

Volume 1
Pages 1-18

THE WAPPINGERS CENTRAL SCHOOL DISTRICT
PUBLIC HEARING
"CONTRACT FOR EXCELLENCE"

DATE: June 8, 2009

TIME: 8:15 p.m.

LOCATION: Wappingers Junior High School
30 Major McDonald Way
Wappingers Falls, NY 12590

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1. JUDITH BELFIELD, Assistant Superintendent, K-12 Curriculum Instruction
2. DR. CHARLES HILL, Deputy Superintendent, Tech, Testing & Assessments
3. JOHANNA HUDAK, Director of Special Education & Student Services
4. MICHELE S. MOLONEY, School Business Manager
5. SUSAN PENNEY, District Clerk
6. RICHARD A. POWELL, Superintendent of Schools
7. JOANNE SEREDA, Director of Human Resources
8. G. THOMAS STELLA, Director of District Administration
9. DR. CHERYL THOMAS Assistant Superintendent, Administration

BOARD OF EDUCATION:

10. DOUGLASS BITTEKER
11. SURESH CHANDANI
12. JOSEPH INCORONATO
13. ANTHONY LOCICERO
14. JOHN LUMIA
15. MARY McGEARY
16. JOHN McMAHON
17. JOSEPH PORPORA
18. MARILYNN SHULTZ

1 MR. BITTEKER: The first item on the
2 agenda this evening, ladies and gentlemen, is a
3 presentation of the C4E update by Dr. Thomas
4 for 15 minutes.

5 MR. POWELL: Mr. President, before
6 Dr. Thomas begins, maybe I could just say a
7 few words to the community that's here this
8 evening?

9 MR. BITTEKER: Oh, certainly. I'm
10 sorry.

11 MR. POWELL: No, it's okay. Tonight
12 as required by law, we're going to be holding
13 a hearing on our contract for excellence,
14 better known as C4E. And just to give the
15 community some background, in the last couple
16 of years prior to going into the 2009/2010
17 school year, we had two schools that were
18 called SRAP schools -- schools requiring
19 academic improvement and academic progress --
20 and they were both of our middle schools. So
21 we were put on the contract for excellence
22 and we were given additional funding. We had
23 to submit a plan to the state and to adhere to
24 the plan. And I'm pleased to say this evening
25 that as of the end of this school year, those

1 two schools are off of the state's list.

2 They are no longer SRAP schools. So I want

3 to commend the administration and the faculty

4 of those two schools for doing an outstanding

5 job in terms of making that happen for us.

6 They should be commended for a great, great

7 job. That's the good news. The bad news is

8 that since we came off the list -- and I'm

9 going to read this because it gets a little

10 complicated. For John Jay High School, we were

11 notified that we were being designated -- that

12 they were being designated as a SRAP school for

13 next year for the content area of ELA in terms

14 of its students with disabilities and special

15 education students not being AYP for two

16 consecutive years. Let me just briefly explain

17 to you what happened for us to get on that

18 list. In the 2006/2007 school year, because

19 not enough of the subgroup -- the special

20 education subgroup -- population took the

21 English Regents exam, we ended up on report.

22 And as some of you who come to Board meetings

23 regularly know, this Board has debated and

24 written letters relative to the need for

25 special education students to be taking

1 Regents exams in some cases. There's a point
2 to be made, if you will, in terms of what
3 special education students should be tested
4 for and what they shouldn't be tested for and
5 it's fallen on deaf ears. Maybe with the
6 renewal of NCLB that will change. But because
7 in that one year not enough students took the
8 English Regents, that was strike one. In the
9 following year, because the graduation rate
10 for special education students fell below the
11 state's benchmark, we were put on it for the
12 second year. So we've been on it for two
13 consecutive years for two different reasons.
14 And we're probably talking about -- oh, I would
15 say -- Dr. Hill, maybe 35 students?

