

WILLINGTON BOARD OF EDUCATION
Tuesday, November 14 2023
Virtual Meeting: Hybrid (in-person and online)
7:00 p.m.
Minutes
[Zoom Recorded](#)

Members Present

Michelle Doucette Cunningham - Chair
Ann Grosjean - Vice-Chair
Dr. Laura Rodriguez
Briana Ross
Arthur Christensen
Via Zoom: Donna Cook, Tracey Anderson

Also Present

Superintendent Phil Stevens
Director of Curriculum and Instruction Dr. Erin Conley

1. Call to order

Chair Cunningham called the meeting to order at 7:02 p.m.

2. Pledge of Allegiance

Chair Cunningham led the Pledge of Allegiance

3. Present to Speak

There was no one present to speak.

4. Chairman's Report

Chair Cunningham stated that the Cabe Conference is on Friday and is hoping members can make it. Chair Cunningham also noted that this was her last Board meeting and that she would be handing the meetings off to new members. She mentioned that there was a new law that required Board of Education members to get training. She also recommended that they discuss test scores in a workshop. She also encouraged new members to do a facility walk-through.

5. Communications

Phil Stevens noted that he received a communication from Grant Administration about the roof saying that they have not encountered the same situation with projects that have been approved and then been canceled. They said we could reapply for the project. P. Stevens said that it was not helpful because the project was canceled and because prices and tax numbers have changed and that it makes a couple hundred thousand dollar difference to the town. P. Stevens said he believes that the project

should not have been canceled and is hoping to have a more productive conversation when reaching out again.

a. Amanda Doughty: concern about cell phone policy

6. Superintendent Report

a. Staffing

P. Stevens said there was an internal staffing adjustment at HMS. An opening in the HMS library and Olivia Rovalino, who was implementing Rosetta Stone for the World Language program, moved into the library position. Sara Jean, one of our HMS paras, expressed interest in the World language position and she was moved into that role. Kelsey Lam was hired as a paraeducator to replace Sara Jean.

b. Facilities Study

P. Stevens said that the facilities study was approved at town meeting on November 2nd. He stated that he had a meeting with QA+M last week to discuss next steps and their contract. QA+M shared that they are willing to do an AIA contract, or the proposal can be accepted which would then lead to creating the purchase order. Based on the scope of this work, an AIA contract might be excessive. P. Stevens said he could write a letter accepting their proposal, create the PO, and they would produce the items within their proposal. He said that they are hoping to move forward with the start of their work in the first week of December.

c. Food Services Fund: meal payments for 2023-2024

P. Stevens noted that they recently submitted a plan to address the food services fund balance. He noted that they highlighted the intent to purchase equipment, make repairs, increase staff hours, or hire additional staff to allow more prepared meals, and to pay for lunches. P. Stevens said an email was received from the state noting that the approval to eliminate the cost of the paid meals for students who do not qualify for free or reduced rates is only for this school year, 2023-24.

d. Reading waiver

P. Stevens said that they met with the state and *Public Consulting Group* on October 31st to provide information on our reading waiver and to answer their questions. PCG noted evidence that our curriculum taught phonics, phonemic awareness, and phonics. The Director of Curriculum and Instruction, Literacy Coach, and P. Stevens prepared a presentation for the reviewers to provide additional information on how they teach vocabulary and comprehension and shared the additional work that has been done since submitting the waiver. P. Stevens said that they were told they would learn about the outcome of our waiver request on December 1st.

e. CES chimney issue

P. Stevens said that they have had no changes in the condition of the CES chimney. He noted that someone submitted an anonymous report of mold in that classroom and an Eastern Highlands Health inspector came out to investigate and found absolutely no mold. P. Stevens said that they are still trying to get someone to come out and wrap the

chimney or seal it until the repairs can be completed this summer which will be paid for out of the non-lapsing funds that were approved last meeting. He noted that part of the issue is that the power lines are attached to the building right there which makes that small project more challenging. P. Stevens said that he had not purchased the dehumidifier yet because Service Master said the area was not wet, and the funds may be needed elsewhere.

f. Upcoming events

P. Stevens said that Parent Teacher Conferences are coming up on November 20th and 21st and that there is a professional development day which will be a half day for students on December 1st. He noted that the staff was asking that next year there be ten professional development days instead of six.

g. Other

Superintendent Stevens said that the plumbing request that was at town meeting had passed unanimously so they are working with EMCOR and other contractors to get that work going.

L. Rodriguez asked about the CES chimney saying she was concerned about power lines being near moisture.

P. Stevens said that the power lines were safe and in the rain all the time. He said the concerns were that a tarp placed on the chimney could wrap around power lines and that they could be in the way of the work that needs to be done.

