

**FLEMINGTON-RARITAN REGIONAL BOARD OF EDUCATION
BUDGET WORK SESSION/REGULAR MEETING
MARCH 15, 2010
MINUTES**

The regular session of the Flemington-Raritan Regional Board of Education was called to order in conformance with the "Sunshine Law" by Julie Bell at 7:03 p.m. in the theatre of the J. P. Case Middle School.

Members Present

Michael Bonieski
Janine Foreman
Laurie Markowski
Christopher Murdock
Julie Bell

Members Absent

Dennis Copeland
Patrick Larmore
Doris McGivney
Joseph Zarish

NON-INSTRUCTIONAL

On motion of Ms. Markowski, seconded by Ms. McGivney, approval was given to authorize the Business Administrator/Board Secretary to advertise and accept bids for the following items:

- Sewer line replacement at Reading-Fleming Intermediate School.
- Upgrade heating controls at Francis A. Desmares School.
- Fire Inspection, Testing and Maintenance of the Fire Alarm/Detection Systems, Fire Sprinkler Systems and Portable Fire Extinguishers in the Flemington-Raritan Regional School District.

Aye:	Dr. Bonieski	Dr. Copeland	Nay:	0	Abstain:	0
	Ms. Foreman	Mr. Larmore				
	Ms. Markowski	Ms. McGivney				
	Dr. Murdock	Mr. Zarish				
	Ms. Bell					

CITIZENS ADDRESS THE BOARD

No citizens addressed the Board.

CORRESPONDENCE

Mr. Nolan and several Board members received email from Mr. Tonge regarding feedback and input on the budget.

OLD BUSINESS

No old business was discussed

NEW BUSINESS

Ms. Bell advised the public and the Board of Education that a meeting of the Board was needed on March 18, 2010 at 6:00 p.m. in Room D111 at J. P. Case Middle School to discuss the Superintendent's evaluation process.

BUDGET WORK SESSION

Mr. Nolan gave a power point presentation regarding the 2010-2011 district preliminary budget.

The meeting was opened to questions from the Board.

Dr. Copeland questioned slide 13 regarding reducing Library Clerks to half time. He asked if they still qualified for benefits. Mr. Nolan responded they would not receive benefits. Dr. Copeland also asked for clarification of the types of teachers being reduced at RFIS. Mr. Nolan said the reduction is of two music teachers and one PE teacher.

Dr. Bonieski wanted to know when we might expect definitive numbers on healthcare costs for 2010-2011. Mr. Nolan said those numbers will not come in until late April or May.

Dr. Copeland remarked on the class sizes rising in K-4 in all schools except Francis A. Desmares. He asked why there is an anticipated decrease in class size in Francis A. Desmares kindergarten to first grade. Mr. Nolan said he is anticipating a withdrawal.

Mr. Zarish asked about slide 5, the increased projection for health benefits. He wanted to know where that came from. Ms. Hope replied that we were advised by the broker to increase the medical line from 12% to 16%.

Ms. Markowski asked if the class sizes reflected on slide 18 included the reductions in staff from slide 13. Mr. Nolan said yes they do. Ms. Markowski remarked that she is a little nervous about these enrollment numbers.

Ms. McGivney asked if the state aid is better than anticipated, will the J. P. Case team still be eliminated. Mr. Nolan responded that if more money is available all the reductions will be looked at. Ms. McGivney is concerned because once a job is lost it is very hard to get it back. Mr. Nolan said he feels we have met our obligation to keep class sizes low.

Mr. Zarish asked how a whole team can be eliminated. Mr. Nolan explained the new distribution of classes.

Ms. Foreman inquired if the projected numbers on slide 6 for activity fees and facility use are conservative. Mr. Nolan said yes they are conservative and are based on some research.

Mr. Larmore also asked about slide 6. Mr. Nolan said that he believes we can run a good program for a minimal fee. Mr. Larmore asked if the fee would be flat for all activities with a maximum per family or would they pay by club. Mr. Nolan said they would charge something like fifty dollars per sport or club. He noted that the plan is not yet final. They are working on it.

Dr. Bonieski asked if the projected revenue at J. P. Case would bring in less than 25% of the cost. Mr. Nolan said yes.

Dr. Murdock asked why, compared to other schools, there is a larger class size rise at Robert Hunter on slide 16. Mr. Nolan said that the changes are consistent over the grade levels and no comparison was done school to school. Class sizes are smaller with the younger students.

Ms. Bell said that she believes the classrooms are smaller at Robert Hunter. She wanted to know if these class sizes will fit in those classrooms. Mr. Nolan replied that this should only be an issue with grade four and he will check.

