

WEST BOYLSTON SCHOOL COMMITTEE

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF
WEDNESDAY, February 13, 2013**

LOCATION: West Boylston Middle/High School Media Center

PRESENT: SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEMBERS

John Owanisian, Chairman
Jennifer Breen
Richard Shaw
Erin Palumbo
James Pedone

ADMINISTRATORS

Elizabeth Schaper, Superintendent
Lawrence Murphy, Principal Middle/High School
Christopher LaBreck, Associate MS Principal
Marjorie McCarthy, Elementary Principal
Roger E. Pontbriand, Jr., Business Administrator
Sherri Traina, Special Education Administrator

COMMUNITY

Faculty & Staff: 2 Guests: 10
Student Advisors: 2 Press:

Mr. Owanisian opened the meeting at 7:00 p.m. and welcomed everyone to the February 13, 2013 School Committee Meeting.

Approval of the Minutes

Mr. Owanisian reminded everyone that the next School Committee meeting on March 13, 2013 would be preceded by a budget hearing at 6:00 p.m. He indicated that if anyone had any interest in the budget, the School Committee would urge as many members of the public to attend as possible.

Mr. Shaw made a motion to approve the minutes of the regular School Committee Meeting of January 9, 2013; Ms. Breen seconded. Motion approved. **Voted 5-0-0.**

Student Recognition Awards

Mr. Owanisian introduced Ms. McCarthy, who presented the Student of the Month Award to Major Edwards Elementary student, Katy Misiaszek.

Mr. LaBreck stated that the Student of the Month Award from the Middle High School would go to Hannah Silver, but that she was unable to attend the School Committee meeting, but would be at the meeting in March of 2013.

Mr. Murphy gave the Student of the Month Award for the High School to Rachel Baldi who was nominated by Ms. Carolyn Somma.

Student Advisory Council

Mr. Owanisian introduced the members of the Student Advisory Council – Abby Colangelo and Rachel O’Connor, who updated those in attendance regarding current events happening in the Middle/High School.

Rachel indicated the National Art Honor Society - the week after vacation would be volunteering at the Worcester Art Museum and they were also working with the West Boylston Arts Foundation.

Abby explained the yearbook just completed the senior and underclassmen sections. She also stated that Dickinson’s Ribbons literary magazine is now taking submissions for the spring issue.

Mr. Owanisian asked the council if there were any updates with regard to sports.

Rachel stated that the boys won their senior night game against Tahanto. She also stated that the girls are moving on to districts as well.

Acknowledgment Of Camera Crew

Mr. Owanisian thanked the camera crew for all of their hard work.

Highlight on Schools

Dr. Schaper stated that when she began working in West Boylston she spoke to many people about their hopes and dreams for the West Boylston Public Schools and one message that was clear was a message about raising the academic bar. She stated that we have a lot of amazing resources in this school district, especially for a school district of this size, in the arts. She indicated that we have a very talented pool of art teachers, wonderful facilities and a lot of resources for the arts that you don't find in districts of this size and she stated that we've thought about how to use those to leverage children's creativity and to help them get a wonderful education here.

Dr. Schaper indicated that one of the dreams that came out of brainstorming with the community about this, was the idea of potentially merging the science, technology, engineering and math STEM program with an arts program to put the "A" in STEM and make it STEAM.

Dr. Schaper explained to the committee that that little seed that was planted in the middle of last year, has grown into a full-fledged plan for an academy that will open next year in our middle school beginning with students in grade 7. She stated that students who enroll in the academy would stay in it through grades 7, 8, 9 and 10 and then be very well prepared to take our most academically challenging sequence of courses after that in science and technology.

Dr. Schaper stated that Mr. LaBreck and his team have done a lot of work planning for this academy and they are still in the midst of planning. She indicated that she asked Mr. LaBreck to come to this evening's meeting to tell everyone where the planning group was with their progress and to take any questions that anyone might have regarding the program.

Mr. LaBreck gave credit to members of his team who have put in hours and hours of work on this program.

Mr. LaBreck stated the STEAM is a combination of STEM, and that's been a trend within the State of Massachusetts for about the last five (5) years and across the country.

Mr. LaBreck stated that essentially what STEM is – is taking science, technology, engineering and mathematics and teaching them in an interdisciplinary way, but teaching them through problem solving, discovery, exploratory learning in a project based curriculum.