7. Financial Report

a. November 2023 financial report

Attachment #1

P. Stevens said that they have applied Title 1 grants to programs 1 and 2. He said he encumbered funds for club transportation for the year for HMS. Programs 5-9 have minimal changes. P. Stevens said Program 10 has been adjusted for current staff and the business manager and he believes there is \$40,000 in health insurance savings, though that number can change due to employee needs. P. Stevens said that the biggest adjustment to this budget is in program 3, special education. P Stevens said that there were not final bills from vendors, but they have encumbered estimates. He said that after encumbrances were completed there was a shortfall of \$582,401. He said that they are expecting approximately \$300,000 in excess cost funds back from the state which would bring the shortfall to approximately \$282,000. He said that is only if they didn't spend another dollar out of that particular program, which was probably not reasonable. He noted that last meeting, the Board approved \$80,000 for the chimney repairs out of the non-lapsing fund, but he thinks that is going to have to go into year 1 of the CIP plan. He said that they can use the non-lapsing fund for the deposit, but they may need the funding from our non-lapsing fund to cover the special education shortfall. He said he is looking across several programs to address the funding shortfall in special education.

B. Ross asked how Program 3 was budgeted incorrectly.

P. Stevens replied saying that they had budgeted for two outplacements and two additional outplacements occurred after the budget was completed.

D. Cook suggested letting the town know about the situation and that they are looking for funding. She asked if there could be more state funding for Program 3.

Chair Cunningham said that was what the \$300,000 was for and that they do not cover the full cost. She noted that the money they received was based on the four placements.

P. Stevens said he went to the Board of Finance and asked for money to be transferred to the non-lapsing fund and that he notified them that it was for the two extra outplacements.

8. New Business

a. Approve Regular Meeting Minutes of October 2023

Attachment #2

L. Rodriguez moved to approve the minutes of September 2023.

A. Grosjean seconded the motion.

A. Christensen corrected the previous minutes, saying it did not reflect what he asked about the HVAC grant. He said that he was stating that he knows the time limit on HVAC grant money can run out so he was asking if there was a time limit on roof grant money that could run out. He said that the answer was no and that there was a large distinction between what he had said and what was written.

Motion Passes Unanimously

b. School Building Committee Final Report

A. Grosjean asked that if they did the PO with QA+M if they would still be free to go ahead and do the roof if that happened.

P. Stevens said that they could still do the roof and that they would not get in the way of each other. He also noted that he didn't know if the \$1 million set aside would be enough to cover the two roofs.

A. Grosjean said that since they need the money in the non-lapsing fund for special education maybe they could go to the Board of Finance for the money to do chimney work.

P. Stevens responded by saying that timing-wise he is okay with how it stands right now because doing the roofs in the summer of 2024 would be very challenging. He said that there are a lot of moving parts including grants and where the money for the roofs was going to come from.

Chair Cunningham asked if there were thoughts between the PO and the AIA contract.

L. Rodriguez asked if there would be a benefit of doing the AIA.

Chair Cunningham said that when the proposal came in it did not match the request, however, she said that was addressed in the contract. She noted that people may be leaning towards the full contract because it is more detailed, but it also takes more time so they lose the window of any outdoor work that needs to be done before snow falls.

P. Stevens said that if they write a letter they can highlight what they want and that work can be stopped at any time or that more work could be done if needed. P. Stevens said that they would be accepting the proposal and that they could document changes in writing.

L. Rodriguez clarified that in a contract lawyers would be involved and with a letter and with the PO they are just writing exactly what they want, she asked if there was a cost associated with either of these.

P. Stevens said that there would be a cost for lawyers for the AIA route and that if he wrote a letter it would be part of his time.

A. Grosjean asked if the contract was flexible if they wanted to add work.

P. Stevens said that they would have to go back to the town if they wanted to add money for additional projects.

D. Cook asked if Phil added the list to the proposal if there was a place that they would sign so they knew that the changes had been made to the proposal.

P. Stevens said that it would be exactly verbatim from their proposal.

B. Ross said that she thought the letter and the PO would be the way to go.

Chair Cunningham asked if anyone wanted to go to the contract, but no one supported that route.

Chair Cunningham said she would share the final School Building Committee report and asked that any edits or questions be sent in within a week to P. Stevens. She noted that the report will not be made public until they release it.

c. Cell phone policy

D. Cook said that she spoke with educators out of district about low test scores and that they said that the cell phone policy could be a huge issue when it comes to this. She said that she was told that cell phones in the desk or on their person were a huge distraction and that cell phones should be left in lockers. She also referenced the letter that they received from Amanda Doughty about the cell phone policy. She said that

students were at school to learn, not to be on cell phones. She also noted that a new policy could help test scores and communication between and with students.

Chair Cunningham said that we do have a cell phone policy and that the process of reviewing policies would be to have a subcommittee look into the issue in depth. She said she believed the problem was not the policy, but the problem was a lot broader and bigger. She suggested saving this issue for the next Board when the policy committee reconvenes.