Dr. Murdock asked Mr. Nolan to check grade three as well.

Ms. McGivney asked if the state has guidelines regarding class size and student numbers. Mr. Nolan said he will check.

Dr. Bonieski asked if Central Office approves sub-standard classrooms. Ms. Bell expressed her concern about the cafeteria and common spaces being large enough. Mr. Nolan said he will have numbers next week.

CITIZENS ADDRESS THE BOARD

Judy St. Angel, Raritan Township, said she is concerned about the safety of the children in her Francis A Desmares neighborhood who will now be walkers at Reading Fleming Intermediate. She considers the neighborhood not safe for walking and would like to see the busing in this area brought back.

Marie Corfield, Raritan Township and teacher, disagreed with the class size numbers listed for Robert Hunter across the board. She said the class size increases with push-ins for art and music. She believes that two of the fourth grades could have as many as 26 children and one of the third grade classes could have 25. She is also concerned about the flurry of kindergarten and first grade enrollments over the summer.

Phil Sorg, Raritan Township, asked why most of the cuts on slide 13 are at the school level. He wants to see more cuts at central office. Mr. Nolan responded that the teachers are out front and do a great job but the district also needs the behind the scenes workers to generate reports, follow grants and make sure all state and federal mandates are followed. He remarked that the district needs these people to account for every penny spent and this staff often helps to save the district money. Mr. Sorg asked if central office could be streamlined more.

Mr. Nolan responded that he will look at class sizes again and he mentioned that central office has been cut several times in the last four years so there are fewer cuts to be made.

Deb Luccaro, Raritan Township and librarian, remarked that on slide six, the revenue generation numbers are modest. She asked when the district will know more about revenue. Mr. Nolan remarked that the district will know more on Wednesday about state aid reductions. Ms Luccaro asked when we will have a better idea of the actual facility use revenue. Mr. Nolan said that those numbers will come in over the summer. Ms. Luccaro said she has a copy of the two page Library Clerk job description if the board would like to see it. She said that Library Clerks work a fulltime, valuable job. She also feels that the class size projections for Francis A. Desmares are not realistic. Librarians see full classes with push-ins and they don't have aides to help.

Anna Fallon, Raritan Township, asked if the class sizes projected reflect the students that may be lost to the charter school. Mr. Nolan responded that they don't. Ms. Fallon asked why busing cannot be consolidated. She has followed several buses through her neighborhood that carried ten children each. She said she owns a small business and understands the high cost of health benefits. She would like the district to look into the option of increasing the deductibles on the staff health coverage so that we don't lose the teachers.

Joanne Elacqua, Raritan Township, remarked that the balance left on Slide 14 (\$80,000.00) seems low. With a budget this size she is concerned about leaving less than a 1% margin of error when the current reserve is being used to reduce the budget. Ms. Hope responded that the budget process is not done. The district will know more on Wednesday. The tighter the budget the smaller the margin of error gets. Ms. Elacqua asked what will happen if we go over. Ms. Hope responded that the numbers will change. The district is not allowed to have any excess in the budget. Ms. Elacqua asked if slide 13 included health benefits. Mr. Nolan said yes it does.

Kevin Harrigan, Raritan Township, said that the district did a job analysis of the J. P. Case Vice Principal position. He wanted to know if that same process could be used to evaluate all the positions in central office. Mr. Nolan responded that the Vice Principal position at J. P. Case has been changed to better reflect the needs of the school. He will be continuing the evaluation of the administration in central office over the summer for possible cuts next year.

Jim O'Donnell, Raritan Township, said that the board mentioned a tax increase last week. He said he will not vote yes for a budget that includes a tax increase. Mr. O'Donnell also remarked about the lack of children on the buses. Most of the children do not ride and the Robert Hunter School is full of parent cars every morning. He asked if there is some way to do the busing more efficiently. Ms. Bell responded that they are looking at the bus situation. Mr. O'Donnell said that the biggest part of the budget (80%) is salaries and benefits but the tax payers have no say in those negotiations. He would like to see no pay increase this year and the employees should pay toward their health benefits.

Hildred Sullivan, Raritan Township and librarian, asked the board to reflect on the phrase "provide a sound foundation" in the district mission statement. She believes that the library is the cornerstone. As a Librarian she teaches 27 library classes and the additional G & T classes and is left with forty minutes a week to take care of the library. Without a library clerk it cannot be done. She also feels that with push-ins the class sizes reflected in the power point presentation are bigger than listed.

