

WEST BOYLSTON SCHOOL COMMITTEE

**MINUTES OF THE PUBLIC HEARING FY14 BUDGET MEETING OF
WEDNESDAY, March 13, 2013**

LOCATION: West Boylston Middle/High School Media Center

PRESENT: SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEMBERS

John Owanisian, Chairman

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: 4

Student Advisors: 0 Press: 2

Mr. Owanisian welcomed those in attendance to the Public Hearing on the FY14 School Budget, and introduced Dr. Schaper who presented the budget.

**Presentation of
the Budget**

Dr. Schaper indicated that as she and her staff started the budgeting process, they relied on the same three budgeting priorities that they established last year.

Dr. Schaper stated that the first of those priorities was to distribute staff across the district in order to balance class sizes. She said that this year that involved redistributing staff to create 3.0 full middle school teams. She stated that they did that without the addition of any faculty members. She stated it was simply done by moving people from the high school to the middle school where the class sizes were larger.

Dr. Schaper said that the second budgeting priority that was established was to decrease reliance on contracted service providers in favor of utilizing district staff. Dr. Schaper indicated that we have a woman that has been hired as an ABA staff member through a contract – a day-to-day, hourly contract, and we used grant money to do that, but instead of having an hourly service provider, we intend to use the same grant funds to hire a person who will work for us.

The third budgeting priority was to centralize technology where possible for maximum fiscal efficiency. Dr. Schaper indicated that this year they are working on gaining some efficiency in our printing and copying services.

Dr. Schaper stated that last year's operating budget – FY13; the K-12 school and the superintendent's office asked for \$8,958,918.00. This year we're asking for \$9,452,259.00; and increase of \$493,341.00 or 5.5%.

Dr. Schaper stated there are only three areas that show in increase in the budget: contractual obligations - \$347,264.00, Special Education Out-of-District Tuitions - \$140,698.00. Both increases are mandatory funds. We have no discretion over the prices that outside schools set for their tuition rates.

Dr. Schaper indicated that that we have made reductions in our own supply needs, and programmatic needs in order to help minimize the effect of these increases.

Dr. Schaper presented a Power Point presentation on the budget distribution and how it looks when it's broken down into types of costs. Salaries and wages are where most of the funds go, Special Education Services – including out-of-district costs account for 9% of the budget, 3% of the budget goes to Middle/High School instructional, technology and building maintenance costs, 2% is allocated to Major Edwards Elementary instructional, technology and building maintenance costs, and 1% is allocated to the district office for office expenses and technology costs.

Dr. Schaper broke down the costs of the K-12 School Budget into Cost Centers so that people could see where those cost centers have been impacted.

Dr. Schaper mentioned that in the Superintendent's Office there are three lines: Salaries – 1.7% change from last year, Expenses – down 2.0% and Technology – up 2.6% for a total increase of 1.4% over the FY13 budget.

Major Edwards' expenses include: core curriculum, enrichment curriculum, and student support programs. There are 27.4 teachers/professional staff 5 paraprofessionals and 8 cafeteria/custodial/office staff at Major Edwards. These numbers will remain steady from last year. Dr. Schaper stated that the budget this year for Major Edwards includes staff salaries – increased 7.5% over last year (due to contractual raises and changes in liens and steps for teachers who we employ), instruction is up 3.5%, technology up 2.2% and building maintenance is down 1% for a total of 7% increase over the FY13 budget.

Dr. Schaper stated that the middle school receives funding through the budget to pay for core curriculum such as language arts, mathematics and science. She stated that we are adding a new program, but no programmatic costs were added to fund a STEAM Academy, which is a science, technology, engineering and math academy infused with the arts to make it STEAM.

Dr. Schaper indicated we will continue to run the Explore Curriculum for middle school students, and student support services.

Dr. Schaper advised that at the high school the programs that are funded with budget money include Core Academics – English, Social Studies, Foreign Language, Math and Science. She indicated that the VHS courses offered for FY14 has been reduced from 75 students to 25 students.

Dr. Schaper explained that the staffing at the Middle/High School remains the same. She told those in attendance that she actually made one mistake with regards to the Major Edwards budget, in that we added one custodial position.

Dr. Schaper stated that salaries in the Middle/High School budget run about 5.2% extra, instruction is up about 2.5%, technology is up 2.1% and Building Maintenance is down approximately 0.6% for a total increase in the Middle/High School Budget of 4.9%.

Dr. Schaper indicated that another cost center for us is the in-district special education costs. She stated that at Major Edwards the money funds a pre-school, life skills class, grade level specialized support, therapists, school psychologist, and paraprofessionals. At the Middle/High School the money funds four resource classes, inclusion support, MS and HS life skills, therapists, school psychologist and paraprofessionals.