Mr. LaBreck explained that what would make West Boylston unique and different would be integrating the arts. He indicated that by putting art together with science, technology, engineering and mathematics, you can develop some really innovative problem solving/critical thinking skills.

Mr. LaBreck stated that the entrance criteria for this program would be based on grades, MCAS scores or other standardized tests, attendance, teacher recommendation and an application process.

Mr. LaBreck indicated that they plan to start the program next school year with just the one unit out of Project Lead the Way, the automation robotic unit.

Mr. Owanisian asked Mr. LaBreck if adding arts added a creative element to the program.

Mr. LaBreck stated that he thought there was a very natural between engineering and the arts when you talk about design.

Dr. Schaper explained that there are a lot of students that are very good at science and math. Opening up the side of your brain that you use to draw and think creatively allows for an entirely new way of looking at things and from this new ways of understanding develop. She stated that it will serve these students well if we teach them to look in the way that an artist does.

Ms. Palumbo asked where the time would be taken from, if students' science time is doubled.

Mr. LaBreck stated that what the students would lose, would be what we call the Explorer period, which is 10 weeks of health, 10 weeks of computers, 10 weeks of tech ed and 10 weeks of art. He stated that the only piece that would be missing from the program for them would be health. He indicated that they would have to find ways to incorporate that particular curriculum into their schedule.

Ms. Breen asked Mr. LaBreck how we were going to finance this project.

Mr. LaBreck indicated that a start up cost was hard to give just now. He stated that the most expensive part of this project is training the teachers. He stated that the rest of the program would not be that expensive. There is some initial start up cost, but the cost for consumables would be just \$300.

Ms. Breen also asked if Health was a required course.

Dr. Schaper indicated that we have options as far as where and when we can teach the health standards.

Mr. Shaw asked what the STEAM program would cost ultimately, as a whole program – 4 to 5 years out. He asked if we would have to charge fees and Dr. Schaper explained that we are not allowed to for such a program because it is part of our regular school curriculum.

Mr. Shaw asked Mr. LaBreck how a child qualifies.

Mr. LaBreck indicated the best way to provide incentive for the 6th graders would be for them to see what the 7th graders are doing in this program. He stated that that would be the best incentive for those kids who aren't there yet, but could be there if they just applied themselves.

Mr. Shaw asked if a student worked really hard in the 7th grade, could they get into the program in 8th grade.

Mr. LaBreck indicated that there needs to be an entry point beyond the initial point where you come in as a 7th grader. He stated that some of that would depend on how that curriculum is developed for 7th and 8th grade.

Mr. Pedone asked if there would be some kind of opportunity for students to take their ideas and or solutions to problems outside of the school in some type of retreat where they could discuss problems with other students and other teachers.

Mr. LaBreck explained that there are many potential possibilities such as science fairs in other locations. He stated that we have made connections with other schools such as Clark University and

WPI to help us develop any pieces that we need help with.

Sub-Committee Reports

Mr. Owanisian called for a report of the Budget Subcommittee. Mr. Shaw indicated that the Budget Subcommittee met last Wednesday night and the whole School Committee met with the selectmen. Mr. Shaw then indicated that the town administrator gave what their estimated revenue was going to be to be in order to create the budget as a town.

Mr. Owanisian called for a report of the Chapter 74 Subcommittee. Ms. Breen indicated that she and Mr. Shaw met with Dr. Schaper and Representative Jim O'Day with regard to the vocational education and how it affects the public school budgets. She stated that they spoke with Mr. O'Day about the possibility of changing some of the laws and coming up with some ways to help lessen the impact, financially, on districts specifically like ours – a small school district who when we send kids to Assabet, really feels the pinch financially.

She explained that Mr. O'Day was very responsive and listened to the concerns brought before him. Ms. Breen explained that Dr. Schaper pointed out several things in that meeting with regard to the law and how it really does not help public schools defend their ability to keep the money within their own district.

Mr. Shaw commented on the outstanding letter that Dr. Schaper sent to Mr. O'Day and for the outline of the issues, which were very clear and concise.

