

Willington Board of Education
Special Meeting Minutes
February 26, 2019 7:00 p.m.
Town Office Building, Upper Level Meeting Room
Approved 3.12.2019

Audio Recording: yes
Notes Taken: yes

Members Present:

Herb Arico
Tracey Anderson
Chiara Bambara
Michelle Doucette Cunningham
Ann Grosjean
Elena Testa

Members Absent:

Stephanie Summers

Also present: Superintendent of Schools Phil Stevens

1. **Call to Order:** M. Doucette Cunningham called the meeting to order at 7:00 pm

2. **Present to Speak:**

Sarah Parsell, 75 Timber Lane, encouraged the BOE members to support the kids. She talked with her neighbors and everyone she talked to agrees that the kids need to be put first. She discouraged eliminating two full time employees and thanked the BOE for their hard work.

3. **Communications**

A. Retirement:

Robin Preston Strong, a special education teacher at Hall School, is retiring at the end of the school year. Linda Nichols, head chef at Center School, is also retiring. Thank you for your service.

B. CT Children's Medical Center Letter: The district and town held a PJ day to support the CT Children's Medical Center. The district received a letter of thanks.

Received a letter from the State Department of Education regarding accountability results displayed over 12 indicators. The indicators define how well a school is doing preparing students for high school and college. CES has been identified as a high performing school. HMS is also doing very well. Students are on track for high school graduation and competitive with Mansfield and Ashford. Congratulations to staff and students.

Also received an email from Michael Foster suggesting that the BOE fully fund education.

4. Board of Education Chairman's Report: Nothing to report at this time.

5. Superintendent Reports

A. CAS Student Awards (Elementary Arts Banquet)

Two fourth grade students- Bowen and Cody- were recognized at the CT Association of Schools Student Awards Banquet for excellence in visual arts and citizenship.

B. Proposed legislation regarding district consolidation:

The proposed legislation is a hot topic. Willington already has a lot of efficiencies such as a shared finance department with the town and a regional high school. There are a few different bills being considered. Willington is working with Region 19 to see if there are any areas that we can continue to save money. Right now they are looking into the area of transportation.

M. Doucette Cunningham will be submitting written testimony for Friday. She offered to let other BOE members to sign, tweak, or change to submit individually. She encouraged each BOE member to submit testimony for each bill.

H. Arico stated that there can be a lot of benefits from regionalizing. The BOE discussed the way testimony is signed and presented to be clear whose opinion it represents.

6. Financial Report

A. Budget Report:

The schools are still on a budget freeze. Anticipating being on the budget freeze until May. The buffer is extremely narrow. P. Stevens does not anticipate the schools returning any money to the town. Would like to open it up and make necessary purchases towards the end of the school year if the budget allows. Donna agrees that it is tight. The only things that we are purchasing now are contractual or absolutely critical to instruction.

7. Committee Reports: None at this time. To be updated next month.

8. New Business

A. Review New York City field trip

The BOE does not have a district policy for field trips, but one exists at the school level. A new district policy is still in draft form. Ken Craig presented on behalf of Mr. Philips and the music and arts program. He gave an overview of the field trip.

A Grosjean made a motion to approve the NYC field trip on April 24th to see Frozen. C. Bambara seconded the motion.

| VOTE: | Yes | No | Abstain | Absent |
|------------------------------|--------|------|---------|--------|
| Herb Arico | --X-- | ---- | ---- | ---- |
| Tracey Anderson | --X-- | ---- | ---- | ---- |
| Chiara Bambara | --X-- | ---- | ---- | ---- |
| Michelle Doucette Cunningham | --X-- | ---- | ---- | ---- |
| Ann Grosjean | --X-- | ---- | ---- | ---- |
| Stephanie Summers | ----- | ---- | ---- | --X-- |
| Elena Testa | ---X-- | ---- | ---- | ---- |

Motion passes.

