



## Winchendon Public Schools

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School Committee Chair: 

WINCHENDON TOWN CLERK  
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### School Committee Meeting

February 16, 2023 - 6:00 pm

Town Hall, 2nd Floor Auditorium

#### Attendance:

Ryan Forsythe, Chair; Greg Vine, Vice Chair; Larry Murphy; Karen Kast-McBride; Angelina Dellasanta, Student Representative; Thad King, Superintendent; Amanda Babinski, Director of Finance & Operations

#### 1. Call to order

#### 2. Pledge of Allegiance

R. Forsythe reads audio visual disclosure.

#### 3. Public Comment: None

#### 4. Student Representative Report:

A. Dellasanta presents district wide student related updates. Murdock High School Student Council hosted the Special Olympics Bocce Tournament on January 27. The Middle/High School performance of *Matilda* the Musical was a great success. Earlier today, Murdock High School held its first World Language Fair. Students from all novice and intermediate language classes were tasked with making posters containing details from different countries around the world. February 17, the middle school will host a 7th and 8th grade dance. Murdock High School Student Council will be taking the Polar Plunge for Special Olympics on March 8 in Hyannis during the annual conference. Donations can be made to the team at [fundraise.specialolympicsma.org](https://fundraise.specialolympicsma.org). Murdock senior, Tiana Graessle will be performing at the Massachusetts Music Educators Association 2023 All State Festival at Boston Symphony Hall on March 4 at 1pm. Tiana placed in the top 25% of all 106 sopranos who auditioned. Murdock Middle School is holding help sessions during February Break on Tuesday through Thursday, 9am-12pm. The Youth Changemakers Sunshine Cafe is hosting a series of events over February Break for the youth in town. The indoor track team had their state meet at the Reggie Lewis Center in Boston. On February 18, boys varsity basketball will play against Southbridge, and the middle school cheer team will have a meet at King Phillip High School in Wrentham. The Murdock Boosters are in desperate need of volunteers to work the concession stand at middle and high school sporting events to help raise money for student athletics. Volunteers may contact Sue at 978-297-5671.

#### 5. Consent Agenda:

a. Minutes:

G. Vine moves to approve the minutes for the January 5 meeting. Seconded by K. Kast-McBride. Vote is unanimous.

b. Field Trip Approval:

Principal Anne Diaz presents the Nature's Classroom field trip for 5th grade students. G. Vine moves to approve the field trip. Seconded by K. Kast-McBride. L. Murphy comments this is an incredible program and he is happy our students are getting the opportunity to go. Vote is unanimous.

L. Murphy moves to take New Business item 9a and 9b and move them up to next order of business. Seconded by G. Vine. Vote is unanimous.

**6. New Business:**

a. Community Preservation Act Exploratory Committee Discussion:

R. Forsythe introduces community members, Adrian Guerrero and Amanda Phillips, who will present information on the Community Preservation Act. Ms. Phillips states this act is article five on the warrant for the upcoming special town meeting. Discussion is had about the Community Preservation Act, which is a trust fund that is set up between a surcharge on people's home owners tax and can be up to 100% of those monies that is matched by the Massachusetts state government. The people of the town then vote on what the money will be used for. The funds may be used for open space, historic preservation, recreation and housing. The committee that will be created will discuss options for fund usage. Ms. Phillips believes the school committee will have some input in the recreation portion of the funds. Mr. Guerrero presents a breakdown of the funds and a few of the ways in which other towns have used such funds including a new outdoor track turf on the football fields, refurbishment of tennis courts. G. Vine discusses the town's passing over of these funds in prior years, which he believed to be a mistake as this is something that will help the town. Ms. Phillips explains the Community Preservation Act website, which will show what other towns are doing with the funds from this act. L. Murphy agrees this is a great opportunity for Winchendon that should not be passed on. Discussion is had regarding the possible uses of the funds for the town and how other nearby towns have utilized their CPA funds. L. Murphy asks who decides where the money goes. Ms. Phillips explains that the funds are divided up between the four areas: open space, historic preservation, recreation and housing. Ten percent goes to each of those areas every year. The CPA committee will receive applications for projects to fund, and those chosen will be brought to a town meeting for a vote. She explains that Article five is not voting on the CPA committee yet; it is just voting to get on the ballot. L. Murphy asks how one gets to be on the CPA committee. Mr. Guerrero explains there will be at least one member from each committee, then four additional openings. Ms. Phillips adds there will be five members: one to represent each section, then a floater member that will be appointed by places in town like Parks and Recreation. The other four members will be elected through a ballot. Mr. Guerrero states there is a town meeting on March 13 at which voting will take place for this. K. Kast-McBride asks what their vote does on this because she does not know that they necessarily need to vote. R. Forsythe clarifies that the vote will be to support or not support depending on the way the members cast their votes. L. Murphy moves to support Article 5, the Community Preservation Act on the March 13, 2023 Special Town Meeting Warrant. G. Vine seconds. Vote is unanimous.

