

JAY/WESTFIELD JOINT SCHOOL BOARD MEETING
Tuesday, September 8, 2015 at 6:00 P.M.
AT THE JAY/WESTFIELD SCHOOL

Board Members in attendance: Sally Rivard, Kevin Amyot, Myra Alix (by phone)
Loren Petzoldt (by phone)

Administration/School Personnel in attendance: Kristy Ellis, Principal; John Castle, Superintendent; Paul LeGrand, Custodian; Rebecca Velazquez, Recording Secretary

Citizens in Attendance: Mark Simon, Simon's Water Operation; Zachary Clark, Rugianno's Engineering

I. At 6:20 pm the J/W School Board meeting was brought to order by Sally Rivard.

II. Kevin Amyot moved to approve the Minutes of August 11, 2015. Sally Rivard seconded the motion, and the vote carried.

III. Options for Improving Water Quality

Information:

Zachary Clark from Rugianno's Engineering and Mark Simon of Simon's Water Supply gave their impressions and recommendations:

A. Impressions:

1. Mark, who has worked with Jay/Westfield's system in the past, feels that there should be no chloroform reading in chlorinated water. He expressed skepticism about the lab. He also noted, though, that the reservoir has been the hot hit 4 or 5 times and that one solution may be to use well trawls instead. Zach added that a fiberglass tank would be ideal, and that the concrete one currently in use raises flags.

2. Zach felt that replacing the current system with a UV filtration system would not guarantee clean reads. To make such a guarantee, he would have to know exactly what is causing the contamination within the current system.

3. Zach explained that pursuing a switch to UV would require a compatibility test – at a cost of \$200. Any plumbing work necessary for compatibility would be an extra cost. The state requires two units, as opposed to the one unit the Board had factored into budgetary consideration. With the UV filtration, the old system will remain available, as the state requires a back-up chlorination system.

4. Zach and Mark both felt that the water is sitting in the tank too long. The tank holds 4500 gallons and the schools uses approximately 500 per day. This means that water is held for around 9 days.

B. Recommendations:

1. Testing

Zach recommended a 2 month period of in-house testing, both at the source and at two points within the building. Ideally, these points would be ends of the distribution line, but without a blueprint, choosing those dead-ends would be a shot in the dark. This testing would serve to gather more information and further a process of elimination. Mark Simon could perform those tests in addition to his

monthly ones. He verified that these tests could be called “Special” or “Routine” so that any positive reads do not trigger a State response.

2. Decreasing Storage and Increasing Pump Frequency

Zach suggested leaving the valves open and a sink at the end of the distribution line running for that 2 month period, to increase the frequency of pumping and guarantee water moves through the system more quickly. He suggested flushing any toilet that is used infrequently.

Mark had a different approach. He suggested lowering the electrodes in the tank in order to increase the frequency of pumping and manually reducing the volume of water held in the tank. He said that it would be a simple process. He guessed that 1500 gallons would be the minimum because of the booster pump. The goal would be for there to be only 3 days of holding time and 300 gallons of water between the shut on and shut off points.

Discussion:

All expressed regret that the firm responsible for installation is no longer in business, making the blueprints unattainable.

Kevin Amyot reiterated the Board’s consensus that a move away from chlorination would be ideal, as they would prefer the children not be drinking heavily chlorinated water. However, the additional costs – the 2nd unit and plumbing fees – will need to be considered. Zach noted that chlorination itself is not harmful and that getting to a consistently low residual reading may lessen the desire for UV. The Board will keep the bottles provided for UV compatibility testing on hand for consideration at the end of the 2 month testing.

Kevin Amyot expressed concern that such frequent testing may cause contamination. Mark Simon showed photos of the sampling spots and explained the process of collecting. It will remain clean.

Paul LeGrand said that he can help Mark make the adjustments to the tank to decrease storage. He also said that he will not add any extra chlorine or shock the system at all during testing, as to not affect results.

Action:

Kevin Amyot motioned to move forward with a two-month testing period, during which Simon’s will test two spots weekly. The source will be Spot #1 each week and Spot #2 will alternate between the sink in the janitor’s closet and a second “dead-end” spot to be determined. The extra testing will cost \$300 monthly, \$100 per additional week. Sally Rivard seconded the motion. Vote carried.