B. Approve minutes of January 8, 2019 meeting

H. Arico made a motion to approve the minutes of the January 8, 2019 meeting as written. Motion seconded by T. Anderson.

| VOTE: | Yes | No | Abstain | Absent |
|------------------------------|--------|------|---------|--------|
| Herb Arico | -X---- | ---- | ---- | ---- |
| Tracey Anderson | -X---- | ---- | ---- | ---- |
| Chiara Bambara | --X-- | ---- | ---- | ---- |
| Michelle Doucette Cunningham | -X---- | ---- | ---- | ---- |
| Ann Grosjean | -X---- | ---- | ---- | ---- |
| Stephanie Summers | ----- | ---- | ---- | -X--- |
| Elena Testa | ---- | ---- | ---X-- | ---- |

Motion passes

C. Approve minutes of January 9, 2019 budget workshop meeting

H. Arico made a motion to approve the minutes of the January 9, 2019 meeting as written. Motion seconded by C. Bambara seconded.

| VOTE: | Yes | No | Abstain | Absent |
|-----------------|--------|------|---------|--------|
| Herb Arico | ---X-- | ---- | ---- | ---- |
| Tracey Anderson | ---X-- | ---- | ---- | ---- |

| | | | | |
|------------------------------|--------|------|--------|-------|
| Chiara Bambara | ---X-- | ---- | ---- | ---- |
| Michelle Doucette Cunningham | --X--- | ---- | ---- | ---- |
| Ann Grosjean | ---X-- | ---- | ---- | ---- |
| Stephanie Summers | ----- | ---- | ---- | -X--- |
| Elena Testa | ---- | ---- | ---X-- | ---- |
| Motion passes | | | | |

D. Approve minutes of January 16, 2019 budget workshop meeting

H. Arico made a motion to approve the minutes of the January 16, 2019 meeting as written. Motion seconded by A. Grosjean.

| VOTE: | Yes | No | Abstain | Absent |
|------------------------------|--------|------|---------|--------|
| Herb Arico | -X---- | ---- | ---- | ---- |
| Tracey Anderson | ---X-- | ---- | ---- | ---- |
| Chiara Bambara | --X--- | ---- | ---- | ---- |
| Michelle Doucette Cunningham | --X--- | ---- | ---- | ---- |
| Ann Grosjean | --X--- | ---- | ---- | ---- |
| Stephanie Summers | ----- | ---- | ---- | ---X |
| Elena Testa | ---X- | ---- | ---- | ---- |
| Motion passes | | | | |

E. Approve minutes of January 23, 2019 budget workshop meeting

H. Arico made a motion to approve the minutes of the January 23, 2019 meeting as written. Motion seconded by E. Testa.

| VOTE: | Yes | No | Abstain | Absent |
|------------------------------|--------|------|---------|--------|
| Herb Arico | ---X-- | ---- | ---- | ---- |
| Tracey Anderson | --X--- | ---- | ---- | ---- |
| Chiara Bambara | ---X-- | ---- | ---- | ---- |
| Michelle Doucette Cunningham | --X--- | ---- | ---- | ---- |
| Ann Grosjean | --X--- | ---- | ---- | ---- |

| | | | | |
|-------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| Stephanie Summers | ----- | ----- | ----- | --X-- |
| Elena Testa | --X-- | ----- | ----- | ---- |

Motion passes

F. Approve minutes of February 6, 2019 budget workshop meeting

H. Arico made a motion to approve the minutes of the February 6, 2019 meeting as written. Motion seconded by A. Grosjean.

| VOTE: | Yes | No | Abstain | Absent |
|------------------------------|--------|-------|---------|--------|
| Herb Arico | ---X-- | ----- | ----- | ---- |
| Tracey Anderson | --X-- | ----- | ----- | ---- |
| Chiara Bambara | --X-- | ----- | ----- | ---- |
| Michelle Doucette Cunningham | --X-- | ----- | ----- | ---- |
| Ann Grosjean | ---X-- | ----- | ----- | ---- |
| Stephanie Summers | ----- | ----- | ----- | ---X- |
| Elena Testa | --X-- | ----- | ----- | ---- |

Motion passes

G. Approve Willington Public Schools' 2019-2020 Budget

The BOE had a brief discussion on the voting process. H. Arico made a motion to adopt the superintendent's budget proposal. E. Testa seconded the motion. The motion was clarified to include to the dollar amount- \$8,545,312 or 2.93%.

