

WILLINGTON BOARD OF EDUCATION
SPECIAL MEETING BUDGET WORKSHOP
Minutes
February 6, 2019, 6:00 p.m.
Town Office Building, Upper Level Meeting Room

Audio Recording: yes

Notes Taken: yes

Members Present:

Herb Arico

Tracey Anderson- arrived at 7:20 pm

Chiara Bambara

Michelle Doucette Cunningham

Ann Grosjean

Stephanie Summers

Elena Testa

Members Absent

None

Also present: Superintendent of Schools Phil Stevens and HMS Principal Ken Craig

1. Call to order: Michelle D. Cunningham called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m.

2. Present to Speak: None

3. Review of all programs for Willington Public Schools' Superintendent's 2019-2020 Spending Plan (Budget)

Ken Craig presented a description of Library Media Specialists and Enrichment Specialists daily tasks and how they are integral in the new Readers Writers Workshop and Illustrative Math curriculum.

Elena Testa asked what the daily responsibilities are of the Library Media Specialist.

Ken Craig described the Library Media Specialist as being an vital part of the new STEAM program for grades 5-8. She also works with students in grades 5-8 during the WIN block, provides book hooks for students in grades 6-8 every two weeks, and teaches Library classes for 5th grade every week.

Elena Testa determined that this is approximately 3 hours of direct time with students daily.

Phil Stevens addressed the question asked at the last meeting, How much do other school districts spend on supplies? It appears that Willington is within reason of what other towns are spending, although this is not easy to compare. In comparing like towns, Willington was 5th lowest, which put it in the bottom third of the towns compared.

The other question asked last meeting asked Phil Stevens to compare money spent on Professional Development. Again these numbers were not easy to compare due to possibility of district contracts, etc.

Discussion on how much money has been returned to the towns general fund over the last 10 years. The total returned is at \$1,388,048.

Phil Stevens discussed with other superintendents how they are applying grant money, and he reported they are not applying all the their grant money to offset their budget as is being done in Willington.

Phil Stevens shared data from the 2018-2019 school year about the number of students moved and transferred from CES and HMS.

Discussed correlation between quality of school and home value.

Discussed ECS Grant Funding, which is money that comes in from the state that offsets the school budget. Over last 5 years it is down 7.5%. This does not include teacher retirement.

Michelle D. Cunningham discussed bills presenting forced regionalization of schools. This is not expected to impact our schools at this time.

Phil Stevens highlighted a letter written by a student describing her positive experience in the Makerspace.

Review of Program 1 (Center Elementary School)

Most of these changes are in salaries, and the biggest thing is the offsets. It is under where it was in comparison to last year.

Review of Program 2 (Hall Memorial School)

There is a slight decrease in salaries, and a significant decrease in educational supplies. There was a discussion about the grant offset, and the decrease in budget for building maintenance.

Review of Program 3 Special Education and Related Services

There is some grant money that was applied here, but most of these items are dictated by IEPs, which are legal requirements. Overall, Special Education has an increase and is one quarter of the budget.

Review of Program 4 Review of Transportation

The majority of this is contractual. Everything else here is flat (transportation) which does not include field trips.

Herb asked how often they rotate buses. Phil Stevens said that according to the contract, this is every 6 years.

Review of Program 5 Health Services

This is to maintain 2 nurses, one at each of the schools. The supplies here need to be flat.

Review of Program 6 Curriculum and Staff Development

This money is used to provide professional development which will allow teachers to be the best that they can be in order to provide students with the best education possible. This also includes stipend positions. The goal here is to build a capacity amongst our teachers.

Review of Program 7 Utilities

This is also contractual. The Utility team met as a committee today to review usage on buildings used around town. They have decided to get a monthly report on usage to maintain bills. Phil Stevens is still waiting on a solar proposal.

Review of Program 8: Operations/Maintenance

This includes custodians, property insurance and part of a secretary position. Overall, custodial supplies are down 4%.

Ann Grosjean was wondering if we could put the expense for Emcor back into program 8. Is there any advantage to having it here? Michelle D. Cunningham explained that this does not change the bottom line. Phil Stevens clarified that this is just showing what it takes to run operations and maintenance.

Review of Program 9 System-Wide Support

The only thing that is new here is the public safety officer. The majority of safety projects are in CIP, which include improving doors, buzzers, cameras. Minor security comes out of maintenance.

Phil Stevens was notified by finance chair that there was a bus communication problem. M&J is required to have bus radios. This is the 1st time we were made aware that they were not able to contact HMS. There are known dead spots around town that communication cuts out. If this happens, bus drivers are to pull over and use cell phone. Dispatchers are going to test their radio where there is believed to be dead spots. Dead spots will be tested, and then it is going to be critical for M&J to respond to this issue. We are researching having our own system. They were notified that there may still be dead spots no matter what because of the hills in town.

Elena Testa asked about CAGE. Phil Stevens clarified what the CAGE dues are specifically for. Elena Testa questioned if this membership was necessary. Herb Arico discussed the needs for professional development for the superintendent and board members.

Review of Program 10 Fringe Benefits/Substitutes

Phil Stevens is still waiting on more information regarding insurance. He is planning on 14.5%. It will be a little while before we get this information

Herb Arico questioned sub pay and whether it was competitive with other towns. Phil Stevens explained that we are competitive with other towns and this has been the best year for subs in a long time.

Herb Arico asked about reimbursement for tuition for teachers and whether this was necessary. Phil Stevens sees it as a small price for the benefit and noted that it was contractual.

Phil Stevens discussed items not in the budget that could impact the the district in the future.

