

**MINUTES OF BOARD RETREAT HELD  
June 13, 2011**

The Board Retreat of the West Windsor-Plainsboro Board of Education was called to order by Mr. Hemant Marathe at 6:00 p.m. in the Administrative Conference Room at High School North. The following Board members were present:

Mr. John Farrell	Mr. Todd Hochman	Ms. Dana Krug
Ms. Rachelle Feldman Hurwitz	Mr. Robert Johnson	Mr. Hemant Marathe
Mr. Anthony Fleres	Mr. Richard Kaye	Mrs. Ellen Walsh

Present also were: Dr. Victoria Kniewel, Superintendent of Schools; Mr. Larry Shanok, Assistant Superintendent for Finance/Board Secretary; Dr. David Aderhold, Assistant Superintendent Pupil Services and Planning; and Mr. Russell Lazovick, Assistant Superintendent Curriculum & Instruction.

**CONVENE**

In accordance with the State's Sunshine Law, adequate notice of this meeting was provided by mailing a notice of the time, date, location and, to the extent known, the agenda of this meeting to the PRINCETON PACKET, THE TIMES, THE HOME NEWS TRIBUNE, AND WEST WINDSOR and PLAINSBORO PUBLIC LIBRARIES. Copies of the notice have also been posted in the board office and filed with Plainsboro's and West Windsor's township clerks and in each of the district schools.

No members of the public were present.

**BOARD PRESIDENT'S COMMENTS**

Mr. Marathe welcomed everyone to the retreat and thanked them for participating during this busy time of the year.

**SUPERINTENDENT'S COMMENTS**

Dr. Kniewel thanked everyone for participating during such a busy week that includes committee and Board of Education meetings. Tonight is to understand what we, as a school district, are trying to achieve and why; to clarify the relationship between instructional goals/programs and Board of Education decisions and budget; and, to understand the place of Board/administration communication and its timeliness.

**Welcome/Review Outcomes & Agenda/Ground Rules/Set the Context**

Dr. Kniewel stated that the main purpose of the retreat is to understand our mission: where we are going instructionally and why; reflection and report out: "Whole Child, Every Child;" and, Budget: Comparative Spending and Priorities and Communication and Involvement.

**Reflection and Report Out: "Whole Child, Every Child"**

Mr. Lazovick dissected the district mission statement, connecting the work over the past year and the work that has yet to be done to achieve the district's long-term instructional goals.

He reviewed past presentations on student performance, highlighting again both how based on these measures the district is supported the highest levels of students learning and, more importantly, how these measures examine neither the depth or breadth of the district's instructional goals.

Focusing on the district's Competencies for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Learners, Mr. Lazovick presented a comprehensive guide to the pieces of the K-12 instructional program for all students. He highlighted the instructional focus, by level (K-3; 4-5; 6-8; and 9-12) and how they are interconnected. Mr. Lazovick defined where and why student progress is measured, how performance data is shared and used to inform instruction, and how state-mandated programs have been implemented to support the district's program and goals. The various supporting technologies were defined, including Virtual, Infinite Campus, Let Me Learn, and Performance Matters. The value of each system in supporting the district's program was made clear.

Finally, Mr. Lazovick presented on the district's new evaluation process and its role in supporting the district's instructional program. Implemented this year, the evaluation process includes Frameworks with a continuum of performance that supports professional growth and accountability. Further, the process and its documents now include specific measurement of a faculty or staff member's contribution toward achieving the district's instructional goals.

In all, the district has initiated large-scale change in the pursuit of its instructional goals, is at the beginning of this change, and must now stay the course and move toward the goal of reaching the Whole Child, Every Child.

### **Budget: Comparative Spending Perspectives**

Future meetings and discussions will involve everyone in myriad aspects of the budget and negotiations. Tonight we will focus on providing a common base and in seeing that the numbers need a context to have the most meaning. Mr. Shanok discussed the costs of the district from several perspectives.

A straightforward one is to look at how major categories of staff personnel have shifted over time. The comparisons will be 2002-03 to 2010-11. The number of students has increased by 12%. Administrators over that time have decreased by 15%. During the defeated budget process, numerous officials noted that the common benchmarks of administrators to students and staff show that the district compares very favorably to other districts. Up to a year ago the number of teaching staff had increased as economies were realized as enrollment in some grades declined and while some areas grew with increasing enrollment; however, a year ago the loss of \$7.7 million of state aid forced a reduction in teaching staff that leaves the district flat over the above years. To press economies over these years there has been a decline in district staff serving as regular education aides, secretaries, bus drivers, and buildings & grounds staff. With the impetus on bringing special education classes back to the district, there has been great growth in district personnel serving special education students. This has uniformly resulted in improved services to children and often served to contain the growth of costs. It should be noted that these students get services determined by their IEPs and these services cannot be unilaterally reduced as part of a general attempt to decrease spending. State and federal law serves to protect these services. Due to this fact, economizing necessarily falls more heavily in other areas.