H. Arico justified his motion stating that this has been a challenging month and budget year. A lot of the items in the budget are contractual. A high percentage of the budget are fixed costs. The discretionary funds are limited. He would like to see more money put towards education but believes that the proposed budget provides the necessary educational opportunities while remaining fiscally responsible.

A Grosjean made a motion to amend the budget to reinstate supplies, library books, and professional development for an added cost of \$29,416. T. Anderson seconded the motion.

H. Arico made a motion to disaggregate supplies, library books, curriculum, and professional development into separate dollar amounts. E. Testa seconded the motion. The BOE discussed the feasibility of disaggregating the numbers and the process for voting. The disaggregation would be hard to do, especially in regard to the supply line, without making an error. M.

Doucette Cunningham requested that the motion be withdrawn so that a flat amount could be cut from the \$29,416 instead of attempting to disaggregate.

Vote- on the motion to disaggregate supplies, library books, curriculum, and professional development lines

| VOTE: | Yes | No | Abstain | Absent |
|------------------------------|--------|--------|---------|--------|
| Herb Arico | ---X-- | ---- | ---- | ---- |
| Tracey Anderson | ---- | --X-- | ---- | ---- |
| Chiara Bambara | --X-- | ---- | ---- | ---- |
| Michelle Doucette Cunningham | ---- | --X-- | ---- | ---- |
| Ann Grosjean | ---- | ---X-- | ---- | ---- |
| Stephanie Summers | ----- | ---- | ---- | ---X- |
| Elena Testa | ---X-- | ---- | ---- | ---- |

Motion fails

Discussion of the justification for reinstating the lines that total \$29,416:

T. Anderson stated that some teachers may not have ordered supplies in September. They are already at a disadvantage with the budget freeze. If supply funds are reduced they will not be able to purchase new things such as music, drama, and science supplies.

A Grosjean stated that curriculum change and development requires supplies.

C. Bambara wants to ensure that we have books in the hands of the children.

Vote- on motion to reinstate supplies, library books, curriculum, leadership, and professional development

| VOTE: | Yes | No | Abstain | Absent |
|------------------------------|--------|--------|---------|--------|
| Herb Arico | ---- | ---X-- | ---- | ---- |
| Tracey Anderson | ---X-- | ---- | ---- | ---- |
| Chiara Bambara | --X-- | ---- | ---- | ---- |
| Michelle Doucette Cunningham | --X-- | ---- | ---- | ---- |
| Ann Grosjean | -X---- | ---- | ---- | ---- |
| Stephanie Summers | ----- | ---- | ---- | ---X- |

Elena Testa ---- ---X- ---- ----

C. Bambara made a motion to reinstate the school-wide enrichment position, adding \$78,022 to the budget. A. Grosjean seconded the motion.

Discussion on justification for the motion:

C. Bambara appreciates H. Arico's original justification for the proposed budget. It would provide enough education for what our kids need, however she thinks that the excitement the students gain from the enrichment programs promote learning and keep Willington competitive with other towns.

A Grosjean shared that the enrichment program is exciting for the students. This is also a large part of the STEAM program.

E. Testa agrees that this position is good and it would be great to keep. However, with financial constraints and unknown factors, she cannot support it.

T. Anderson suggested that P. Stevens created the budget following the BOF guidelines. However, the BOE needs to do what is in the best interest of the children. The BOF and the BOE have different perspectives. Without the school-wide enrichment position, there would be a program but it would not be the same quality.