4. Review budget adjustment options and discussion

Discussed Board requested Budget Adjustments:

Option A (current services remain as it is in the 18-19 budget), Option B (reduction in supplies), Option C (Add Positions), Option D (Add Library Position), and Option E (Add Schoolwide Enrichment Position). All of these adjustments include grant money.

When dropping from 6.09% to 5.69%, \$30,000 in cuts, supplies were greatly affected.

Elena Testa asked specifically about option E.

Stephanie Summers asked what is the difference is between B and C. Phil Stevens clarified that this was due to the savings of the special education teacher retirement and the addition of the positions back. All of the savings that we now know are reflected in options C. Option B reduces supplies by 1%.

Elena Testa- She is trying to keep the interest of everyone living in this town while keeping the interest of children first. She thanks Ken for his description of the proposed cut positions. She believes that the Library position is a high price for the amount of work done. In regards to supplies, she would love to keep these as is, but does not see it as a priority. Makerspace should be kept first out of all of the other proposed cuts. She does not see it as fair to pay minimum wages for Librarians for the town library and much more for the HMS librarian.

Herb Arico- Expressed that because there are certain fixed costs that we have no control over, this process is difficult. A paraprofessional position in the library would save a considerable amount of money and in order to maintain our budget, we could remove the enrichment program. He discussed concerns over increasing class sizes when cutting these positions. Overall, we need to have a reasonable budget that is within our financial restraints. He believes having a budget under 3% is reasonable and supports the original budget proposed.

Elena Testa questioned if the enrichment position was cut, would enrichment still happen in the same format?

Stephanie Summers- The positions cut is about the same amount in the health insurance increases. She is upset over the fact that this might happen. Makerspace offers students a place to connect to school and the Library Media Specialist allows individual students interest to hook students and thinks this needs a specialist. At this point she is favoring Option C but is open to hearing others ideas.

Chiara Bambara- Still needs to think about the 2 proposed cut positions. To have our children suffer because of these position cuts is upsetting and is not sure she would feel comfortable presenting a budget without those two positions included.

Ann Grosjean- At this point she is favoring Option C. Everything is dwindling because of fixed budget, and she is concerned with the budget in future years. She would prefer to go in with a higher budget and then adjust when the board of finance gives us more of a direction. If we are really trying to build curriculum, these 2 positions are key in achieving that.

Tracey Anderson- She agrees with option C because she feels that we should not put our teachers at a disadvantage with lack of supplies. There are too many demands on teachers and by taking away supplies we are putting more pressure on teachers to use their own resources. We already act on a limited budget and supplies should not be minimized. To have students speak on behalf of these two positions says something. Cutting these two positions put more demands on teachers. She does not believe a para will be qualified for this and students may

suffer. There is no choice with these fixed costs and many districts have cut Library Media Specialists positions and regretted it.

Michelle D. Cunningham- We need to be sure to provide an excellent education to our students even though the state only requires an adequate education. This improves property value and it is an overall investment. We can choose to fight for the budget that our students deserve. Option B would be the best option, but this is barely adequate. She would have liked to see this budget be even higher. This system is working and it needs additional supports, not for these to be taken away. We have a responsibility to take care of our kids. We have been super frugal for years. Asks that we all come together with agreement.

Elena Testa- Explained that she will be representing the people that voted for her and will not support the board vote publicly if she does not agree with it.

Tracey Anderson- Clarified information from a new member workshop that once an budget has been voted on you may no longer express your own personal opinions.

Herb Arico- He does not believe a higher budget is realistic. The role and the responsibility of the board is to support and be behind the approved budget.

Michelle D. Cunningham- Believes our budget passes with a large margin. She thinks that this town values education and we should support that.

Phil Stevens explained that there are three priorities to the board- Small class sizes, clubs and extracurricular activities, and professional development. As you are making decisions you are representing students. When you make decisions, students are impacted and staff is impacted.

Michelle D. Cunningham- The meeting next week will be to vote on the budget. After the amendments, a final vote will take place. We will not do it program by program. The motion process will be complicated.

5. Present to speak

Erica Wieceński of 19 Adamek Road thanks the board for the work that they do. She is upset by the comments made about who the board members represent. Once elected to this board you represent this entire town. You are not just representing the people that voted for you.

Judie Threath of 19 Birch Meadow Lane had an experience with her son and step son that spoke to how well her son was prepared for high school because of his experience with the Library Media Specialist at HMS. Her step son did not have a Library Media Specialist, and struggled with the same assignment. This is a living example of what happens when you have a Library Media Specialist at a school. Her 7th grader made a point to mention that research was learned

with the library media specialist. Going forward she asks that you think of the students in the town. She would like the board to ask for the money back that was given back to the town.

BOE Comments

Chiara Bambara thought that overall this was a good discussion. She thanks Herb for his years of experience, even though she does not agree with his position.

Herb Arico thanks the board for all of the input and Phil for his contributions. Hopefully we will be able to come up with a budget that provides the best for our kids.

Stephanie Summers is thankful for the learning experience and the regulars that come weekly.

Tracey Anderson is thankful for the letters that have come in to the board of education. She wants to remind the board of education that their role is to support education. She hopes that the board of finance has confidence in their decision on the needs of education and in the town on their requests of education. She feels that we often focus on a number rather than what is valued by the town. In the past, the town people usually support and we need to remember that. She reminded that board that even though we deliberate in many voices, we govern as one.

Ann Grosjean is glad that we are potentially going forward with what is best for our kids. She is thankful for the community input.

Elena Testa reminded the board that her position is not against children, but rather the best possible education that we can afford while being fiscally responsible.

Michelle D. Cunningham thanks all that provide public opinion. She takes the fact that people send letters very seriously and thanks the other members of board. She noted that even though they all have different opinions they are civil with one another and they are all on this board because they love children.

6. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 8:20 p.m.

Katherine Rychling
Recorder