G. Vine asks if there will be any outreach meetings for the public prior to March 13. Ms.

Phillips states there will be outreach meetings before the ballot votes. K. Kast-McBride expresses concern about the town's taxes going up. Ms. Phillips explains that is why the town has tax exemptions. The first \$100,000 does not count. If a person is considered low income, they will not pay this, nor will the elderly.

b. Special Town Meeting Warrant Article 3 - Capital Purchase Discussion:

R. Forsythe presents the Capital Purchase discussion. This is an item that will be on the Special Town Meeting Warrant, to see if the town will vote to transfer from free cash the sum of \$40,000 for broadcast equipment upgrades and staff support in town hall. Town Hall currently has no capabilities of live streaming public meetings due to broken equipment. In order for the town to move those funds to make the needed upgrades, this item needs to pass similar to the last agenda item. The vote will be to support or not support. G. Vine provides additional information about the town's communications committee putting this into the contract with Comcast. The money would be allocated eventually through the contract, so it will not be a burden on the taxpayers of the town at all. G. Vine moves to support article 3, Capital Purchase, on the March 13, 2023 Special Town Meeting Warrant. Seconded by L. Murphy. K. Kast-McBride asks for clarification on what the equipment will provide. G. Vine states that it is for live streaming, not specifically for Zoom, but also for improving the equipment already had. Vote is unanimous.

7. Superintendent's Report:

a. Budget Summary:

A. Babinski presents budget summary, including full MUNIS report, budget report and summary of transfer requests. Looking at the transfer requests, there is zero net impact. Each line item is going from salary to salary and from expense to expense, so there is no need for a vote. These transfers should get us to a place where we won't see any negatives on MUNIS based on the forecasting. She is working on some special education out of district tuition. Extraordinary relief claims are coming up in March; we have seen an increase in tuition for the out of district students for the school year. R. Forsythe asks if this accounts for all cleanup and if town hall is ready for this. A. Babinski states that she spoke with the town accountant, and she was very supportive of this being done ahead of time, and it will be a great opportunity to train the newly hired town accountant. T. King adds that this is something that is normally done toward the end of the year, but by doing it now, it helps forecast the monies that the district will have left and start thinking about end of year projects much earlier than we would have typically been able to do. G. Vine asks for clarification on the increase in tuition. Ms. Babinski states that it is an increase in students that are out of district placements. K. Kast-McBride mentions the upcoming 14% increase in tuition costs. Ms. Babinski explains the daily rate for a student that is going to an out of district school is increasing to 14% on July 1. This is an unprecedented increase. There has been a lot of advocacy by schools to the governor, the Senate to look at ways to help school districts because this increase will certainly be felt. The state is discussing ways to provide relief to the school districts, including increasing circuit breaker funds. Discussion is had about circuit breaker and how it normally works. R. Forsythe asks if in preparing the FY24 budget, will the district use a 14% increase as a likely placeholder. Ms. Babinski confirms. She explains the process the district has taken to evaluate how much this will cost after the increase. R. Forsythe asks if as a ballpark figure with the 14%, would it be 1.7 in total. Ms. Babinski confirms and also explains that additionally, the district has seen more students go out of district this year. The district has a huge need right now with students with mental health and special education needs, so special education will be a focus of the FY24

budget. T. King explains the increase the district saw in circuit breaker funds for FY23. L. Murphy asks if with some of the new programs the district has initiated this year, would it be able to keep some of those kids in district. T. King describes the SOA funds and a 10% increase. What the special education department is bringing forward is additional teachers, specifically for sub-separate programs to give us a broader reach for those most critical students in a more specific way than we currently are able to offer. One of the benefits of the reorganization plan is that we will have space for particular programs and possibly invite other school districts to participate, possibly to generate income in that way.

