

Easton School District No. 28
Meeting of the Board of Directors
May 14, 2019

Jennie Marie Giovenale-Austin Library

Call to Order: The meeting was called to order by Vice-Chair Chris Helgeson at 6:32.

Attendance: Amy Grove, John Jensen, Chris Helgeson, Jen Phillips

Staff: Patrick Dehuff, Dawn Bechtholdt, Steve Jensen, Sagrario Jimenez

Board Members Absent: Lynn Lopez

Guests: Terry Smith, Cathy Hammerberg, April Simonsen, Karl Hinz, Maria Ramsey, Keely Ramsey, Rachel Henderson, Dana and Phillip Meehan, Keri Kaestner

Approve Agenda: John Jensen made a motion to approve tonight's agenda. Amy Grove seconded the motion and the motion carried.

Board Minutes: Jen Phillips made a motion to approve the minutes. John Jensen seconded the motion and the motion carried.

Communication to the Board: None

Public Comment: Public comments were made regarding the preschool program. Please see comments below in section on budget cuts.

Board Business:

Bus Purchase: At our previous board meeting, Steve Jensen, Transportation and Maintenance Supervisor, shared his concern that the small bus that serves our students in the Lake Kachess and Snoqualmie Pass area is projected to be over capacity in the upcoming school year. After discussion, the Board of Directors requested a firm bus quote from Steve Jensen and a financial analysis of purchasing the bus from Superintendent Dehuff.

To purchase a larger bus that has a maximum capacity of 48 students, with a sharp turning which is helpful during the winter months transporting students to Snoqualmie Pass, the quote that Steven Jensen provided to the board is \$109,699.03 Superintendent Dehuff explained the finances of the bus, if approved by the board. We currently have \$52,000 in our transportation vehicle fund that can be utilized to purchase a new bus. We can borrow the remaining amount of \$57,699 at favorable interest rates through a state pooling for municipalities in good financial standing. The interest rate will be determined at the time that the loan proceeds are requested. Currently, the current interest rate for a ten-year loan is 2.04 percent. Superintendent Dehuff submitted the current depreciation schedule for its current buses and a projection of the depreciation payments for the new bus, if the board decides to approve the purchase. The amount of future revenue from the state for depreciation will cover the loan payments for the

new bus and still allow us to put some away. Therefore, it is not a financial risk for the district to purchase a new bus since the payment will be covered by future depreciation payments from the state that are specifically meant for bus purchases. The Board of Directors discussed the need for a new bus, considering that our current small bus that transports students to Lake Kachess and Snoqualmie Pass will be overloaded, and the ability for the district to secure a low interest loan that will be covered by future depreciation payments so there will not be an impact to our general fund. Jen Phillips made a motion to approve the purchase of the school bus. Amy Grove seconded the motion and the motion carried.

Budget Cuts:

Superintendent Dehuff discussed the need for budget cuts. Easton School District has the lowest local school tax rate in Kittitas County and one of the lowest in the State. Unfortunately, there were two significant impacts to Easton School with the legislative fix for the McCleary lawsuit, which was intended to provide more support for public education. One was a cap on local levy funds that are based on the amount per \$1,000 of assessed valuation or an amount based on student population, whichever is less. This creates a hardship for Easton School because our school is small. Originally, the cap was \$1.50 per thousand of assessed valuation. There were numerous school districts that lobbied for the cap to be increased and the legislature raised the cap to \$2.50 per thousand of assessed valuation. However, we were already well under the cap because Easton School has been less than \$1.00 per thousand of assessed valuation. However, due to our small size, our school is being penalized by losing approximately ½ of our local levy funds (because the small size) even though we have such a low tax rate. The other issue is that the mix factor for funding teachers was eliminated. Previously, revenue was adjusted (either up or down) based on the amount of teaching experience and advanced degrees that a teacher has. However, this was eliminated which adversely impacted schools such as Easton School that have teachers that are higher on the salary schedule due to years of experience and/or advanced degrees.

