

**Waitsfield Elementary School**  
WAITSFIELD BOARD OF SCHOOL DIRECTORS Minutes  
January 20, 2014 7:00 PM  
Waitsfield Elementary School

**ATTENDEES**

**Board Members Present:** Eve Frankel, Helen Kellogg, Allison Champlin, Rob Williams, Todd White

**WES and WWSU Members:** Kaiya Korb, Emily Smith, Jeremy Hill, Michelle Baker

**Community Members:** Stephanie Weigand, Deri Meier, Sophie Dasaro, Deb Loomis, Amy Caffry, Jane Devereux, Jere Brophy, Michele Lepp, Emily Smith, Jeremy Hill, Amy Yavitz, Lindsay Jernigan, Jean & Jonathan Goldhammer, Sally Kendall, Kirsten Seibert, Laura Brines, Rachel Rosenblum, Liza Walker, Christine Sullivan, Kathy Haskell, Audrey Huffman, Chris Badger, Genevieve Knight, Elizabeth Schwartz, Elizabeth Cadwell, Peg Mehuron, Michelle Lepp

**CALL TO ORDER**

Rob Williams called the meeting to order at 7:06pm.

**APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

Eve Frankel made a motion to approve the minutes from the December 16, 2013 board meeting. Allison Champion seconded and the motion was unanimously approved.

**ACTION**

**2014-2015 Budget:** Rob Williams opened the meeting by setting the context of the value of our fine school, the challenge of funding statewide, and appreciation for all who've come to participate in the discussion. He then called on Kaiya Korb to frame the budget, the reductions proposed, and a brief impact analysis of each. Kaiya opened by recapping the first budget draft presented in November, which represented a 5.3% increase. That budget included a .2 increase in teaching staff for math at first grade, continuation of a second kindergarten, continuation of the Middlebury language program, increases to the technology fund to maintain the investments already made, a decrease in special education services, increase in food service costs, and the negotiated increases in salaries and healthcare costs.

Two months ago, when the board asked Kaiya to propose further cuts, she offered the following for consideration:

- 1) Elimination of the second kindergarten teacher - with a fully trained

- support person in the room for the remaining one classroom. Kaiya noted the variability in anticipated student numbers; 19, our current prediction, is within the state's recommended range of 14-20.
- 2) Reduction of the .2 math position intended to support the larger (20 students) 1<sup>st</sup> grade class expected next year.
  - 3) Eliminating the Middlebury Interactive Language program. This program is currently available to all students and their families.
  - 4) Reducing the custodial hours per week, which equates to an hour and half of custodial time per day.
  - 5) Increase by less our current technology devices. It would mean not replacing our laptop lab, which is currently slow and outdated in its operating system.
  - 6) Reduce the music program in two potential ways:
    - a. Reducing the position from full time to .6 or 3 days a week. The musical theater would like be eliminated as well as small group or individual lessons would no longer of be available.
    - b. Reducing the position from full time to .8 or 4 days a week. This option would limit the flexibility/availability of lesson time around student learning needs. We would still have small group lessons available.

Music at Waitsfield currently includes music classes, lessons for individual and small group lessons, plays and concerts. Other valley towns have .5 or less with lessons afterschool.

- 7) Reduce French instruction from .4 to none at all. All other valley schools offer French language.

#### Clarifying questions:

Chris Badger followed up on a question he'd asked about oil expenditure and the process behind that not being on the list for reductions. Kaiya responded that the volatility of oil market is a factor. The other factor is that the building fund has been greatly depleted and any surfeit in the oil line of the budget would be redeployed to a maintenance line.

Elizabeth Cadwell, regarding technology, asked if we change the program so younger children (under 5-6) were not involved in technology, would that significantly impact the budget? Kaiya noted that our younger students already don't use technology significant amounts of time. We need the ration proposed to maintain the current uses which are most significantly at 3<sup>rd</sup> – 6<sup>th</sup> grade. It was also noted that technology is needed to administer the new standardized assessments, which are computer based.

Deri Meier asked if continuing the second kindergarten position effectively

makes that a permanent position. Kaiya answered that no, the position would not be permanent. Also, would reduction to the music teacher mean that the individual would be available for private lessons? Kaiya responded that she would not require the music teacher to teach privately, though some other music teachers do this.

Amy Caffry, with regard to the kindergarten teacher, what are the options if the position is kept but not needed come September? Could they be deployed for the .2 math need? Kaiya responded that the position commitment is within a range, like to be a K-6<sup>th</sup> grade teacher, so contractually re-assignment could occur, although is not a practice of preparation that we look to follow.

Kathy Haskell asked: has the board explored grants for technology and French instruction? Kaiya responded that we've had limited grants for technology with rather specific purposes; they are not broadly available. Kaiya also noted that she approached Middlebury for a donation/discount of their program, to no avail.

Christine Sullivan asked for clarification on the student numbers for kindergarten. She also asked about the option for asking the PTA for the technology requirements. Kaiya noted that the PTA already funds valuable programs and that those would be important tradeoffs. It is the PTA's prerogative to choose those.