16 MR. HILL: It's a small number of
17 students.

18 MR. POWELL: It's a small number of
19 students. And for that we're going to be
20 receiving something like \$5 million to try to
21 correct the problem. So tonight the purpose of
22 the hearing is first that Dr. Hill -- excuse
23 me -- Dr. Thomas is going to be presenting the
24 plan that we're going to be submitting to the
25 state. After she's done presenting it, we'll

1 take comments -- if any -- from the community
2 relative to what you would like to see in that
3 plan. And then depending on the comments --
4 if any -- we will modify the plan and submit
5 it to the state. It will be posted on the
6 website and as of July 1st we'll be off and
7 running. So Dr. Thomas?

8 DR. THOMAS: Thank you. The contract
9 for excellence has been up on the district's
10 website for a couple of weeks now, and
11 hopefully you've had time to review it. It's
12 very lengthy. There are parts of it that we
13 must include. This is the bulk of what we
14 submit to the state. There's a contract
15 narrative that describes the plan and the
16 reasons for the plan. There's a contract
17 overview. There's a fiscal summary, and that
18 and the maintenance of effort are all of the
19 financial pieces of it and how we are dividing
20 up the money that the state has given us to
21 spend on contract for excellence programs.
22 There's also an integrated planning report
23 of how this works in conjunction with our
24 other programs, with IDEA, and the other
25 things that we do in the schools so that

1 it's not a stand-alone program. And they're
2 looking at us to make sure that our efforts
3 are comprehensive. There's also metrics
4 reports and performance targets where we tell
5 the state our goals of what we want our kids
6 to be able to do at the end of this year and
7 what our target goal is for their performance.
8 For the general description of the program,
9 you've heard quite a bit of it from Mr. Powell.
10 But we've been part of the program since the
11 2007/2008 school year. It's required by State
12 Ed that we are on this program. And what they
13 require is that aid is spent on programs that
14 provide support to students at risk of failing.
15 So if we were to take that literally, it would
16 mean that we would be spending the contract
17 for excellence money on our special education
18 population at the high school. However, when
19 we started in 2007/2008, we made an argument
20 to the state that you can't just look at one
21 subpopulation, that your program really has to
22 be comprehensive. And we convinced them that
23 our program should be K-12, that success
24 actually starts in kindergarten and then we
25 would need interventions all the way through

1 twelfth grade in order to make sure that our
2 students are successful and that they graduate.
3 And they agreed with us. So these are parts
4 of the plan that are still in place today. We
5 have early intervention programs starting in
6 kindergarten. We have early literacy skill
7 building. That's where our literacy
8 specialists come in and our K-8 coordinator.
9 We put many academic intervention programs in
10 the elementary school. We restructured that
11 in the junior high school. We added project
12 classes to Van Wyck to give students extra
13 time on task. They actually have an extra
14 period of ELA and math every other day. This
15 past year -- this year -- we put in teaming in
16 ninth grade. So you can see we're expanding
17 K-12. We've had the alternative high school
18 program and we've expanded that and provided
19 more schoolwork opportunities for classified
20 students. So we're hitting students all
21 the way around; K-12, classified and
22 non-classified. And as a result, our ELA
23 scores are up, our math scores up, and this
24 year we saw our ninth grade failures reduced
25 by 50 percent. So these programs are

1 successful. They're working. And the state
2 is very happy with us for that. As you heard,
3 we still have one area where we really need to
4 pay attention to next year, and that is to
5 improve the graduation rate and improve the
6 ELA performance of all classified students
7 with an emphasis on John Jay. In 2007/2008,
8 all of the funding that the state provided for
9 contract for excellence money had to be spent
10 on brand-new programs. In the following year,
11 they revised that a little bit so that we could
12 maintain our programs, and then a percentage of
13 the money was to be spent on new programs. So
14 we added new programs the second year. In this
15 year what the state is saying is that we may
16 use all of our contract for excellence money to
17 maintain the efforts thus far. If we'd like to
18 reallocate we may do so, but they must be spent
19 on approved C4E programs. So these are our
20 expenses for this year. Summer school is
21 \$65,000.00, and that's where we did our
22 reallocation. We took money that was spent
23 on the elementary week long reading camp over
24 the summer and reallocated that to our high
25 school summer school. The others are programs

1 that we are maintaining. Comments on the
2 contract for excellence plan can be submitted
3 to us by e-mail or by mail or by picking up
4 the phone and calling. We'd be happy to answer
5 any questions that you have on it.