Mr. Owanisian called for a report of the Marketing Subcommittee. Ms. Palumbo indicated that both she and Mr. Owanisian met last night with Dr. Schaper. She stated that they went over placing posters in various locations for School Choice applicants in all the grades. Ms. Palumbo stated that Dr. Schaper advised that we currently have 31 applicants for School Choice. Ms. Palumbo explained to the committee that we are going to look at doing another Banner article, and hopefully there would be one done on the STEAM Academy.

Mr. Owanisian indicated that they sent out 50 plus posters to the local churches, synagogues and houses of worship.

Ms. Palumbo thanked Ms. McCarthy for giving school tours of the elementary school and asked if she had received any responses as far as anyone coming to see the school.

Ms. McCarthy stated that about 8 people have responded to the offer for tours of the school.

Mr. Owanisian stated that he was a member of the Negotiations Subcommittee and that there was a tentative agreement in place at this point.

Mr. Owanisian called for a report of the Policy Subcommittee. Ms. Breen stated that they met and Dr. Schaper has given them some policies from schools in surrounding towns. She indicated that some schools don't have a homework policy. She mentioned that they would look at getting together again to look at other schools' policies and they would assess where there were at that point.

Mr. Owanisian called for a report of the School Building Subcommittee. Mr. Pedone stated that they met last week with Dr. Schaper to discuss the issue of doors in the elementary school. He indicated that the new doors came in larger than anticipated. The frame was re-worked to accommodate the larger doors.

He stated that they were going to attempt to work on a solution so that the doors would be framed properly.

Dr. Schaper stated they had a recommendation from the architect – the doors as they were installed, because they had to do some patchwork on some metal – that was not acceptable to him. His recommendation to the district was that we don't have to accept these.

Mr. Pedone mentioned that there was meeting this coming Friday with the architect to discuss that matter.

Mr. Owanisian called for a report of the Technology Subcommittee. Mr. Pedone stated that the committee met last night to discuss the survey results regarding the district's website. He stated that based on the results, the committee feels that a complete overhaul of the site is in order.

Mr. Pedone stated that they were looking for something that was more user friendly and more pleasing to the eye. He stated that users completing the survey stated that it was very difficult for them to find the required information on Ed Line as the data was scattered all over the place.

Mr. Pedone indicated that our director of technology is busy trying to find a different content management provider that will allow us to save money, as we are paying for services through Ed Line that we do not need.

Mr. Pedone stated that they were also piloting a new message service, which we have free for three (3) months.

Mr. Owanisian called for a report of the Transportation Subcommittee. Mr. Shaw indicated there was no update at this time.

Ms. Diane Nichols, a grant coordinator from Coordinated Family & Community Engagement Grant (CFCE) introduced herself to the committee and those in attendance and provided an overview of the services that her organization provides to the town through a joint grant with the town of Clinton.

Mr. Owanisian called for a report from the elementary school. Ms. McCarthy reminded the community that kindergarten registration is taking place for the entire month of February. Ms. McCarthy also highlighted other areas of her report for the committee such as Grade 3 students working on "tests as a genre unit", Grade 4 students participation in a Museum of Science Star Lab, and the grand reopening of the Major Edwards School Bank in Grade 5.

Mr. Owanisian called for a report from the Middle School. Mr. LaBreck stated that Middle and High School Math teachers have been working together to develop common assessments and align their curriculum to the new MA frameworks. He also indicated that Middle School ELA and Social Studies teachers are meeting regular to develop lessons and implement strategies from our work with TLA. Mr. LaBreck stated that the 5th grade information night has been rescheduled for Thursday, March 7, 2013 from 6:30 – 8:30 p.m.

Mr. Owanisian called for a report from the High School. Mr. Murphy highlighted areas of his report for the School Committee as well. He told those in attendance that two high school students were notified of their selection for awards from the Scholastic Art and Writing Competition for 2013, Corey Marsh and Maddie Blodgett. Mr. Murphy stated that the guidance department is presently in the process of working with the high school students on selecting their classes for the 2013-14 school year and that the school is working with the police, fire and emergency services to review and revise our efforts to be prepared in the event of a crisis situation.