Another perspective is to look at the growth in per pupil costs (State of New Jersey Comparative Spending Guide figures). Over the 2002-03 through 2009-10 period this has grown by 17%. Is this a favorable or unfavorable result? Well, the consumer price index has increased by 21% over that period. The Employment Cost Index (ECI) of state and local government employees has grown by 25%.

Years ago, the Board of Education and the Finance Committee had growing concerns over budget growth. This was heightened as the budget was defeated three times in the 1990's. They evolved a target concerning growth in spending: take the annual percentage growth in the Employment Cost Index (state and local government employees), add the enrollment growth to that. These were growing between 4 to 6% and 1.5 to 2.0% respectively. The committee wanted growth to not merely reflect that growth so they subtracted 1% from that sum. That was to be their target for growth year by year.

The budget over these years has grown 33%. Is that good or bad? Well, the ECI plus enrollment growth minus 1% has grown 34% over the years. We have kept to the goal targeted by the Board those many years ago; in fact, we are currently one percentage point better than our target.

Step back a year. The budget had grown 31% at that time while the indices minus 1% had increased 33%. A two percentage point favorable gap. Today it is a one percentage point gap. Why and does it suggest anything for the coming year? It likely does. The ECI grew last year by the smallest amount of any of those years. The enrollment growth was negligible. But 1% is still one percent! If this target is kept, further reductions in programs and personnel will likely be needed. Does 1% make as much sense today as it did when the ECI and enrollment were growing at a faster pace?

Next, examining some perspectives relating to the state's per pupil cost figures. Back in 2002-03 the district was 336 dollars above the state average and rather close in spending to Princeton, Hopewell and Lawrence. Overall, the district was the 4<sup>th</sup> most expensive in the county – the district had not lost the Finance Committee's desire to be about in the middle of the pack. With the fiscal disciplines exercised in subsequent years, the district's relative cost performance improved. In the last year of actual data available, the district is the 7<sup>th</sup> most expensive Mercer County district and thousands of dollars below the three previously cited districts, indeed, the district is nearly \$1,300 below the state average.

Examine the percentage rate of spending growth. Over the 2002-03 to 2008-09 period the district's per pupil cost has grown by an average of 2.3% per year. That is half of the state average rate of growth. It is the lowest rate of growth in the county. The district is the top performer by that measure. Move to a 2002-03 to 2009-10 comparison and the district remains the best performer though the growth rate declines in some districts and the state, but grows in a few too.

Looking at the absolute growth in the number of dollars per pupil spending over those years. WWPRSD has increased its spending by \$1,839 – the lowest increase in the county. The state average is an increase of \$3,431. (Some folks mention Montgomery as a consistent role model: Montgomery's spending increased by \$3,518 in that period of time – shrinking their spending per pupil advantage over WWPRSD from \$2,438 in 2002-03 to \$759 in 2009-10.)

For a final comparison tonight, examining the major classifications of per pupil spending in 2009-10: classroom spending, support services (media center, guidance and nursing), administrative costs and operations costs (facilities). WWPRSD has lower administrative costs per pupil than Lawrence, Princeton, and the state average; Hopewell is at our level (as is Montgomery). WWPRSD operations costs are well below all of the above districts.

Because our total spending is relatively low, the classroom dollars per pupil are lower than Lawrence, Princeton and Hopewell. And, we are a few dollars lower than the state average. Yet, as a percentage of total spending the district spends 63% on the classroom compared to 56% in Lawrence, and 60% in Princeton (Montgomery spends \$895 dollars per pupil less than WWPRSD in the classroom and only 59% of their total in the classroom. Montgomery spends a larger % of their total on admin and operations than does WWPRSD. So, if WWPRSD spending is to be reduced, a likely target by elimination will be the classroom and its support services).

With these common perspectives everyone should be able to make more productive comparisons during upcoming budget and negotiations discussions.

**Budget: Communication, involvement and passage of time**

Dr. Aderhold explored the complexity of some of the relevant contractual numbers: 1,230 instructional minutes per week; 5 instructional periods per day; 53 instructional minutes per period for core subjects and 40 minutes per period for electives; less than two duty periods; minimum of 400 minutes of planning time per week, etc. Change these numbers and variations and possibilities emerge in great numbers. It is impractical to explore them all.

Another set of numbers is the time to implement a change. The middle and high school schedule changes took years from start to finish. The effort with Town Center was a two-year effort. It may be awhile for a contractual change to impact budget.

**Closing and Next Steps**

The superintendent and Mr. Marathe thanked everyone for their participation.

Upon motion by Mr. Fleres, seconded by Mr. Kaye, and by unanimous voice vote of all present, the meeting adjourned at 10:02 p.m.

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Larry Shanok, Board Secretary

Prepared by:

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Kathleen M. Bertram