

WEST MILFORD TOWNSHIP PUBLIC SCHOOLS
FISCAL RESTRUCTURING SUBCOMMITTEE

MEETING #3 – OCTOBER 27, 2022 – 5:30 P.M., WESTBROOK SCHOOL MEDIA CENTER

Meeting Minutes – October 27, 2022

Attendees:

Dr. Alex Anemone, Superintendent
Monica Church, Parent
Cynthia Gallagher, Teacher
Claire Lockwood, Board of Education Trustee
Dr. Greg Matlosz, Upper Greenwood Lake School Principal
Danielle Post, Teacher
William Scholts, Assistant Business Administrator
Gregory Zackaroff, Teacher

Discussion/Agenda Items:

- Mr. Scholts opened the meeting by sharing handouts from the District's recent redistricting study, as prepared by Ross Haber Associates. The handouts illustrated the proposed attendance zones vs. the existing attendance zones and detail where each Street will attend school should the District approve the restructuring plan and closure of Westbrook School.
 - o Proposed Attendance Zones can be found here:
<https://www.wmtps.org/common/pages/DisplayFile.aspx?itemId=69544022>
 - o The committee reviewed the attendance zone handouts and held a brief discussion.

- Salary and health benefit costs were discussed, as they are the largest percentage of the District's operating budget. Salaries and health benefits account for 76% of the District's current operating budget, with salaries of District staff accounting for 60% and health benefits accounting for 16%.
 - o The attached handout was provided, illustrating the ranges of salaries for various District Bargaining Units.
 - It was discussed that savings made by staffing cuts will likely be staff on the lower end of the salary guides, as seniority will be a factor when adjusting District staffing.
 - o It was explained that Employee Benefit Contributions are not increasing at the same rate as health insurance premiums, as many employees have selected to join the new Educators Health Plan (EHP), created under Chapter 44.
 - The Chapter 44 contribution is dependent on employees' salaries (Contributions range from 1.7% of the employees' salary – 7.2% of the

employees' salary), while the previous Chapter 78 employee contribution was based on percentages of premiums, depending on the employees' salary level (Contributions range from 3.5% of the employees' health insurance premium – 35% of the employees' health insurance premium)

- Effective 1/1/2021, new hires who are eligible for health insurance are required to join the EHP Plan, while employees hired prior to 1/1/2021 have the option to switch to the EHP Plan during open enrollment each year, but can also remain in their current Traditional/Direct Access Plan should they prefer.
 - It was asked if the EHP Plan is a “Trial” Plan put out by the State.
 - The committee discussed the EHP Plan was designed to save District's money, and how the State has a \$300 million statewide savings requirement that must be met by 12/31/2023. If the savings threshold is not met, the State is required to make plan design changes or employee contribution changes to make up for the shortfall.
 - While Chapter 44 is saving employees who changed their plan coverage money on their contributions, it is not resulting in a savings for the District as the premiums are not much less than the Direct Access Plans. A handout (attached) was given showing a comparison of health benefit rates, with a projection for the current year's (2022/2023) employee contributions versus prior year's (2021/2022) employee contributions.
- Mr. Scholts discussed the budget timeline with the committee, noting that budget meetings with District Supervisors and Principals are scheduled to begin in early December.
- Dr. Anemone informed the committee that the November Board meeting originally scheduled for November 15th is being rescheduled for November 29th.
 - Should the Board vote to approve the restructuring at the meeting, the budget adjustments and planning will begin shortly thereafter.
 - The District is anticipating more State Aid cuts for the 2023/24 and 2024/25 budget cycles, as a result of Senate Bill 2 (S-2) which was passed in 2018.
 - The preliminary budget hearing will be in March 2023, with the public budget hearing scheduled for April 2023. Exact dates are not yet available as the 2023 Board meeting schedule has not yet been approved.
- The committee continued to have a group discussion. Committee members asked what else has been done in District to generate cost savings.
- The District completed a multi-year Districtwide Energy Savings Improvement Plan (ESIP), which was completed in FY21.

- There was an energy audit and numerous District upgrades made to enhance the District's energy efficiency, as well as the addition of solar panels throughout the District.
 - Being in the middle of the restructuring process allowed the District to apply for Stabilization Aid in September 2022 in the amount of \$2,769,099.
 - At the time of this meeting, the District is still awaiting an update from the State regarding the status of the award.
 - There have been numerous staffing cuts over the past few years, as well as positions that were not filled when an employee retired. There were other positions that were condensed with job responsibilities being combined.
- It was asked if there is any data which compares District's expenditures and how they compare to other Districts in the State
 - Dr. Anemone informed the committee that there is a "Taxpayers' Guide to Education Spending" which can be found on the State's website.
- A committee member asked if Westbrook was the school to be repurposed, what would happen to all of the books in the library?
 - The committee was assured that no books will be wasted, that they would be repurposed to other West Milford schools' libraries and can also be used to supplement teacher's classroom libraries.
- It was noted that restructuring would likely eliminate all single section grades Districtwide.
- A committee member asked if there were any plans being made to welcome any students who would be moving to a new school for 2022/2023.
 - The committee was informed that specific plans have not been laid out yet, but there will definitely be welcoming events held at schools between January and June for students and families who may be moving to a new school, should the District Restructuring be approved.
 - It was noted that the District Elementary PTA's are also communicating with each other to plan events and assist in the transition process.
- A committee member asked if the restructuring subcommittee meetings will continue after the November 29 Board meeting.
 - Dr. Anemone and Mr. Scholts informed the committee that subcommittees will not continue after a Board decision has been made, as the discussions from that point onward will be held at a Board of Education and Administrative level. However, updates will be provided to the community as the process continues.

- The committee was reminded that the final report will be presented at the November 29th Board of Education meeting, and it was encouraged that the committee members attend the meeting or live stream it, if able.
- Mr. Scholts thanked all committee members for their efforts and participating in the District's Restructuring committees.