6 MR. POWELL: That concludes Dr.
7 Thomas' presentation. And Dr. Thomas, as far
8 as contacting us by phone, which phone number
9 would you recommend?

10 DR. THOMAS: Extension 131.

11 MR. POWELL: So it's the district
12 office extension 131, which is Dr. Thomas'
13 office, I believe. That concludes our
14 presentation in trying to ground you a little
15 bit in terms of where we've been with C4E
16 and what our plan up until tonight's hearing
17 recommended to go to the state for
18 implementation on July 1st. And so Mr.
19 President, I'll turn it back to you to open
20 up the hearing.

21 MR. BITTEKER: Yes. Is there any
22 public comment on what you've heard regarding
23 the C4E? Would anyone like to make a comment?

24 MEMBER OF THE PUBLIC: Hi. My name
25 is Wendy McNamara. Would it help as part of

1 the C4E because the guidance counselors have
2 a large load in the high school to have one
3 dedicated guidance counselor whose only
4 responsibility is the 35 students who are
5 under C4E and to have that kind of support
6 so that they will be getting extra follow-up
7 and extra time with one person whose only
8 responsibility -- being the state has given a
9 lot of money to improve the performance of
10 these students -- to have once guidance
11 counselor whose only job is these 35 students
12 rather than other students as well? Because
13 I know -- I don't know the caseload of the
14 guidance counselors in the high school, but
15 I know it's well over 100 per guidance
16 counselor. That's just a thought.

17 MR. BITTEKER: Thank you.

18 MR. POWELL: Dr. Thomas, do you want
19 to suggest anything on that comment or
20 statement?

21 MR. BITTEKER: Would you like to
22 respond to it?

23 DR. THOMAS: That's an excellent
24 suggestion and we actually have been talking
25 about connecting those kids to an adult who can

1 monitor their academic progress and their
2 attendance in moving them toward graduation.
3 So thank you very much.

4 MR. BITTEKER: Anyone else from the
5 public? Are there any questions from the
6 Board? Dr. Thomas, I think you should probably
7 remain at the mic. We have someone else from
8 the public.

9 MEMBER OF THE PUBLIC: I'm Pat D'Amato
10 from John Jay. I'm just wondering if somebody
11 could describe the two self-contained special
12 education programs that we house at John Jay
13 that I think are probably responsible for the
14 students' failures?

15 MR. BITTEKER: Thank you. Ms. Hudak?

16 MS. HUDAK: We currently have two
17 self-contained programs at John Jay. One is a
18 basic help class we call intensive instruction,
19 and these are for 24 students who require very
20 intensive instruction. These students are IEP
21 students. They're not on a diploma track.
22 And these students are definitely a part of
23 the difficulty in terms of us meeting our
24 graduation requirement. But you have to
25 remember that these students are, for the

1 most part, mentally retarded with significant
2 needs. The other program is project C, which
3 is our special education alternative. And the
4 students in this program are Regents bound and
5 they probably just require smaller classes and
6 additional academic support.

7 MR. BITTEKER: Thank you. Mr.
8 Incoronato?

9 MR. INCORONATO: Thank you. I have
10 just a quick question on the funding. We're
11 showing expenditures amounting to \$2.3 million.
12 Is that being offset by the state's C4E
13 program?

14 DR. THOMAS: That's money that the
15 state gives us as foundation aid that we must
16 designate for our contract for excellence.

17 MR. INCORONATO: So it's not costing
18 the district anything more --

19 DR. THOMAS: No.

20 MR. INCORONATO: Than if we didn't
21 have these programs?

22 DR. THOMAS: I'm not quite sure what
23 you mean. If we didn't have the programs, we
24 wouldn't be spending the money?