D. Cook said that she agreed that it could be shared with the next board but should not be ignored.

A. Grosjean noted that Hall School and the PTA are sponsoring a virtual informational webinar, tomorrow, November 15, on the subject of internet safety and social media.

A. Christensen said that his biggest concern was that the policy was published in 2012 and has not been modified since. He noted that the policy is 11 years old and that there is a world of difference in technology and phones between now and then. He said that the way it is worded is almost allowing kids to use their cell phones and that the policy needed to be updated as soon as possible. He noted that he believes they would be hard-pressed to find a teacher who says that cell phones are needed in class for learning. He said he would revoke the teacher's allowance for allowing kids to use cell phones unless they could come up with specific examples of why they are needed.

Chair Cunningham said that teachers are trained professionals and that cell phones are tools and that they have to help students navigate in a social world. She said that in addition to that it is important for students to learn when to depend on certain apps and information and when not to depend on it. She said that taking away the teacher's discretion is hindering them for no reason.

P. Stevens noted that there was typically another layer of policy in the student handbook.

A. Grosjean said that she would love for the teachers to look at the policy and give their input.

D. Cook said that they provide necessary computer equipment to all students that their personal cell phones are personal property they bring to school and that there needs to be regulations and restrictions on it. She said parents need to teach children what is appropriate on their personal property and teachers are responsible for teaching children what is appropriate on school equipment.

Chair Cunningham said she would love to hear from teachers and students on the policy and that it is the Board's job to write policy, however, she would want to hear input from those involved in the situation. She said better policy could be written if there was an inclusive conversation.

B. Ross said that she believed that it was more of a cultural issue than a policy issue and that giving students opportunities to be a part of the conversation is part of their growing and learning.

9. Old Business

There was no old Business at this time.

10. Present to Speak

Carrie Rainville, Potter School Road: Ms. Rainville said that she had updates from the PTA. She said the pie and cookie dough fundraiser was a huge success and that they have over 400 items to distribute. She said pick-up times would be November 16th and 17th at Center School from 3:30-4:30 and pick-up was also available during parent-teacher conferences next week. She said that they also have a gift card fundraiser happening until November 23rd. She also noted that there will be a Tech Talk on November 15th at 7:00 p.m. She said that the town tree lighting would be on December 8th. She said the next PTA meeting would be December 14th at the Willington Library.

John Mitchell, 64 Timber Lane: Mr. Mitchell said that he would like for the cell phone policy to be rewritten and that he said that they should have an anonymous poll from teachers on what they would like the cell phone policy to be.

Erika Wicewski, Ms. Wicewski thanked Board members for their commitment to education and the community. She welcomed new members and encouraged them to take any training available. She thanked Chair Cunningham for her dedication to the Board.

11. Board Comments

D. Cook wished the future board all the best and the best to the students and teachers of Willington. She said she believed her time for leaving was appropriate.

B. Ross thanked all of the current and future members and encouraged residents to get involved and vote. She thanked the town's PTA for encouraging residents to get involved.

A. Grosjean welcomed new members. She said she was impressed with the reading waiver and the curriculum adjustments have been very successful in homes.

L. Rodriguez thanked everyone she had served with and said it was an honor to be on the board. She thanked Chair Cunningham. She said that one of the next things on the board agenda was continuing with the curriculum. She said history, social studies, and science have been the forgotten items on the curriculum and that to be an inclusive school district it was important to teach students who made the country. She said it was important for children to learn about all kinds of children.

T. Anderson said that she appreciated serving on the board and said that the team they had been for the past few years had worked well together. She said she welcomed the new

members and that she would miss Chair Cunningham's leadership and appreciated her efforts.

A. Christensen said that there was a special election between himself and L. Rodriguez because there was a tie in the votes. He said that he believes what pushes him forward is because it is about working and being a voice for the kids and parents of the town. He said he wanted to fight for the kids and that he hoped people would come out and vote. He also noted that he is coaching basketball and registration has closed, however, if someone wants to join they still have that opportunity, and they could contact him or other coaches.

P. Stevens said that he does not think that people realize how much time and effort is given by members of the Boards and thanked them for their participation.

Chair Cunningham said that the work on The Board of Education was very rewarding. She said that they set an example for the next generation of people who are going to be parents and involved in their community one day. She said they want to build good citizens and good parents. She said students spend a lot of time in school and that it is important that they are there and come together in the community. She said she believed that all the Boards had the kids' best interests at heart. She thanked all the members for their participation and she thanked P. Stevens for being an excellent administrator. She also thanked Donna for her service and wished Arthur and Laura the best of luck in the special election. Chair Cunningham also thanked her family for allowing her to use her time to be part of the Board of Education. She stated that it had been her honor to work with her fellow Board members. She noted that one of the biggest accomplishments on the Board has been working to help students with mental health issues.

12. Adjournment

Chair Cunningham motioned to adjourn the meeting.

D. Cook seconded

The motion passed unanimously, meeting adjourned at 8:32 p.m.