

**BOARD OF EDUCATION  
RETREAT MEETING MINUTES  
December 10, 2014**

The meeting of the West Windsor-Plainsboro Board of Education was called to order by President Anthony Fleres at 6:05 p.m. at the Village Elementary School media center. The following board members were present:

Mr. Anthony Fleres  
Ms. Louisa Ho

Ms. Rachel Juliana  
Ms. Michele Kaish

Ms. Dana Krug  
Mr. Scott Powell  
Mr. Yu "Taylor" Zhong

Board Members Feldman Hurwitz and Kaye were absent. Present also were: Dr. David Aderhold, Superintendent of Schools; Mr. Larry Shanok, Assistant Superintendent for Finance/Board Secretary; Mr. Martin Smith, Assistant Superintendent, Curriculum & Instruction; and, Mr. Gerard Dalton, Assistant Superintendent, Pupil Services/Planning. Guest attending was: Yingchao Zhang.

**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.

**PUBLIC COMMENT**

No one from the public was present at the meeting.

**SUPERINTENDENT'S COMMENTS**

Dr. Aderhold welcomed the Board to the retreat. Tonight will be a wide ranging discussion on the topics that impact our thinking about the 2015-2016 budget.

**CHECK IN**

Mr. Dalton led an exercise to begin the evening. Breaking into two groups, each was to develop a board logo while using a fixed set of materials. After a brief but lively interaction within each group, the two teams displayed and interpreted their logo to the other group.

**DISCUSSION**

The Superintendent noted that the purpose of tonight's effort was to develop consensus around the fiscal parameters and the associated actions for the 2015-16 budget

The Superintendent reviewed the District Goals and the nearly yearlong schedule of milestones associated with the budget process. Those present were divided into pairs and set off on a "Gallery Walk" around charts depicting key financial and operating parameters of the budget. In this process, members could ask questions and provide background to other participants, aiding in the financial comprehension of

everyone involved. The administrators also participated in the give and take around these charts. This allowed the implications associated with these concepts to be better understood. After the walk, the groups combined to discuss any remaining questions raised by the exercise.

Next the superintendent reviewed the general fund tax levy cap. While popularly known as the “2% cap,” it in fact allows some specific adjustments. Since the district did not use all dollars allowed in past years, the district can utilize banked cap this year. In addition, if the State of New Jersey follows past practice, high increases in health premiums will result in allowable adjustments to the general fund tax levy. While a 2% general fund tax levy dollar amount is about \$2.9 million, full utilization of the cap law would allow about a \$4.0 million increase.

While there are many budget areas under increasing cost pressure, the superintendent focused on five areas under particularly strong pressure for the 2015-16 budget cycle: these include: transportation, special services tuition, health care premiums, building & grounds and salary adjustments. If present service levels are maintained, these areas call for at least \$4 million of additional support. The other areas of the budget also have need of additional dollars. Either some current services are reduced or dollars need to be added to the budget.

To provide perspective, a discussion of class sizes were reviewed at several grade levels. While the size of a class varies, most classes are at a level that suggests additional students being added would be less than ideal. The district has squeezed out the instances of small class sizes; for example some types of classes that are small are combined with others so that the combined class size is of a reasonable size.

Additional discussions dealt with technology build-outs, implications of the upcoming moves of 3<sup>rd</sup> graders and elementary special services students. Addition of third grade at Millstone suggests that changes be made to bell schedules and to grade 4/5 school start and finish times. The recent addition of security activities at our schools has been reviewed and revisions are under consideration. Steps to serve struggling learners, PARCC, and negotiations all have budget implications. Capital outlay needs are many, including an array of projects that will have to be dealt with over the next few years: turf fields, tracks, pools and HVAC controls are significant ones

Upon motion by Ms. Juliana at 10:30 pm, seconded by Ms. Krug, and by unanimous voice vote of all members present, it was agreed to continue the meeting of the board of education for one hour.

The Superintendent next discussed the areas in which various principals and directors have requested additional staff. In all, about sixteen positions have been identified and discussed. Three or four might be done as substitutions of existing staff – taking advantage of enrollment shifts or program changes to downsize in areas of small impact. That still leaves a choice of adding considerable additional funds to the next budget or not acting on some or all of these programmatic requests.

As the budget is discussed, it must be recognized that there are many unknowns. Among them are: state aid, health premium increases, negotiations, implications that surface from the current technology review and the GT program Review. Some shifts are possible to husband district resources, but after years of squeezing costs, most remaining options have serious implications.

At 11:30 pm Mr. Powell, seconded by Ms. Ho, and by unanimous voice vote of all members present, it was agreed to continue the meeting by 30 minutes.

With the pressures on costs discussed tonight, there was little support for the number of reductions that would be needed to have a zero increase budget for 2015-16. To enhance board of education discussion, three levels of budget increases were sketched, as well as what impacts on the status quo or on adding

services would result. The highest of the three levels potentially had provisional support from two board members and strong objection by one. The second level, utilizing the full cap law provisions, had the provisional support of a majority of the board and objection by one member. The lowest level of increase had the support of one board member who indicated that it could be done by increasing class size across the district. Other board members were not enthusiastic about raising class size.

At midnight Mr. Powell, seconded by Ms. Ho, and by the unanimous voice vote of all members present, all agreed to extend the meeting by 30 minutes.

Further discussion on the budget concluded that the administration had sufficient board guidance so as to be able to move forward with the budget preparation cycle. The Superintendent noted that the indicated level implied that sought after additions for struggling learners would either not move forward at this time or be done by substituting dollars from some staffing moves that may be possible due to shifts in enrollment and programs.

Superintendent Aderhold and Board President Fleres thanked everyone for their participation and perseverance. A lot of ground was covered tonight.

Upon motion by Mr. Powell, seconded by Ms. Ho, and by unanimous voice vote, the meeting adjourned at 12:10 a.m.

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Larry Shanok, Board Secretary