H. Arico stated that the program does enrich students, but it is an extra item. His priorities are maintaining small classes and having a professional staff. This position is great if we can afford it, but we are adding things back in that we cannot afford. If this gets put back in we will be looking at an increase that is not sustainable. Willington is a small town with a tight budget. The superintendent came in with a reasonable budget.

M. Doucette Cunningham believes that Willington residents can afford this amount. It is a small price to pay for the benefit. Affordability is in the eye of the beholder. It is not a large amount of money to pay when it is divided by all of the households.

Members of the BOE made brief follow up comments.

Vote- Motion to reinstate school-wide enrichment program.

| VOTE: | Yes | No | Abstain | Absent |
|-----------------|--------|-------|---------|--------|
| Herb Arico | ---- | --X-- | ---- | ---- |
| Tracey Anderson | ---X-- | ---- | ---- | ---- |

| | | | | |
|------------------------------|--------|--------|------|-------|
| Chiara Bambara | --X--- | ---- | ---- | ---- |
| Michelle Doucette Cunningham | --X--- | ---- | ---- | ---- |
| Ann Grosjean | -X---- | ---- | ---- | ---- |
| Stephanie Summers | ----- | ---- | ---- | ---X- |
| Elena Testa | ---- | --X--- | ---- | ---- |

Motion passes.

T. Anderson made a motion to reinstate the library media specialist position. A. Grosjean seconded the motion.

Discussion:

T. Anderson stated that the public has shared that this is an important position. We need to fully fund our schools. That means we need to keep what we have. Willington would regret it if we eliminate this position.

A Grosjean shared that having a certified person in the library media specialist position keeps the library state of the art and enables us to have the media program. We should maintain this position. Pairing children with engaging books at their reading level is important.

E. Testa stated that this position only has contact with children for 2 hours per day. It is unreasonable to pay that much money for so few hours of student interaction.

C. Bambara believes that this is a difficult decision. There is a big difference between a certified teacher and a paraprofessional.

H. Arico agrees that library specialists are an important part of the school system and it is a valuable position. CES had a certified position and they had no problems replacing the position with a paraprofessional. The same could be done at HMS. The loss of a certified person is sad, but the ticket for the job and benefits is too high. This is one way that we can reduce the budget while maintaining programs.

M. Doucette Cunningham suggested that in earlier grades children are learning to read. In the later grades, children read to learn. The content becomes even more important. This makes the library media specialist position essential.

E. Testa said that she might be able to support this if the position interacted with children more. As it is, she does not think it will make a big difference.

T. Anderson does not believe it is fair to compare classroom teachers and the library media specialist. Part of the job of the media specialist is supporting teachers. The responsibilities are not all about student interaction, but that does not make the position less valuable.

Vote: Reinstate library media specialist position, adding \$114,410 to the bottom line for a total of \$8,767,117 or 5.6%.

| VOTE: | Yes | No | Abstain | Absent |
|------------------------------|--------|-------|---------|--------|
| Herb Arico | ---- | --X-- | ---- | ---- |
| Tracey Anderson | --X-- | ---- | ---- | ---- |
| Chiara Bambara | --X-- | ---- | ---- | ---- |
| Michelle Doucette Cunningham | --X-- | ---- | ---- | ---- |
| Ann Grosjean | -X---- | ---- | ---- | ---- |
| Stephanie Summers | ----- | ---- | ---- | ---X- |
| Elena Testa | ---- | --X-- | ---- | ---- |

Motion passes.

M. Doucette Cunningham stated that the budget is barely maintaining the existing services and she would like to go even further with it. She does not see support for that, so she will not make any additional motions.

Final vote for the WPS 2019-2020 budget in the amount of \$8,767,117

A Grosjean commented that this budget only maintains what we have now which is currently frozen.