Kevin Amyot motioned to approve the lowering of electrodes and reduction of storage volume in the holding tank. This will be carried out, free of charge, by Simon’s with the help of Paul LeGrand. Sally Rivard seconded the motion. Vote carried.

IV. Financial Reports:

Action:

No action, as the August 2015 Financial Statement was not presented.

Information:

Kevin Amyot reported that the 2013 Audit for Westfield has just arrived. There was general dismay at the backlog at Besaw & Associates.

V. Principal’s Report:

A. Demographics

Information:

Enrollment is slightly better than expected, but still declining. There will be 92 bodies in PreK – 6. The increase of 10 students in K-6 is a pleasant surprise. The fact that 19 6th graders will be graduating out is a major concern. Of the 15 students enrolled in PreK, only 1 is not Jay/Westfield.

Discussion:

The PreK numbers are a good indicator of future K-6 students. Kristy reported that the PreK program is off to a great start, thanks in large part to Julie Ste-Marie's work throughout the summer. She actively enrolled students, while setting up the classroom and taking classes toward her certification.

B. SBAC Results

Information:

Kristy Ellis has not delved very deeply into the results, but math scores were incredibly strong. The 6th graders Reading & Writing was a little below the state average. Kristy suspects this has more to do with the Writing portion.

C. Facilities

Information:

Kristy reported that the new door may require a contractor for installation. Kristy informed the Board that she would like to purchase a new freezer. The old freezer is 22 years old and runs on Freon. Kevin Kincaid came to look at it because it is running hot and constantly. She estimated the cost at or under \$2500, including installation, shipping and handling.

D. Annual Action Plan

Kristy presented the Board with a bare-bones Action Plan that simply meets the requirements needed to receive Federal funds. A forthcoming Action Plan will delve deeper into communicating the mission of the school to the community. She would like John Castle and others to help with the articulation.

E. Forthcoming Figures for Next Meeting's principal's report:

1. Free & Reduced Lunch
2. English Language Learners
3. Percentage of Special Education Students

VI. Superintendent's Report:

A. General Update

Information:

John Castle was very happy with the 2015 Convocation, citing its focus on teacher leadership and the appropriateness of it being teacher-led itself. He feels strongly that the teacher leadership in the NCSU is really being embraced and that the educators are stepping up. John thanks Kevin Amyot for attending the last SU meeting and expressed disappointment in the presentation by Secretary of Education Rebecca Holcombe. He appreciated her traveling to speak to the SU, but felt that she did not tailor her presentation to the specific community. Nor did she take the opportunity to get to know this SU. The exchange was not as meaningful as he had hoped.

B. Policy Committee Update

Information:

Support staff Policies and Agreements across the SU are being looked at. Currently, there are wide ranging differences across the districts, which makes for staggering inequity. As examples, John noted the differences in Probationary Status as 40 days, 60 days, 60 calendar, without benefits until 60 days, etc. He would like

the Board to know that the Policy Committee respects the autonomy of local schools and will not create one single Policy. Instead, they will come up with a more common approach and recommendations that will help close gaps and promote equity. This may take the form of a Model Policy.

C. Act 46 Overview and Considerations

Information:

1. Cost Containment Provisions

The FY2017 Budgets will be greatly affected by these provisions, that establish thresholds for increases in Education Spending Per Equalized Pupil. The downward pressure on spending would likely put Jay's threshold at 2.1% and Westfield's at 1.69%. Unfortunately, the official equalized pupil numbers do not come in until the first week of December. Therefore, budgets will mostly be created using projections. John believes that the Jay/Westfield equalized pupil count will come down (the loss will be capped at 3.5% no matter what because of hold harmless). He urged the Board to be austere during the budget process. Each dollar spent above the threshold results in a 2nd dollar to Montpelier, a penalty fee. This makes even a 1% increase, if over the threshold, fiscally impossible. The thresholds are in place for 2 years. He stressed the importance of this fact and suggested any surplus money from this year be set aside as a Tax Stabilization Fund. That would have to be presented as an Article on Town Meeting day in both Jay and Westfield.