Dr. Schaper explained that at the Middle/High School next year one paraprofessional – a needed position in order to support an increased number of students in our life skills program.

Dr. Schaper stated that the special education K-12 budget saw the most flux this year – by an overall increase of 19%. She indicated that our expenses at Major Edwards were reduced significantly. She indicated that Ms. Traina and she did a lot of work to avoid redundancies in buying materials.

Dr. Schaper indicated that there are significant increases in the special education out-of-district tuitions. She said that last year the district paid for 5 students that were Middle/High School students that we paid for out-of-district tuitions – this year we have 7 Middle/High School students and one Elementary student. She stated that those costs are up 36.5%. Transportation for some of those students is up by \$284,294.00 – an increase of 31.9%.

She stated that pupil personnel services is a small line on the budget with an increase of only 8.7%. This part of the budget covers guidance, nursing and 504 plans.

Dr. Schaper mentioned that in this district, we use our school choice money to try and help the district run. She stated that some of that money goes towards transportation. Next year \$227,608.00 was budgeted for that purpose (no change from last year). We also pay for our utilities with the school choice money. The total school choice budget is down 2.5%.

Dr. Schaper explained that in the budget we also cover the athletic department's stipends for coaches in the amount of \$84,568.00.

Dr. Schaper stated that in addition to the school budget (K-12), the Town of West Boylston is also responsible for paying tuition at a rate set by the state for students who wish to attend a vocational school. She stated that the tuition for this year is about \$98,184.00. This is a combination in the increase of students attending and the tuition costs. The transportation for these students will cost \$53,020.00 next year, which is not an increase.

Dr. Schaper asked if there were any questions about the budget as it was presented.

A member of the community asked Dr. Schaper why the VHS program had such a significant drop in the amount of students.

Dr. Schaper explained that we made a very purposeful choice to reduce the VHS slots and gave 8 points for making that decision, which are also available on her blog. She stated that offering 25 slots is in-line with other districts – even ones much larger than ours. She explained that even with the reduction in seats, nearly a third of our seniors could still participate in a VHS class. She explained that an over reliance on VHS courses has caused many of our own high school classes to fall beyond the optimum numbers for running a course, so that many of those classes have had to be cancelled. Dr. Schaper stated that most of the courses that were offered through VHS over the years were less challenging than those that were offered at the high school. She explained that a continuation of large numbers of VHS course could result in a decline in the overall academic environment. She indicated that a significant factor is the cost for running a VHS class. In this district the cost has been about three times the amount than what it costs to have a student sit in a teacher taught classroom.

Mr. Owanisian asked Dr. Schaper if she could explain why the costs the special education budget has increased and why they are beyond our control/unavoidable.

Dr. Schaper stated that the law is very clear in Massachusetts. If a student requires an out-of-district placement, it's the responsibility of the town in which that student lives to pay for their

tuition to attend and special school. She indicated there are some little caveats in the law that do sneak up on us, and that this year, they did. She stated that last year when the budget was prepared, we knew about 5 students were out-of-district. She said that when we came back to school between September and January, this district was assigned responsibility for 2 other students who had a parent. One parent out of the two that lived in our town. We were not aware that these parents had students in another school, but the district that they came from knew that they had a parent living here and they made a claim to the State Department of Education that we should share costs – so we now share costs.

Dr. Schaper said that she wanted the citizens to know that we have no idea, nor have we had any responsibility for the education of students before we are assigned responsibility to fund them from the State Department of Education.

Dr. Schaper explained that we have provisioned for those students that we know about in our budget this year, but that's not to say we couldn't get another one at some time next year, because it does happen.

Dr. Schaper stated that the Circuit Breaker money, which comes back to us quarterly, can be applied towards the tuitions. She said that we had to do that fully this year. We had to use every penny that came back in Circuit Breaker, so there's no way to use that next year because we've used it up to pay the unanticipated tuitions.

A member of the community asked Dr. Schaper for clarify her explanation – it doesn't matter who has custody of the child, it depends on if one parent lives in West Boylston, one lives in Princeton – then it's the responsibility of Princeton and West Boylston to pay for the child.

Dr. Schaper indicated that that was correct.

Mr. Owanisian asked if there were any further questions, to which there were none.

Mr. Owanisian explained that in terms of follow up, there would be discussions with the Town Administrator. The School Committee was invited to meet with the Board of Selectmen in April. He stated that there would be more discussions to come on the FY14 Budget.

Mr. Owanisian stated that the regular School Committee meeting would begin at 7:00 p.m. and confirmed that there were no additional questions.

At 6:24 p.m. Mr. Shaw made a motion to adjourn, Mr. Pedone seconded; **Voted 4-0-0.**

Adjournment

Respectfully submitted,

Marie Johnson
Recording Secretary