Audrey Huffman asked if technology is a one-time expense that the PTA could support versus a teaching position. Kaiya responded that equipment, including our most recent cart, is generally purchased through a leased program – thus, the costs are spread out over several years so that we can maintain a level impact on the budget (thus, it is not a one time cost). She also noted that we have used reserves in prior years, which is why we need to increase the line in the budget going forward as those reserves are no longer available.

Eve Frankel noted how dire our funding situation is and appreciating everyone's participation in this discussion. Rob Williams added that in 2005 property taxes funded 61% of our budget. Now it's closer to 70% of our budget due to the reduction of funds coming from the state's general fund. Rob stressed that all should come out to town meeting to advocate for education.

Adam Greshin sits on the ways and means committee that recommends how the state funds education. Rob suggested that we need to push for new thinking on the funding. Todd White noted that the governor's comments that our taxes are in the hands of the school board is disingenuous, as we have relatively little impact. Kaiya spoke to the measure of the per pupil expenditure as a good way to evaluate school spending over time (as opposed to just looking at taxes).

Amy Caffry noted our small school size and the longevity of our staff.

Assuming all things stay the same (without teachers leaving), staff costs will continue to go up and we'll have to cut teachers to level fund budgets. She

recommends that we fight for what we have. The core question is how do we keep the best education for the most number of kids and how do we measure the impact of the programs we're considering.

Kirsten Seibert notes we skipped over the WWSU assessment line, which she would not miss if cut. Kaiya clarified that this is the amount our school pays for all supervisory union services, not payment for an assessment.

Rob Williams made a motion to move a budget that would capture the following:

- reduce kindergarten
- reduce .2 professional for math
- reduce Middlebury's language program
- reduce custodial hours
- reduce music to .8
- keep French at .4

This would equate to a budget of \$2,372,653 or 3.25% increase over this year's. Eve Frankel seconded.

Discussion: Stephanie Weigand, music teacher at Harwood, spoke to the implications of reducing the music position to .8. She spoke to her experience shadowing Jeremy Hill during her licensure program. She sees a notable difference in students coming to Harwood from Waitsfield. She doubts that things can stay the same should there be a reduction in staffing. She believes that private instruction is where students learn to play their instruments and to read music; band is a time for exploration. She also noted that only students with personal means would be able to afford private instruction. She speaks to the role of music as building great learners. She also read a letter from Becca Hamel supporting continuing full funding of music.

Michelle Nucci asked what the difference in costs between full time and .8 music; the answer is \$14,604.

Lindsay Jernigan noted that musical education has neurological benefit to the left hemisphere. Math, verbal and special relations skills go up with music education. The research is truly causal. Music education has broader implications for long-term academic success.

Elizabeth Cadwell noted music is a universal language that moves across cultures. She feels that the music program across the district is outstanding and asks why we would alter that.

Peg Mehuron has two children who came through WES and is a music educator in Barre. Ours is an essential feeder program to Harwood's wonderful program. She noted a comment by a former English teacher, that she could always note the change in the music program in the writing in her class.

Chris Badger noted that we, the board, need to push back on the community to

support the programs we need.

Rachel Rosenblum asked if the board had considered keeping the music program intact. Eve Frankel spoke to the virulent emails from the some members of the community who intend the vote the budget down. Rachel asked a follow- up question of what would happen if the budget were voted down. Eve stressed that the combined increase of 17-19% in property taxes would be challenging to approve.

Todd White: we are clear that we need to spend more to deliver the first-rate education we are committed to delivering.

Eve Frankel notes that once budgets are voted down, the subsequent cuts are expected to be deeper.

Rob Williams noted that none of us want to cut anything; we are charged with delivering the best education for the best budget possible.

Amy Caffry feels strongly about the quality of education that touches most kids, and notes that the music program stands out in this way.

Lindsay Jernigan noted that there is no value in comparing to other schools with respect to music, as she feels they did not get it right.

Emily Smith spoke to the French program. She supports the music program and adds that similar research exists to support the world language program. It supports higher order thinking and vocabulary. Likewise, high school teachers note the meaningful impact of elementary language education on the incoming students.

Lindsay Jernigan asked Eve Frankel why she fears the cuts would be deeper the second time around if the budget should fail. Eve noted that the tax burden is carried by 1/3 of the population whom are often highly engaged. We need to maintain good will as frugal spenders.

Kaiya spoke to the impact of a school budget failing in terms of how the perception, in the community, about the schools; a failed budget can breed ill will.

Laura Brines supports our asking for what we think we need.

Liza Walker agreed.

Deri Meier urged us to make some reductions, failure to do so makes it easy for him to mobilize the 90% who don't have kids in the school to vote down the budget.

Allison Champlin notes her desire to see music kept whole, the second kindergarten teacher in place, and is contemplating the options for French.

Chris Badger spoke to wanting to come together with the senior community to determine what an appropriate education is for our kids and push back together against the state.

Elizabeth Cadwell noted the role of schools in supporting youths. She is concerned about drug use of children and encourages the seniors to engage with

the youth, including through support of the budget.

