about EO Smith, but scared to have a 5th grader. They push and talk about STEAM, it was a big deal from the principal. The positions we're cutting is about 30% of teaching these programs. My daughter is coming home upset about these cuts and I don't even know how she knows about it yet. Contractual items will go up every year. I think these positions are important for our students.

Dina Gilbert of 6 Burt Latham Rd- I have had kids in the Willington school system for 13 years. Eventually we will have a consolidated school. We need to look at our dwindling population. It's never easy to make cuts from any program. Center School had an extremely successful transition from a librarian to a paraprofessional. She has been wonderful. By losing that resource, we have access to Willington Public Library. I never felt my kids were at a disadvantage without having a librarian. Rather than cutting from core classes. I feel that cut would be the least disruptive to our students.

Aaron Kruger of 174 Tolland Tpke- I have two kids, one who skipped a grade and one who has an IEP. I'm cautious that the board watches what we do with enrichment. We did move our daughter out of the school because she wasn't being challenged enough. There are a lot of bright kids in Willington and they need to be challenged. The budget will always grow. It's the way the economy works. I commend Phil for getting it down to the 3%. I don't support the cut of the makerspace but I do feel like librarian position we could do without. Make sure to look at enrichment programs. I've heard a lot of parents complain about the transition from Hall to EO Smith.

Sarah Parcell of 75 Timber Ln- When I first got to this town, if you looked at the school, its old fashioned. The teachers are phenomenal. I feel like my son has been challenged and teachers care about him. All his friends have different talents and strengths. Anything we can do for our schools I think we need to do. We have standardized testing for a reason and our scores are good. Our schools have simple things yet they are definitely challenged. They have Spanish, the 3D printer and they need that in the future. I'm not sure where I stand on the library position, but libraries are the base of education. I will work for the kids in the town I live in. These kids are our future and they deserve a future. A basic education with good kind teachers is everything.

M. Doucette Cunningham- Thank you all for your passion and thoughtfulness of your comments. We will have one more budget workshop before these decisions are finalized. I encourage you to speak with friends and neighbors.

P. Stevens- This has been quite a challenging process. The survey we did showed an overwhelming level of parents who want enrichment programs. I had to make a decision based on board priorities.

C. Bambara- Would like to thank everyone for all their great input.

A. Grosjean- My feeling is to take our 5.69% and go the finance board, I realize it may not be possible, but those are my feelings. There is nothing more we cut. And thank you all for your input, it's nice we have the support to maintain our budget.

T. Anderson- I appreciate input from the town for what you want. Please keep coming. I agree with Ann, we're already in a frozen budget this year, where will we be next year, there is no room to go.

E. Testa- I feel we need to be fiscally responsible to keep taxes down.

S. Summers- I appreciate all the comments and am inspired to do some more digging. We've all done site visits and I was impressed and jazzed because we got to see the students work. I was blown away by the art and the way the students are interpreting things and seeing what's going on in our schools.

H. Arico- Would like to thank everyone for coming out, I took notes on all your comments. Thanks to our superintendent, staff, and other administrators who put this budget together. It's been a long process and I appreciate all the efforts you've put into it. It's about as fine tuned as you can possibly get it. I don't know where the budget will go from this point on, but whatever we do come up with, I hope the board will stand behind it. That when we go to the BOF we will stand together with the budget we decided on, that will provide our students with the best education we can.

M. Doucette Cunningham- I think that living in a small town and participating on a volunteer board has given me an insight to how hard governing is. I want to thank my fellow board members for the perseverance, because we care about Willington. We put a lot of time into these meetings and have a difficult decision to make in the next month. I appreciate the hard conversations we have to have. Even those that didn't speak tonight [public] I appreciate you coming out. I would like to note a really interesting educational report on social/emotional and academic learning. Learning happens in a space where kids feel safe, loved, and engaged. Some of the magic of Willington schools is behind the scenes and I hope for a budget that will continue this magic. With that I will take a motion to Adjourn.

5. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 8:53 pm.

Andrea Byberg

Recorder