Gary Marconi, Raritan Township, referring to slide 5, wanted to know the total increase in the cost of health benefits. Ms. Hope responded that it is one million dollars. Mr. Marconi said that in this financial environment it is not unfair to expect teachers to pay toward their health benefits. He recommended a freeze in salaries and payment toward employee's health benefits. Mr. Marconi asked when negotiations begin. Dr. Copeland responded that the administrators took a pay freeze this year. He also wanted to clarify for a previous resident that the budget includes a 4% tax levy. This budget calculated at a 0% tax levy, would show a 4.3 million dollar deficit.

Bruce Davidson, Raritan Township, said he feels the district did a good job on these cuts. He agrees that keeping class sizes small, especially in the lower grades, is the right thing to do. He agrees that administration is a favorite target for cuts

because what they do is not seen by the public. He suggested a zero-based method to evaluate the administrators. Mr. Davidson said to look at what would happen if they were not there. We need to help people see why the district needs them.

Janine McGill, Flemington Borough, asked what impact the charter school has on the budget. Mr. Nolan responded that the information is mixed. He has a list of 15 names and a roster of 32 but when the district tried to talk to the parents in an exit poll, some of them were surprised they were on the list.

Scott Totten, music teacher, asked for details regarding the reductions in elementary art and music. Mr. Nolan responded that they could reduce all the teachers to 80% or reduce one art and one music teacher to 60%. Mr. Totten said that he has 30 full classes a week now and he comes in at 7:30 a.m. and leaves at 5:00 p.m. He believes music and art are needed in the schools. Mr. Nolan agrees that music and art are needed. He wants to work with the Principals to be sure that teachers are teaching full schedules.

Mark Legato, Raritan Township, asked if the district did an administrative stress test. Teachers are needed and the district needs to cut administration. He said the district needs to look at each position and see if it is really needed. He also remarked that he believes the class sizes will be bigger than projected. Mr. Nolan responded that push-ins come into PE, music and art, not the core classes. The class size numbers came from the Principals and are accurate. Mr. Legato asked if the district asked the teachers. Mr. Nolan said that some push-ins bring teacher's aides into the classroom with them and that makes the student /teacher ratio go down.

Karin Alexanderson, Raritan Township and teacher, remarked that the holes in the art and music schedule are not the teacher's fault. These teachers would love to add kindergarten to the schedule. She said that the district looked at the value of the J. P. Case Vice Principal position and she would like the board to evaluate the art and music teachers the same way. These programs are needed. Mr. Nolan responded that he values all that the teachers do but the district needed to address inefficiencies to help balance the budget. Ms. Alexanderson said she works through lunch and her schedule was reduced by the Principals not by her request.

Stuart Miller, Raritan Township, asked why there are only \$50,000.00 in cuts in central office and hundreds of thousands in cuts in teachers. Mr. Nolan explained that most of the cuts needed at central office were done in the last 4 years.

Joanne Elacqua, Raritan Township, asked what cuts have been made in administration in the last few years. Mr. Nolan listed the decrease of some Vice Principals from 12 to 10 month and the 1.5 secretary positions lost in the Business Office. Ms. Hope said that the district is below average in the state for the number of people employed in the business office.

Deb Luccaro, Raritan Township and Librarian, said she will distribute the Library Clerk job description to the board at the end of the meeting. She also said that she considers the health benefit package to be part of her salary.

Linda Pizzico, Raritan Township, said that the children don't brag about the administrators, they brag about their teachers. She encouraged the board to take another look at administration for cuts. She also asked what grade level team is being lost at J. P. Case and are they non-tenured teachers. Mr. Nolan responded that they will be non-tenured teachers and gave a brief explanation. Ms. Pizzico asked about sister teams and Mr. Nolan explained that it is cross grouping to lower class size. Ms. Pizzico also asked about retiree breakage.

Liz Rugg, Raritan Township, asked if the district has compared the teams from Reading-Fleming Intermediate and J. P. Case. Mr. Nolan responded that it is difficult to compare the two schools because of J. P. Case block scheduling

Anna Fallon, Raritan Township, said that as a taxpayer she believes everyone in the district should contribute toward their health benefits. She believes this should be negotiated into the employee contract or there will be a public outcry.

ADJOURN

On motion of Ms. McGivney, seconded by Mr. Larmore, the meeting was adjourned, unanimously viva voce, at 8:51 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Stephanie Hope

Upcoming Board Meetings – J. P. Case Middle School

March 15 - Budget Work Session/Regular Meeting

March 22 - Budget Work Session/Regular Meeting

March 29 - Budget Work Session/Regular Meeting

 QSAC Resolution

April 12 - Budget Work Session/Regular Meeting

April 20 - School Elections