E. Testa considers this budget to be irresponsible.

T. Anderson stated that historically this town supports education. If the BOF agrees and this budget goes to referendum she strongly believes it will be supported.

H. Arico is concerned about the other budgets and the overall tax implications.

Vote for the WPS 2019-2020 budget in the amount of \$8,767,117

| VOTE: | Yes | No | Abstain | Absent |
|-----------------|-------|-------|---------|--------|
| Herb Arico | ---- | --X-- | ---- | ---- |
| Tracey Anderson | --X-- | ---- | ---- | ---- |

| | | | | |
|------------------------------|--------|--------|------|-------|
| Chiara Bambara | --x--- | ---- | ---- | ---- |
| Michelle Doucette Cunningham | --x--- | ---- | ---- | ---- |
| Ann Grosjean | -x---- | ---- | ---- | ---- |
| Stephanie Summers | ----- | ---- | ---- | ---x- |
| Elena Testa | ---- | --x--- | ---- | ---- |

Motion passes.

9. Old Business

A. Approve 2019-2020 School Calendar:

H. Arico made a motion to adopt the 2019-2020 school calendar and include Veterans Day as a school holiday. No second.

H. Arico shared that he is disappointed. The holiday serves a good purpose and not having it on the calendar makes him very sad for the veterans of this town. He does not feel that he has received a reasonable explanation for its removal.

A Grosjean asked if this could be reconsidered if Ashford and Mansfield did not eliminate Veterans Day as a holiday.

E. Testa asked the BOE to consider a half day for students. Half of the day in school to learn about Veterans Day and the second half of the day to rest.

C. Bambara agrees with H. Arico that it makes more sense to celebrate Veterans Day than Columbus Day. She cannot support the motion but understands the point.

P. Stevens expressed concern over the message that students are receiving by giving them a half day off.

E. Testa made a motion to make Veterans Day a half day in school. H. Arico seconded the motion.

T. Anderson shared that students today may not have experienced war. To them having the day off is just vacation. Being in school gives them the chance to be educated.

| VOTE: | Yes | No | Abstain | Absent |
|-----------------|------|--------|---------|--------|
| Herb Arico | ---- | ---- | ---x-- | ---- |
| Tracey Anderson | ---- | --x--- | ---- | ---- |

| | | | | |
|------------------------------|--------|-------|------|-------|
| Chiara Bambara | ---- | --X-- | ---- | ---- |
| Michelle Doucette Cunningham | ---- | --X-- | ---- | ---- |
| Ann Grosjean | ---- | --X-- | ---- | ---- |
| Stephanie Summers | ----- | ---- | ---- | ---X- |
| Elena Testa | -X---- | ---- | ---- | ---- |

Motion fails.

A Grosjean made a motion to adopt the 2019-2020 Willington Public Schools calendar as presented. T. Anderson seconded the motion.

| VOTE: | Yes | No | Abstain | Absent |
|------------------------------|--------|-------|---------|--------|
| Herb Arico | ---- | --X-- | ---- | ---- |
| Tracey Anderson | ---X-- | ---- | ---- | ---- |
| Chiara Bambara | --X-- | ---- | ---- | ---- |
| Michelle Doucette Cunningham | --X-- | ---- | ---- | ---- |
| Ann Grosjean | -X---- | ---- | ---- | ---- |
| Stephanie Summers | ----- | ---- | ---- | ---X- |
| Elena Testa | ---- | --X-- | ---- | ---- |

Motion passes.

10. Present to Speak

19 Birch Meadow Lane, Judy, thanked the BOE.

11. Board Comments

T. Anderson: Thanked everyone for their efforts. Would like to revisit the voting process again next year. Thank you to the public.

M. Doucette Cunningham: Welcomes improvements in the voting process. Congratulations to Willington students and teacher for being on track for high school graduation.

A. Grosjean thanks to Robin and Linda for their service.

12. Adjournment: H. Arico made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 9:37 pm. E. Testa seconded.