Sagrario Jimenez, Business Manager for Easton School District estimates a budget shortfall of \$165,000 for this school year and a budget shortfall of \$96,000 for the upcoming 2019-20 school year. Superintendent Dehuff has identified cuts to three programs (preschool program, summer school program, and culinary arts class) that would save approximately \$40,000. Superintendent Dehuff has submitted the required “reduction in force” letters to those staff who would be affected by these proposed cuts.

Cathy Hammerberg: Cathy discussed the importance of keeping a preschool program and the difference that it makes for early learners in preparation for kindergarten. Cathy mentioned the improvement of test scores in future years if an emphasis is placed on early learning. Cathy encouraged the Board of Directors to keep the program and consider options, rather than eliminate the program. Cathy said that once the program is eliminated, it would be difficult to bring back and it would be better to consider options to make it more cost effective instead of eliminating it.

Keri Kaestner: Keri shared her concern that a decision to cut the preschool program would be late notice and make it difficult for her to find a preschool program for her child. Keri also said

that she loves Easton School but her decision (and other parents as well) to have her children attend Easton School (instead of Cle Elum-Roslyn) would likely depend on whether they started here in the preschool program.

Rachel Henderson: Rachel mentioned that there is a big need for preschool in Kittitas County and that Thorp School District charges \$200 monthly per student (4 day a week program).

Phillip Meehan: Phillip talked about the importance of the preschool program because of the lack of social interaction opportunities for children in preschool ages in rural communities such as Easton. He mentioned the importance of learning skills at an early age.

Dana Meehan: Dana also mentioned the importance of social interaction and behavior supports in preschool, which helps prepare her children for kindergarten.

Maria Ramsey: Maria talked about Easton being a safe place to live and it is important to have a preschool option for kids. She would rather have other options to cut be considered before eliminating the preschool program.

Terry Smith: Terry talked about Easton being a great school and it is important to get the students off to a good start with a preschool program. He mentioned the option of looking for grants and adjusting the number of preschool days.


After hearing input from parents on the preschool program, the Board of Directors discussed the preschool program and options. Superintendent Dehuff told the board that “reduction in force” letters have to be submitted by May 15th but that the decision on whether to keep the preschool program is made by the Board of Directors. Superintendent Dehuff said that the parents had made a lot of good points and that a decision didn’t need to be made tonight. Amy Grove said that the preschool at Easton was a great program and it would be good to keep it. Chris Helgeson mentioned that he thought it would be best to keep the preschool program and look for ways to make it more cost effective. John Jensen and Jen Phillips also thought it would be best to keep the program and look for ways to offset or reduce some of the costs.

Capital Projects Levy: Superintendent Dehuff provided the board with staff’s initial list of recommended capital levy projects. There are three main areas of need that a Capital Projects levy would help with. One area is technology. We need to upgrade our technology with new computers, enhanced wireless connectivity, and a new server. This is an important area of need that we have and we don’t have the funding in our general fund to accomplish our technology goals. Another area is to enhance the safety of our students and staff (cameras, more secure points of entry, etc). And, another area is the need to take care of an aging building. Our secondary wing was built in the early 1960s and is in dire need for repairs and renovations.

While we have had these needs for some time, the Board of Directors has decided to wait until this year to put a Capital Projects levy on the ballot because the bonds on our building will be paid off by the end of 2019 and the annual amount of taxes for the proposed Capital Projects levy will not exceed what our taxpayers have been paying on the bonds. Therefore, there will not be an increase in local school taxes if the Capital Projects levy is passed. If the levy is put on the

ballot in November, the Board of Directors needs to pass a resolution by the end of July. Superintendent Dehuff recommended to the board that they decide on the amount and length of the levy request at the May 28th meeting so there is plenty of time to have a resolution drafted.

Meeting Adjourned: Amy Grove made a motion to adjourn the meeting. John Jensen seconded the motion and the motion carried. The meeting was adjourned at 8:45 PM


Patrick Dehuff
Superintendent

Chris Helgeson
Board Vice-Chair