Community Input

Communication and Reports

Mr. Murphy stated that every year the DECA organization signs up to compete in a business competition where they compete with other groups from all over the state. He stated that we've been very successful in the past. He asked the School Committee to approve funding for the trip, which is an overnight trip on a Friday into Saturday. Mr. Owanisian asked what the price of the trip would be. Mr. Murphy indicated that he did not know the total cost of the trip but that it would come out of the student activities fund. Mr. Owanisian asked Mr. Murphy if he could ask Mr. Palmi if there were any opportunities to interact with members of the community with these students. Mr. Murphy indicated that he would do so.

Ms. Breen made a motion to approve the high school DECA trip; Mr. Pedone seconded. **Motion approved 5-0-0.**

Mr. Owanisian called for a report from the Special Education Director. Ms. Traina that the Special Ed Dept. underwent their mid-cycle review for files, policies, etc. Ms. Traina stated that Suzanne Shaw from the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education was here for two days reviewing documents and talking with staff in January 2013. Ms. Traina indicated that a report would be issued, but it might take several weeks or months to receive same. She stated that her exit review with Suzanne Shaw was very positive. She stated that at that time, there was nothing she could see that we would get cited for.

Mr. Owanisian called for a report from the business administrator. Mr. Pontbriand mentioned that the School Committee should have received an expenditure report in their packet, and he stated that the report is limited in scope until we finalize the collective bargaining process. Mr. Pontbriand stated that we cannot update the encumbrances until we can update the payroll and salaries

Mr. Pontbriand mentioned that the out of district tuition and transportation are two accounts that have deficits. He indicated that we intend to apply some circuit breaker funds to those accounts to bring them level and we also intend to find some other areas within our budget to move some expenditures around.

Mr. Pontbriand stated that at this time of the year, the state comes out with a couple of programs that we could apply for supplemental funds. One of those programs is called Circuit Breaker Extra Ordinary Relief. He stated that he believes we will qualify for that program and we will apply for additional supplemental funds from the state. The other program is called "Foundation and Reserve" or otherwise known as the "Pothole Fund". Mr. Pontbriand indicated that it is not guaranteed we will get anything from these state funds, but we shall apply.

Mr. Owanisian asked Mr. Pontbriand about applying for additional funds to make up the shortfall in the Special Ed Department. He asked if he had a ballpark idea of what we hope to realize from that request.

Mr. Pontbriand stated that the funding has to qualify for Circuit Breaker, of which there is a base amount. He also stated that we would only get the balance above that base amount. As to what percentage, it would depend upon how much we have above that to begin with.

Mr. Owanisian asked if there was a time frame within which we would have to submit our request for funds.

Mr. Pontbriand advised that we have to submit the request by March 1st.

Ms. Breen asked Ms. Traina if these expenses that have come up after the budget was fixed; if we have programs that are available here – is this most of what we're dealing with out of district tuition.

Ms. Traina stated that if you look at our percentage of out of district students compared to many other districts, we are very, very low in out of district students. Ms. Traina stated that there are situations that we don't have much control over such as cost share placements whereby parents live in two different districts.

Mr. Pedone asked if we were to over forecast the money needed for this part of the budget, would we end up losing that money.

Dr. Schaper stated that we do sometimes have an anticipated tuition if we have reasonable certainty that there is a student who is going to be placed in an out of district setting.

Mr. Owanisian called for a report from the superintendent. Dr. Schaper said that every January the Worcester County Superintendents' Association honors a group of elite high school seniors at an awards luncheon, which was held this year at Clark University. Both she and Mr. Murphy attended the luncheon with the West Boylston High School scholar, Corey Marsh. Corey was selected for this honor based on his exceptional academic work. Dr. Schaper included a copy of the program in the School Committee packet.

Dr. Schaper also included in the packet a summary of a meeting which was held with Representative O'Day. Dr. Schaper indicated, that Representative O'Day's office had contacted her requesting information regarding the impact of vocational education costs on our budget. She stated that she was asked to provide five (5) years worth of data regarding those costs. That data is in the packet.

Dr. Schaper stated in 2009 the vocational costs accounted for about 6.5% of the total education dollars. That number has fluctuated over the past five (5) year with a high in 2012 of 12.2% and last year the amount of money spent on vocational education tuition accounted for about 10.7% of the education dollars in this town. Dr. Schaper indicated that this fluctuation in costs in addition to the fluctuation of the tuition rate and the number of students going is what causes the variation in our budget for vocational tuitions. She stated that it has ranged in the past few years between \$13,000.00 and \$16,000.00 per student. Dr. Schaper mentioned that Representative O'Day has a staff member researching vocational education issues and looking at modifications to the law that may help small school districts.