T. King states that at the March 2 meeting, the district will bring forward a preliminary FY24 budget.

b. District Reorganization Update:

Steering committees for the reorganization have been created, and two meetings have taken place for each committee. Committees have been created for a PreK-K group; Grades 1-4 and Middle School, with representatives from each grade level, special educators, allied artists (music, art, etc) and related services for special education, and then a community member and/or parent. Someone from Central Office sits and observes and takes notes. Each committee has come up with common agendas so the same items are discussed each week. A hard deadline for boxes being delivered is April 10 and the deadline for having boxes packed is the Monday following the end of the school year. Announcing staff placement and building layout is set to take place in mid-April.

c. Data Presentations: Toy Town Elementary, Murdock High School

Principal Anne Diaz presents Star Renaissance assessment data for Toy Town Elementary. Student growth percentiles at this point in the year in reading is the 75th percentile, and math student growth is at the 48th percentile. Toy Town also recently had its SoS walkthrough, and the focus was routines and habits of discussion. G. Vine asks for clarification on the data which shows some students are partially meeting expectations; how many are close to meeting expectations; how many are at the low end. Mrs. Diaz explains the way the district looks at reading comprehension. At the beginning of the year, the data showed Toy Town had 60 students that were not meeting expectations. Through interventions over the year, that number has been reduced to 9%. R. Forsythe asks how the student population changed from the beginning of the year to mid year. Mrs. Diaz reports that they have acquired some students, have not lost any. Discussion is had about the supplemental math program. The manner in which they determine what students will be using it is by looking at whether they struggled with a standard that has already been tested. T. King adds that the Freckle and V-math were intentional as the district wanted to use assessments to drive instruction.

Principal, Mary Jane Rickson gives data presentation for Murdock High School, which uses fall as benchmark testing and then looks at midyear. High school students have made significant gains in meeting expectations. Students have made good progress with the new math curriculum, and teachers seem to be very pleased to see what is happening as well. G. Vine states that it appears there is an increase in students not meeting expectations, and that it looks like most of them came from the meeting expectations group. Mrs. Rickson states that the high school is looking at that now, and as students just took this assessment the week before, staff is still looking at where the deficiencies are student by student and evaluating what is needed...after school help or small group work or other supports.

In English, the high school is working with SRST, and writing has been a bigger focus in the English department. It has been discussed to expand writing opportunities across high school curriculum. Overall grade 10 has had gains across the board; students not meeting expectations are down to 14%. IM Math has done a great job of getting the high school students up and running, but SRSD did not start until January, so Mrs. Rickson hopes to see more progress toward the end of the year. Mrs. Diaz adds that SRSD stands for Self Regulated Writing Programs so the students learn how to work backwards, getting a high quality piece of literature they have to determine what the topic is for those supporting details, then figure out how to respond to a question. Discussion is had about AI and how it may seem scary, but it could be embraced as a tool to keep students engaged and interested. Mrs. Rickson states she will return with her reading results in a few weeks.

Motion is made by G. Vine to take five minute recess. Seconded by L. Murphy. Vote is unanimous. Recess is taken for five minutes.

Meeting reconvenes at 7:40pm.

d. Superintendent's Formative Evaluation Presentation:

T. King invites A. Dellasanta to discuss her recent college acceptance. She has committed to Smith College in Northampton to study political science, with 90% of her tuition being covered. Congratulations are offered all around.

T. King begins his formative evaluation presentation by discussing his goals and referencing the district improvement plan which was presented earlier in the year. One of the district's goals was around the math initiative; one was around ELA work, and a third was around social emotional learning. Integrated in those are things about progress monitoring and data work. The math curriculum council created a vision statement, and the action items on that statement have been completed. Last year, the district budgeted to hire a PreK through 5 math coach to prepare for the new math curriculum. This was done, and the coach has done an incredible job. A staff survey will be sent out to obtain feedback on how they have received support from the district math coach. K. Kast-McBride asks when this survey will go out. T. King replies it is being worked on and should be completed within the next couple of weeks. R. Forsythe asks if the district is measuring success in the complete aggregate broken down by school and all grades, all math and reading. T. King confirms and goes on to discuss Renaissance and action items and measurable goals that have and will be completed.

