

Implications for FY 21 Budget

Lyle Holiday – Superintendent of Schools

Windham Southeast School District

Representing the towns of: Putney, Dummerston, Brattleboro, Guilford, (2,200 students)

The original budget vote for Windham Southeast School District, WSESD, was scheduled for March 17, 2020. The budget was prepared by the WSESD Board and administrators looking to provide the best education possible for all students while being financially responsible for taxpayers in the 4 towns of Brattleboro, Dummerston, Guilford and Putney. A minimum of two informational meetings were held leading up to the March 17 vote so the electorate could closely question the budget preparation, expenses and revenue. All indications at the informational meetings were that a fair budget had been developed. I urge you to support an option that allows School Boards to approve a budget, on behalf of the Electorate, that represents the needs of our students as identified in our proposed FY21 budget. As we had to postpone the annual meeting vote Warned for March 17 and likely will need to postpone the May 12 meeting, WSESD is looking for direction from the Vermont State Legislature to ensure there is a budget in place by July 1, 2020. As with all public schools, now is the time we secure our workforce through employment contracts for the upcoming school year.

The first option that the House bill has suggested, an amount equal to last year's FY20 educational spending, would mean a two million dollar cut in FY21 for WSESD. This equates to approximately 20 staff positions. At a time when our students will have been out of school for five and a half months and with no security of what the fall school opening will look like, we need to ensure that our students have access to enhanced educational programs as well as continued opportunities for spending time with peers in afterschool activities. The need for academic coaches for teachers to work with to expand educational opportunities in the classroom and the need for social workers to help families as we return to school in the fall, will only increase.

On July 1, 2019, Windham Southeast School District officially came into being due to a forced merged through the Act 46 process. In less than a year's time, the Board has worked together to become one merged regional district representing all students. The Act 46 process in WSESD was contentious and drove a wedge through communities. Throughout this school year, the communities have worked hard to come together with a common vision for our schools. A cut of 2 million dollars will mean deep cuts in every school in every town. The Act 46 Articles of Agreement bind us from being able to close any school or cut any single strand class in any school. This limits our options when making deep cuts that a 2 million dollar reduction would force.

I strongly advocate for the House Education Committee to propose a solution that allows for Boards to approve a budget to effectively operate schools, consistent with the VSBA's recent testimony. With Free and Reduced lunch percentages ranging from 65% to 31% and in an area with high addiction rates, we need to continue to provide supports for our students and families most in need. The recently completed "Weighting Study"

underscores the major investments in student support services that poverty requires of communities to avoid the high risk of students failing. Unfortunately these investments would be the most likely to be cut in the event of dramatic reduction in school funding.

Thank you for considering our request.

Lyle Holiday
Superintendent of Schools