

**BOARD OF EDUCATION
RETREAT MEETING MINUTES
February 5, 2013**

The meeting of the West Windsor-Plainsboro Board of Education was called to order by President Hemant Marathe at 6:00 p.m. in the media center at Grover Middle School. The following board members were present:

Ms. Rachele Feldman Hurwitz
Mr. Robert Johnson

Ms. Michele Kaish
Ms. Dana Krug

Mr. Alapakkam Manikandan
Mr. Hemant Marathe

Board Member Xu arrived at 6:28 PM and Board Member Fleres arrived at 6:43 PM. Board Member Kaye was absent. Present also were: Dr. Victoria Kniewel, Superintendent of Schools; Dr. David Aderhold, Deputy Superintendent; Mr. Larry Shanok, Assistant Superintendent for Finance/Board Secretary; and, Mr. Martin Smith, 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 TRENTONIAN, 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 meeting and thanked them for their participation during a full and laborious time with all the committee and board meetings.

SUPERINTENDENT'S COMMENTS

Dr. Kniewel also welcomed the Board to the retreat. Tonight is to consider how we move forward during these challenging times and to understand the district's current issues. Focus was on the following: 2013-2014 Budget; Addition to Village School; and, the calendar for the 2014-2015 School Year. As an introductory discussion, the Superintendent asked Board Members to reflect on what elements were "most important" to them. Among the subjects noted were: safety, care in spending since dollars do not solve everything, class size, and communicating about the Village addition. It was noted that class size and its impact on instruction is as much a function of teacher quality as number of students.

2013-2014 BUDGET

Mr. Shanok reviewed some key elements to the multi-year success of the district. A look at key spending categories demonstrates that large changes can occur year to year in things such as benefits, workers compensation costs, energy and transportation. Since we believe that abrupt changes to programs are not good for education, this fact demands attention in building a budget.

Despite increasing employee health premium contributions, the overwhelming majority of premium increases are paid by the district: in 2013-14 this could consume an additional \$1.8 million. If wage increases are 1.5%, another \$1.3 million is needed. Other increases, such as property insurance after the storms of recent years also consume dollars. In general, an additional 2% general fund tax levy brings in \$2.8 million. When our goal is to have no total tax levy increase in 2013-14, this is a challenge both now and in future years.

Fortunately for 2013-14, the district's frugality in the year ending June 30, 2012, means that a high level of tax relief can be utilized; in conjunction with a budget reduction of one million in charter dollars, the board's goal is attainable: a zero total tax levy increase. Dangers to achieving it would include any desire to fund new programs beyond what can be sustained by reducing others; any arbitrary state action to grab district excess surplus, capital reserve or otherwise reduce state aid.

Dr. Aderhold led a discussion on safety as he reviewed the many meetings that have been and are about to be held around this topic. He noted that the State program held in January began with a quote from Attorney General Ronald Susswein, "Please resist the temptation to do something decisive and visible because it might not be the right thing." He noted possible actions across short, medium, and the long term. Some can be achieved with better practices at little or no cost; others require spending. Safety during the day in buildings may be different than actions in the evenings and weekends. Are changes in how we use buildings needed? With 146 different recommendations in hand, a lot of consideration must be given to the topic. The events associated with the lockdowns were discussed; the Board discussed communications surrounding the day. Overall, a threat was perceived and students were kept safe.

With the zero total tax levy increase target in mind, changes in continuing spending will need to be matched by other reductions, or in a pinch, the board could later appropriate some of the district's "savings account" – the 2% fund balance. With our financial flexibility, the district could place in the budget an amount for safety capital outlay, funded through use of capital reserve.

ADDITION TO VILLAGE SCHOOL

The architect has about completed the task of initial review of possible district space needs. A variety of factors including the demographic study highlight the scarcity of classroom space. The present thought is an addition to Village that accomplishes several key tasks: providing six classrooms (these rooms can be utilized in a variety of moves depending on specific enrollment circumstances); providing space for special services; providing space for the present central office staff; and space for Community Education (freeing Millstone River space). About 32% of the functional space relates to central office staff, the rest is space that would traditionally be paid for by bond referendum and the resulting debt service. With our capital reserve and community education fund balance, the district can avoid incurring the continuing expense of debt service principal and interest.

To further develop the concept beyond this first limited effort, the district needs to engage the architect to move forward towards construction. While the central office space is a small portion of the entire space, the envisioned project will in total be in the \$10-12 million range.

2014-2015 SCHOOL YEAR CALENDAR

School holidays in the United State have been primarily driven by staff considerations. Shall there come a time when holidays are also a function of characteristics of the student body? With our diverse community, it may be appealing to add appropriate holidays to our observances. Might 2014-15 be the

time for a change? One opportunity to combine considerations of staff and student body might be to utilize professional development days to open days for student holiday observances. The administration will examine that concept. Several observed that there are examples of districts doing it presently.

SUMMATION OF THE EVENING

The Superintendent noted the depth of tonight's discussions and she and President Marathe thanked everyone for their participation.

Upon motion by Mr. Johnson, seconded by Mr. Fleres, and by unanimous voice vote of all present, the meeting adjourned at 10:25 p.m.

Larry Shanok, Board Secretary