District priority two was strengthening literacy instruction. One objective was to conduct a formal PreK to 12 ELA/Text/Materials adoption process, including working with a consultant and reflecting on some statewide deficiencies. The district came to the conclusion that it was too early to adopt an ELA curriculum; that what was needed was to back up and deliver standards at a higher level. SRSD was adopted to bring students' writing up to speed. R. Forsythe asks for clarification on whether pushing the ELA curriculum out one year means that it will be in a different fiscal year. T. King states that the district will still have funding for it. Discussion is had regarding the action items the district is taking with regard to ELA curriculum and skills improvement.

District priority three was around social emotional. Some action items under this category

included establishing a relationship with outside vendor, CareSolace, as well as deeper training for staff to integrate trauma-informed care into the life and culture of the school.

L. Murphy congratulates Mr. King for all the work done with the leadership team and the staff. Budgeting has been outstanding and the committee finally gets reports it understands. He recognizes that everything the district does is data driven. Communication has improved, and he does a good job of collaborating with the community. R. Forsythe comments that one of the most important things the committee does is evaluate the Superintendent, and the information provided by T. King in the formative way helps and will take center stage at the end of the year during the formal evaluation. Positive growth remains an issue in this district, but he is glad the district improvement plan remains at the core of the plans the district has implemented. K. Kast-McBride states that one thing she felt was missing from the presentation was support for an overall communication goal, and she would like to see the district move forward with that. She feels the Superintendent does a great job overall and that her job is to hold him accountable, and she takes that very seriously. Her major concern is that no matter what the district does with the reorganization, we focus not just on the youngest children but all of them all the way through 12th grade. T. King responds that one of his first initiatives when he came to the district as MHS principal was to create programming at the secondary level that keeps our students and strives to recruit students. He feels that some of the most important things we have done with the trust money received from Robinson-Broadhurst and Murdock Trust is around enrichment activities for students at the secondary level. He also hopes to celebrate more of the things the district does at the high school that most assume families just know about.

## **8. Subcommittee Reports:**

### **a. Joint Committee on Cost/Revenue Sharing:**

T. King provides updates on the Joint Committee for Cost/Revenue Sharing with the town. The committee includes two members from the Board of Selectmen, one member from Fin Comm and the Town Manager, in addition to G. Vine and Superintendent King. Three meetings have taken place to date, and during the third meeting the senator and reps were in attendance and had a conversation about the CAC and the Sunshine Cafe, followed by discussion around Chapter 70 and net school spending. There will be another year where the school budget is very high and probably outweighs the town side. There is a lot of discussion about how that relates to how the town as a community should fund education. We currently fund right at 100% of net school spending, meaning for all intents and purposes, what the state says the town should contribute is what they contribute. We should settle on a percentage over net school spending. The average across the state is around 120%. We should target something, not necessarily 20% above net school spending, but the goal of the committee is to discuss a target and a plan on how to get there. Another discussion of the committee is regarding how to share a Facilities Director across the town and schools and looking at efficiencies there. Representative Slotnick spoke very eloquently about the SOA and how it affects towns. R. Forsythe adds that the school committee will likely need to drive the conversation regarding the proposal to set a floor above 105%. Additional discussion is had regarding other districts in the area and what their funding above net school spending is.

### **b. Calendar Committee:**

L. Murphy states the calendar is almost ready to go and should be ready for a vote at the next school committee meeting.

R. Forsythe gives additional updates. The policy subcommittee, which will meet on March 17. The Capital Planning subcommittee has been doing work on the capital needs for the town, and

in a recent agreement, the park lot renovation for the middle and high school was included in a five year plan.

**9. New Business:**

a. MASC Conference Update:

K. Kast-McBride moves to table to the March 16 meeting. Seconded by A. Dellasanta. Vote is unanimous.

**10. Old Business: None**

**11. Future Agenda Items:**

- a. MASC Conference Review
- b. ELA Curriculum Update
- c. Early Learning Center Update
- d. Data Presentations - Renaissance Scores
- e. Calendar Vote
- f. FY24 Budget
- g. The federal complaint about vocational and technical admission standards for the VOC/Tech schools - possibly invitation to the Monty Tech Representative

**12. Adjournment:**

Motion to adjourn by L. Murphy. Seconded by K. Kast-McBride. L. Murphy - Y; K. Kast-McBride - Y; Chair - N, for the purposes of discussion. Vote passes. Meeting adjourned.

Respectfully Submitted: Liz Latoria

Liz Latoria, Executive Assistant to the Superintendent

Documents Attached: None