Lindsay Jernigan noted that the research on small class size identifies classes under 20 as small – even our largest class falls within this number. Small schools and strong leadership play a very strong role in student success as well; we shouldn't feel a class of 19 wouldn't serve our students.

Audrey Huffman noted that the majority of the kindergarten students will be boys, making a class of 19 in a relatively small space an even greater challenge, in her mind. Kaiya noted that if we had one classroom teacher, we would have an additional space in the building available for small groups from the kindergarten.

Kaiya noted that there 6 girls to 13 boys in the incoming kindergarten class. She suggested that if the numbers grow, we could then discuss re-adding a position at the end of the summer, unbudgeted. She also mentioned the ECO program, which moves the learning to the outdoors for one full morning a week for all kindergarten students. She also noted that there is a potential within the schedule to break the kindergarten class into two small groups for their specials classes.

Helen Kellogg spoke to the fact that the kindergarten decision needs to be made with the information we have today and that 19 is still within the state guidelines for class size. She also noted that dividing 19 into two classes of 9 and 10 would be not ideal for those students, nor feasible for the budget. If/when we see the numbers grow above 21, we can consider adding a teacher back in.

Todd White agrees with Helen Kellogg on the kindergarten position He otherwise agrees with Rob's proposal with the exception of the music program. He would propose keeping the music program whole. He spoke to the role of music and language as essential. Technology is pervasive and will be OK deferred. He stressed the risk of losing the music teacher if the cuts begin.

Chris Badger asked us to add the line item of parent volunteers as a representation in our budget; this volunteerism does a great deal to offset costs.

Audrey Huffman noted the importance of kindergarten as the gateway to elementary school and an essential time for brain development.

Kirsten Seibert spoke to the downsides of small class sizes for getting good social mix and teamwork. She also noted music as a place for heterogeneous education. Overall she supports push back on this downward pressure on our budget. She proposed offering non-native language only in the upper unit.

Rachel Rosenblum, as a language teacher, noted the value of non-native language as similar to music. We have a great value in a two-day teacher that manages to see all kids twice a week.

Elizabeth Cadwell with a child going in to high school and seeing the cost of private school nearing \$50k, thinks our costs per pupil seem really low.

Rob Williams requested to amend his motion, a request which was agreed upon by Todd White who had seconded the motion. Rob proposed a new motion. His revised motion is the same as the first with the exception of keeping the music program at full time. That represents \$2,387,257 or a 3.89% spending increase and a 5.4% tax

impact after the CLA. Todd White seconded the motion. The motion was approved with four votes and one abstention from Allison Champlin.

Kathy Haskell asked if we've allowed enough wiggle room if this budget did not pass. Laura Brines asked if we could help mobilize people to come to the school budget vote at town meeting.

**Approve Warrant for March 2014 Annual School meeting, including request for Australian ballot:** we will add an article stating "Shall the Waitsfield town district adopt its budget article or articles by Australian ballot beginning with budget years commencing July 1, 2015. Board determined this to be article VI, and then article VII will be "transact any other business."

**Establish pre-school enrollment maximums for 2014-2015:** Kaiya recommends we set a maximum of 12 students in either preschool class, allowing us two reserve spots for any students with particular needs who might emerge during the year. Through our license, we can legally have 14.6 kids in our preschool classroom. If we have more students interested than we have capacity for (beyond our maximum), preschool partnership funds become available through our agreed upon procedures. We do not anticipate that we will have more than 12 students in either class in the coming year.

Rob Williams made a motion to set the maximum preschool enrollment at 12. Allison Champlin seconded and the motion was unanimously approved.

**Confirm FY15 Tuition Rate** Rob Williams made a motion to set the tuition rate at \$13,000 dictated by the state. Todd White seconded and the motion was unanimously approved.

## **DISCUSSION**

**Audience and written communication –**

**Review for future adoption: F13 Admission of Resident Students:**

Clarifying discussion ensued but no changes were requested.

**F14 admission of Non-Resident Tuition Students:** Clarifying discussion ensued but no changes were requested.

## **REPORTS**

**Financial Report:** We are currently projecting a fund balance of \$365. Kaiya continues to watch the budget closely.

**Principal Report:** Students and staff will conduct a “secure the building” drill on Thursday. Video projects by students will support the ongoing We ROCK theme. Professional development will continue on our multi tiered system of support.

**WWSU Representative’s report:** The letter is the output of the WWSU meeting with respect to funding. It was drafted by Eve Frankel and Heidi Speer.

### **EXECUTIVE SESSION**

Eve Frankel made a motion to go into executive session on a matter of personnel. Todd White seconded and the board went into executive session at 10:36 pm. The board came out of executive session at 10:39

Eve Frankel made a motion to accept Nina Towne’s letter of resignation. Allison Champlin seconded and the motion was unanimously approved.

### **ADJOURNMENT**

The meeting was adjourned at 10:50 pm. The next meeting will be Monday February 17<sup>th</sup> at 7 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Helen Kellogg  
Clerk and Secretary