Dr. Schaper advised the committee that a copy of Dickinson's Ribbons, a literary magazine, was in their packets. This magazine features student prose, poetry and artwork. Dr. Schaper said that the magazine was also available to view online and the link is located on the Facebook and Twitter page.

Dr. Schaper explained that her staff is currently preparing the FY14 budget and the public hearing on the budget would be held at 6:00 p.m. on March 13, 2013, which immediately precedes the next regularly scheduled school committee meeting. Prior to that public hearing the budget will be available as required by law in the superintendent's office for inspection on Monday, March 11, 2013 and Tuesday, March 12, 2013 between the hours of 8 a.m. and 4 p.m. and anyone from the community is invited to look through the budget.

Mr. Owanisian asked Dr. Schaper how the students are selected for the scholar's luncheon.

Dr. Schaper indicated that the superintendents select their scholar based on whatever criteria they want to use. She stated that in her case, she asks the guidance office to send information about the top ten students in the class. .

Mr. Owanisian asked Dr. Schaper if there would be, at some point, a cap put on the total amount of

students that the vocational school would accept.

Dr. Schaper indicated that the current law allows for any student who is accepted at a vocational school to attend that school. Dr. Schaper stated that if we were a member of a regional/vocational school district, which we have tried to accomplish, there could have been a quota for how many students could attend. We attempted to join the Monty Tech district and also attempted to secure a Community Regionalization Grant to work on the issue but we were rejected by both Monty Tech and by the state regionalization grant maker. Dr. Schaper indicated that our most recent efforts have been through the Chapter 74 subcommittee which is working to suggest legislative changes that might be helpful to small school districts.

Mr. Owanisian called for a report from Mr. Pedone, Mr. Shaw, Ms. Palumbo, and Ms. Breen. All indicated they had nothing new to report.

Mr. Owanisian spoke of the School Committee Targets 1-7 in their packet updating those in attendance relative to:

- **Item one** – Town’s support for School Committee budget – an ongoing issue;
- **Item two** – The School Committee to work with Selectmen and Finance Committee – School Committee recently met with Board of Selectmen and have a follow up meeting with them in March;
- **Item three** – School Committee to organize a community representative Task Force – Providing direction to school system – Kicked off this past summer with a significant amount of community input. Dr. Schaper stated that this was a draft. What we hoped for and what we’ve accomplished is to put some text with it of explanation so that people have a sense of why we selected the goals that we did;
- **Item four** – Committee to work with Administration to update and prioritize the Capital Improvement Plan – Mr. Owanisian stated there is a list of priorities with regard to this plan, one being improvements towards the roof, Technology Improvement Plan and Curriculum Materials/Textbook Replacement Plan – Dr. Schaper stated that every time we try do a curriculum revision cycle, we look to see whether the materials we have are adequate to meet those needs. Right now, she stated that we are working on our English Language Arts curriculum. She said that the composition books that we are looking to purchase this year is much different from last year. She stated that we need to focus on non-fiction text in helping kids learn to read non-fiction text – more than just stories and you can see that reflected in the budget.
- **Item five** – Committee to advocate for State legislative changes to advocate for small school districts – Mr. Owanisian stated that tonight’s discussion relative to the meeting with Representative O’Day reflects this advocacy;
- **Item six** – Committee to work closely with administration regarding marketing efforts – Mr. Owanisian stated that both he and Ms. Palumbo’s have worked closely with the administration and they are hoping to fill some school choice spots in the district as a result of their marketing campaign;
- **Item seven** – Monitoring the impact of vocational education, costs, and programming on enrollment and program offerings in West Boylston and maintaining active advocacy regarding small school districts who are unaffiliated with regional vocational schools – Mr.

Owanisian stated that we have to maintain a focus relative to the vocational needs of the district.

Mr. Owanisian stated that the School Committee will be meeting next week for a mini-retreat on Thursday, February 21, 2013 in the Media Center.

Adjournment

At 9:18 Mr. Shaw made a motion to adjourn, Mr. Pedone seconded; **Voted 5-0-0.**

Respectfully submitted,

Marie Johnson
Recording Secretary