2. Special Education Consolidation

All Special Educators will now be employees of the Supervisory Union, according to the Special Ed Consolidation rules. John does not yet know how the cost of Special Education in the Jay/Westfield budget will be assessed. Possibilities are a direct cost for services in the school, a blended rate across schools or an average rate according to equalized pupil numbers (not Special Ed student numbers). Under a blended rate, Jay/Westfield will save money with its current needs.

3. Small Schools Grant

This becomes subjective in FY2019. The state will come up with definitive criteria and recommendations on who gets the grant. If lost, it would account for about 7-8% of revenue stripped from the Jay/Westfield budget. The state is clearly stating that it does not want to subsidize small schools.

4. Supervisory Union Tax Incentives

With over 1100 students, the NCSU can remain an SU. The State's preferred governance structure would be to reorganize into a Supervisory District. The State is incentivizing this by offering a \$0.10 decrease in the Homestead Property Tax rate to member towns of each newly formed Supervisory District. John presented a chart that projected the savings to each town according to these incentives. He warned that the State would have to raise taxes in order to fund these incentives. Therefore, \$0.10 may actually look like \$0.08 for the schools who participate and a rate increase for those who don't.

The NCSU will not meet the deadline of eligibility for this first round of incentives, as the deadline for all necessary "yes" votes is July 2016. In order to create a Supervisory District, all schools would have to educate their students from PK – 12 within the District. This would rid a school of the option of choice to tuition to Lake Region, for example. All schools with the District would have to have the same governance structure (i.e. PK/K – 6, tuition 7-12).

5. Potential Jay/Westfield Union District

The State would like each SU or Education District to be made up of “the fewest number of districts practicable” by creating Unified Union Districts. Jay and Westfield could choose to do this, giving up their status as two separate districts. The advantage would be a flattening of the tax rate. In Jay/Westfield’s case, this would most likely benefit Jay, whose tax rate has been higher than Westfield’s. A second benefit would be that a higher population (Jay and Westfield combined) would make the per pupil cost less variable. The schools within a Unified Union District must have the same structure (i.e. operate PK/K – 8; tuitions 7-12). Westfield would have to become a member of NCJHS for this merge to happen.

Discussion:

John Castle feels that there is a strong chance Act 46 will be challenged. Troy and other districts in the SU are expressing interest in a lawsuit claiming that this law disenfranchises poor communities. Unfortunately, there has to be proof – meaning some damage needs to be done – before the law can be challenged. John thinks that there is a different formula that can be used, one that would rate poverty higher. The SU will be taking a stand for equalized students from poverty to be worth more.

All agreed that Act 46 is clearly a mechanism to consolidate schools and, as a result, hurt poor, rural districts. The Board and John Castle all agreed that some sort of public forum should be held to really explain Act 46 to the public. The tax break that may result for Jay/Westfield would look good to most taxpayers. However, all felt it was important to stress that the incentives are short lived and the trade-off would be for all decisions to be made by a centralized bureaucracy.

VII. Other Business:

A. Adoption of Policies tabled until next meeting.

VIII. Future Agenda Items/Date for Next Board Meeting:

The Board confirmed Tuesday, October 13, 2015 as the date of their next Board Meeting.

The Westfield Board would like to warn a Westfield Board Meeting, to discuss NCJHS membership, directly following the Jay/Westfield School Board Meeting on Tuesday, October 13, 2015.

Future Agenda Items:

1. Discuss a future community forum centered on Act 46.
2. Approve the August 2015 Financial Statement
3. Adoption of Policies D.8, D.11 and E.26

IX. Executive Session: Sally Rivard moved to enter executive session at 9:02pm to discuss student discipline and invited Kristy Ellis and John Castle to stay. Kevin Amyot seconded the motion, and the vote carried. Sally Rivard moved to exit executive session at 9:30pm. Kevin Amyot seconded the motion and the vote carried. The discussion did not result in the need for any Board motions.

XI. Adjourn : Kevin Amyot motioned to adjourn the meeting at 9:35pm. Sally Rivard seconded the motion. Vote carried.

Meetings:

NCSU Policy Committee

Day

Thursday

Date

September 17

Time

5:30 p.m.

Location

NCCC, Room 316

NCSU Full Board
Jay/Westfield Board

Thursday September 17 6:30 p.m.
Tuesday October 13 6:00 p.m.

NCCC, Room 380
Jay/Westfield School

Respectfully submitted,

Rebecca Velazquez
Recording Secretary