25 MR. INCORONATO: Correct; but it's not

1 costing the district taxpayers any more
2 directly from the taxpayers here in the
3 district?

4 DR. THOMAS: No, it's part of our
5 budget using foundation aid that we can only
6 get from the state.

7 MR. INCORONATO: Because I think some
8 residents have a sense that the C4E contract is
9 really coming out of our skins directly as a
10 district, when in fact it is coming from the
11 state for its designated purpose.

12 DR. THOMAS: That's correct.

13 MR. INCORONATO: So it's not part of
14 the general fund, as it were.

15 MR. POWELL: It's money that comes
16 into us that's designated for C4E purposes.
17 And how we allocate it is based on the plan
18 that we submit. So you're right. There is a
19 misnomer out there that it's coming out of our
20 skin. That's not true. But the funding is
21 there for the plan that we submit. I think
22 it's important to note -- and we've been
23 talking about this for the last couple of
24 years -- that if we were not C4E list
25 supported, Mr. Incoronato, we would be able

1 to use that money to lower our tax levy.
2 That's a problem I think we had last year
3 that we couldn't use it and we keep arguing
4 the fact of spending, you know, millions of
5 dollars for a small subgroup of people. It
6 doesn't make a hunk of a lot of sense, but
7 nonetheless, that's the way that it is. So
8 it would be nice not to be on the list and
9 take that money which would still be
10 forthcoming to lower the tax levy.

11 MR. INCORONATO: But that's the point.
12 It won't be forthcoming unless you have a C4E
13 program.

14 MR. POWELL: Well, if we look back
15 in time at the original criteria for being on
16 C4E, one of it was to receive ten percent --
17 at least ten percent -- additional state aid.
18 And unfortunately that year we did. So that
19 was part of the problem getting us on the C4E.

20 MR. INCORONATO: And then in the
21 secondary school restructuring, is it possible
22 to include marginally performing general
23 education students in some of these
24 restructured classes?

25 DR. THOMAS: Absolutely.

1 MR. INCORONATO: So we could add some
2 additional services to the kids that may not be
3 making it but that are not in this isolated
4 special education group?

5 DR. THOMAS: We do that already.

6 MR. INCORONATO: So they are falling
7 under the C4E contract?

8 DR. THOMAS: Absolutely.

9 MR. INCORONATO: Outstanding. Thank
10 you.

11 MR. BITTEKER: I just have one quick
12 question, Dr. Thomas. You said that the ninth
13 grade failures were reduced by 50 percent.
14 What percent does that represent? I mean, how
15 many ninth graders are failing?

16 DR. THOMAS: I don't have those
17 numbers with me, but that is the data that I
18 received from the guidance counselors. They've
19 been monitoring from last year to this year and
20 they've seen a 50 percent reduction.

21 MR. BITTEKER: But do you understand
22 my question? I mean, was ten percent failing
23 and we've reduced that ten percent by 50
24 percent? That's what I'm asking.

25 MR. LUMIA: That's probably what it

1 means.

2 MR. BITTEKER: Pardon me?

3 MR. LUMIA: That's probably what it

4 means.

5 MR. BITTEKER: That's what I'm saying.

6 DR. THOMAS: I'll have to get back to

7 you on that.

8 MR. BITTEKER: Okay. Thank you. I

9 believe that's it for the C4E update. If there

10 are no other comments, we'll close the hearing

11 and go on to the next presentation.

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13 (Whereupon the PROCEEDINGS concluded

14 at 8:35 p.m.)

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CERTIFICATION

I, Lisamarie Harden-McGrath, Shorthand Reporter and Notary Public, do hereby certify that I recorded stenographically the proceedings herein at the time and place noted in the heading hereof, and that the foregoing transcript is true and accurate to the best of my knowledge, skill and ability.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand this 15th day of June, 2009.

LISAMARIE HARDEN-McGRATH
Shorthand Reporter