

**BOARD OF EDUCATION
RETREAT MEETING MINUTES
February 2, 2015**

The meeting of the West Windsor-Plainsboro Board of Education was called to order by President Fleres at 6:00 p.m. at the Village Elementary School media center. The following board members were present:

Mr. Anthony Fleres	Ms. Rachel Juliana	Ms. Dana Krug
Ms. Louisa Ho	Ms. Michele Kaish	Mr. Scott Powell
		Mr. Yingchao “YZ” Zhang

Board Member Cheng was absent. Board member Zhong arrived at 7:05 p.m. 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.

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 school budget.

CHECK IN

Mr. Smith noted the substance within the whole child/every child phrasing of the district mission. Among the important elements are the depth and breadth of district programs and the consistency in evaluation discipline supported by the use of the Danielson framework. He then moved to the full mission statement: “The mission of the West Windsor-Plainsboro Regional School District, valuing our tradition of excellence, is to develop all of our children as passionate, confident, lifelong learners who have competence and strength of character to realize their aspirations and thoughtfully contribute to a diverse and changing world.”

Board members broke-up into small groups to discuss what resonates with them within either the “shorthand” mission statement or the full statement. After some discussion, the Board exchanged what resonates: that the whole child/every child keeps things front and foremost in mind as decisions are made; the developing of children across a range of areas; “contribute,” “character,” “passionate,” and “lifelong” all resonated among the board members.

DISCUSSION

The Superintendent noted that the purpose of tonight's effort was to engage in extensive conversations and thus develop consensus around the fiscal parameters and the associated actions for the 2015-2016 school budget. He began the discussion with a review of the district strategic goals. He noted three options outlined at the previous retreat. He believes that the administration has responded to those discussions and has evolved an approach that accomplishes the target – and perhaps a bit better.

Mr. Shanok reviewed the allocation of expenditures. While maintaining and building momentum, this allocation keeps the budget-to-budget growth to about \$3.4 million; a 2.1% budget increase. Larger increases are seen in the following areas: special education tuition; improvement in instruction; operations; transportation; and employee benefits. While many other areas are relatively flat, these areas do imply an increase in spending next year. Much of the increase in improvement of instruction is in fact a redistribution of costs as an individual was moved into the newly created data administration position. The district is in the final year of its contract for Buildings & Grounds services; five years ago, the second lowest bid was a million dollars higher than the lowest responsible bidder. What may occur this round? Health benefits continue to increase: the January 1, 2015 increase in the NJDirect10 employee/child medical premium was 15.1% while the family premium increased 12.6%.

The Superintendent discussed a variety of other cost topics and then discussed enrollment projections in some detail. Shifting enrollment calls for staff increases in some areas, but creates opportunity to shave staffing in some others while largely maintaining class sizes around the district. The move to a grade 3-5 configuration at Village brings a variety of issues to the fore: the bell schedule, 34 versus 29 periods for teachers, consistency across the district and bussing. While moderate, some staffing increases are necessary – in some cases, having previously squeezed staffing in earlier years and enjoying the cost savings, some of that needs to be given back as circumstances change.

The Superintendent, with contributions from his staff, discussed the potential of some redesign efforts in the areas of in-class resource student support, basic skills, and technology. A lively discussion evolved as the Board gained insight in the value and trade-offs associated with the redesign of each area. The consensus of the Board was in support of the redesign efforts.

While a number of areas are tackled in the budget, some cannot without greater spending or reductions in areas currently being supported. Significant changes to Read 180, G&T, and some other areas will have to wait for now.

The Superintendent and Mr. Shanok reviewed the capital projects and transportation. With one million dollars of the capital outlay budget targeting technology acquisition this year and next, the importance of continuing to raise the capital outlay budget in the future is seen clearly. Until then continuing to add and use capital reserve will keep the district's facilities in satisfactory shape. With a flat \$2.2 million in capital outlay, the capital expenditures needed associated with the Town Center, Village, High School North, and Millstone River construction will be supported with capital reserve dollars. While some steps are being taken in transportation, larger actions need much thought and time: aging bus fleet, pending loss of bus garage area, rising costs associated with health and pension benefits, crossing guard issues, and bus transport and hazardous road board policies that impact a lot of the existing bussing. With the imminent retirement of the transportation coordinator and the many changes in bussing associated with the Village/Town Center/Millstone River moves, it will take time to address these broader issues, both by transportation and the Board of Education.

By motion of Mr. Powell, seconded by Ms. Ho, and by unanimous voice vote of all members present, the board meeting was extended by one hour at 10:30 p.m.

The Superintendent reviewed the budget unknowns. A major one is the level of state-aid; it will still be more than three weeks until aid is announced. The district has little idea of the likely July 1, 2015, prescription plan increase much less the January 1, 2016, increase in the state medical plan.

The Superintendent encouraged the Board to speak about where they would see more or less spending. While everyone noted the pressure to not let spending and taxes increase too much, there developed a consensus to add \$20,000 to the non-athletic co-curricular spending for the grade 6-12 schools. The administration promised to set those dollars into the budget and initiate a discussion of what the impact will be at the four schools.

Finally, the Superintendent noted the progress made tonight in the wide-ranging conversations. The discussions appeared to evolve into a budget with a \$3.4 million budget-to-budget increase and a general fund tax levy increase that is within the tax cap rules. The Board agreed that that consensus had been reached around the ideas spoken tonight by the Superintendent and that the administration could begin the process of finalizing and implementing the 2015-2016 school budget.

Superintendent Aderhold and Board President Fleres thanked everyone for their participation and perseverance; and, urged them to be careful on the way home in the below freezing temperature outside.

Upon motion by Ms. Kaish, seconded by Mr. Zhong, and by unanimous voice vote, the meeting adjourned at 11:08 p.m.

Larry Shanok, Board Secretary